

City parks chief wants skating on ponds, no matter what bureaucrats say

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[Kuitenbrouwer](#)

Toronto parks department bureaucrats permanently banned all skating on city ponds without consulting any elected city officials, Councillor Paula Fletcher, the parks chief, said yesterday.

Ms. Fletcher (Toronto-Danforth) and the committee's vice-chair, Karen Stintz (Eglinton-Lawrence), believe the ban on pond skating is wrong, and plan to bring the topic to the Parks and Environment meeting at City Hall this morning. Ms. Fletcher suggested yesterday people should continue ignoring the signs, as long as they believe the ice is safe.



"I believe that there should be skating on ponds," Ms. Fletcher said yesterday.

"It certainly was not a public policy," she added, to ban skating on city ponds. The councillor said she was unaware of a document, "Activities on Frozen Open Bodies of Water Policy," until [I reported on it in the National Post yesterday](#).

"When this is a public debate it should be a public document," added Ms. Fletcher. She fondly remembers skating on ponds in her childhood in Sault Ste.-Marie, though skating lost a bit of its lustre for her after she broke her wrist last year skating on the Nathan Phillips Square rink, during the inauguration of the city's new "green" Zamboni.

"We can't forget that people love skating," she said. "They love tobogganning. They love winter and winter sports. And we keep pushing back and back, saying, 'Don't do that.' Sure it's dangerous. You need to manage the risk."

In winter, skaters have enjoyed Grenadier Pond in High Park for at least two centuries. Sometime in the 20th century, the city began drilling holes in the pond to check ice thickness, clearing space on the pond for rinks, and flooding the ice with water pumped from the pond. In 1999, after amalgamation, the City of Toronto cancelled that program, to save cash, and began putting up "No Skating. No Access" signs.

This year the city signs read, "Ice unsafe. Keep Off." Hundreds of skaters, including myself, are ignoring the signs and skating, as cold weather persists. Councillor Bill Saunderson (Parkdale-High Park) walked onto the pond himself Sunday and stuck his hand in a fisherman's hole in the ice.

“The ice is eight inches thick,” he reports. He skated on the pond last year, and says he has support from many people, including the owners of Grenadier Restaurant (up the hill from the pond) to bring back skating.

“People know that’s really solid ice,” he said.

Brenda Patterson, general manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation, told me Monday that she “assumes” Parks staff talked to the Toronto Police Marine Unit before drafting the policy. Ms. Patterson did not know whether Parks staff gave the public a chance to comment before enacting the policy.

The policy reads, in part, “The Occupiers Liability Act indicates that the city must take positive action to make the premises reasonably safe for the public.” Here’s how, the policy adds:

- post signs saying the ice is not safe
- use media to remind people of ice dangers
- “Issue letters of authorization to Toronto Police Service, to act as agents for PF&R, to enforce the regulations under the Trespass to Property Act; allowing for removal of persons on ice as required.”

Please permit me to add here that having a police officer walk onto the ice and arrest me -- on grounds the ice is unsafe -- would be the crowning comedy of my career.

Said Ms. Fletcher: “If I was living out in the woods and there was a frozen pond, I would skate on it.”

Ms. Stintz said that, as long as the city covers its liabilities, “I think we can create a more permissive use policy for skating on ponds. We have enough staff in the city. We could name the ponds that we want our people to go and check out.”

Ms. Stintz will be at today’s Parks committee meeting and says, “If Paula doesn’t bring it up, I will.”

Photo of a law-breaker on Grenadier Pond this week by Tyler Anderson, National Post