

Parents don't want change at their local playground

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Parents are wary about potential changes the city could make to their kids' beloved Dufferin Grove Park playground, which is slated for "renewal" next spring.

Ward 18 (Davenport) Councillor Adam Giambone confirmed that the city is in the midst of a public consultation process and said that people are concerned about what might replace the existing playground equipment. It needs replacing "because things wear out and safety issues have come to light," he said, but didn't elaborate.

The potential changes to the park are part of a \$6 million 'playground safety project' launched in 2000.

Simon Evans, whose five-year-old daughter Haylee plays regularly at Dufferin Grove Park, said his concern, one he shares with many of the parents in the neighbourhood, is more about what the play structure could be replaced with than the fact that it is being replaced.

"The (playgrounds) we've seen (that have been replaced) don't encourage any challenge. Our daughter gets bored," Evans said.

Haylee loves the sand pit, the swings and anything she can climb, he said. She's been playing there since she was one-year-old and during that time Evans hasn't witnessed anyone getting seriously hurt.

"Obviously, children fall, skin their knees, bonk their heads, but there have been no major injuries that I've seen," he said.

He admitted the playground could use some work.

"It's been left to languish. There's been a broken teeter-totter for months," he said.

Although some regular upkeep would be nice, the general consensus is that the playground doesn't need to come down. During a recent conversation among parents of the Friends of Dufferin Grove group most agreed it's needless, said Jutta Mason, a long-time area activist who writes the group's monthly newsletter. Her children grew up playing at Dufferin Grove and now her grandchildren play there too.

"There's no evidence that the playground is unsafe," Mason told The Villager.

According to Mason, who obtained information through the Freedom of Information Act in 2005, there were just four playground injuries and \$11,400 in claims between 1998 and 2004. It doesn't make sense to spend \$6 million ripping out and replacing playground equipment, she said.

"The city is saying it's got to follow CSA (Canadian Standard Association) standards," Mason said. "They're not law, but many places have decided to take them as law."

There are so many elements of the park that work well, Mason pointed out.

"It's so popular. There's a pretty strong sense at Dufferin Grove that the playground is in good shape and park users are intent on keeping it," she said. "I'm interested because it seems to me that it would be a shame to make that mistake again."

The city's 'playground safety project' saw 49 park playgrounds replaced on the heels of the Toronto District School Board and the provincially-funded day cares' decision to remove many of their play structures. Many parents balked because the new plastic equipment, although it may meet the new safety standards, no longer appealed to children. The new playgrounds compared to the original ones are empty, Mason said.

"I think the city is going down the wrong path in regards to this park," she said.