

**FRIENDS OF TRINITY BELLWOODS
WHOSE PARK IS IT?
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO FORUM
TALKING POINTS TO ACCOMPANY SLIDE PRESENTATION**

APRIL 7, 2011

1) "Whose Park Is It?" + Friends of Trinity Bellwoods Logo

- My name is Anna Hill and I am from Friends of Trinity Bellwoods park.
- We are an all-volunteer organization and our purpose is to give people the tools they need to influence development, maintenance and use of the park.
- Since 2001, we have been recognized by our Councillor and Parks and Recreation as the vehicle for community consultation in the park.

2) We have a website, three community meetings per year, and a Steering Committee

- If you go to our website at trinitybellwoods.ca, you'll see a navigation bar with categories like "Playground, Farmer's Market and Greenhouse".
- In general, each category represents one person on our Steering Committee who has offered to work with the community to develop that particular aspect of the park.
- Anyone can join our Steering Committee at any time.
- Our funding sources are mostly from donations from film shoots in the park

3) One of our goals is to develop and maintain park green space

- Because Trinity Bellwoods is the largest downtown park, there is debate about the highest and best use for every square foot of green space in the park.

4) Another goal is to activate the park as a public space for community events

- As you can imagine, these two goals are often in conflict.
- We constantly try to navigate between the desire on the one hand, to care for the trees and park green space as the "lungs of our city" while still giving people a place where they can come together and enjoy a "bath of people" at a community event.

5) Three ways that we try to work with our community to improve the park are:

1) capital investment 2) maintenance and 3) events

- I am going to spend the rest of my presentation walking you through case studies that demonstrate how we work with the community to develop the park through capital investment, maintenance and events.

6) CAPITAL INVESTMENT

7) 125 playground users voted on a new piece of playground equipment for children ages 6-12.

- This was an example of a really successful collaboration between the City and our community group.
- We were given a budget and guidelines to research playground equipment.
- We found three options and held a community vote. Of the 125 voters, 75 were children
- I think it's fair to say that the kids love it.
- Parents on the other hand are often worried about this slide, which is in fact, called a "glider"
- After two kids had accidents, we set up a meeting with our councillor and the concerned parents and talked about dismantling the slide.
- But the parents agreed to keep the slide there if a sign was put up stating that this piece of equipment is for children ages 6 and up.

8) Three years ago, the councillor approached the community and asked us if we wanted a greenhouse

- The greenhouse was a gift from HGTV in exchange for permission to film an episode in the park.
- We held a community meeting and received 12 pages of community feedback.
- 75% were for it and 25% were against it.
- Those who were against it thought it would become a neglected eyesore.
- Although we have had three incidents of graffiti, about nine community groups and 30 individuals use the greenhouse every spring.
- For our park, a small greenhouse is a great alternative to a community garden because a lot of people can garden together in a comparatively small footprint.

9) In response to the West End Community Bikeway Proposal, we created a "Don't Pave Our Park" Petition.

- This is an ongoing process where we are trying to come up with a solution that will satisfy the West End Community Bikeway planners and the neighbourhood.
- Many of the paths in the park are falling apart and need to be repaired but Friends of Trinity Bellwoods feels that repair of the paths should not result in a net gain of asphalt in the park.
- We have suggested that the bikeway proposal take advantage of a new fire road on the south end of the park, thereby avoiding the playground and the Farmer's Market.
- We have suggested use of decomposed granite or grass pavers on some paths, again to avoid an increase of asphalt in the park.
- We will see how this plays out.

10) MAINTENANCE

11) Our Adopt-A-Tree program allows community members to water and care for new trees for the first three years of the tree's life.

- Forestry has been amazing about responding to the community's request for new trees and native plants in the park.
- The problem is that although the City is very generous with plants, there is no budget for maintenance.
- Adopt-a-tree is one community member's solution to how to increase the survival rates of these trees.

12) Spring and Fall Park Days and Cleanup Days are another way that the community tries to help with park maintenance.

- Although these events raise awareness regarding the importance of community engagement, they are not a long term solution to park maintenance.
- Still, they do improve park green space and bring the community together, simultaneously fulfilling the two original goals I mentioned!

13) Last year, we conducted a tree survey of all the park's 800+ trees with the University of Toronto Forestry Department and Neighbourhoods

- We use this data to help care for the trees and educate the community about the urban forest.

For example, will sponsor an Edible Tree Tour with LEAF at our next park day on May 15th.

- In paying for this tree survey, we were walking a very thin legal line as there are lots of union restrictions about paying anyone to do any kind of maintenance in the park.

-Although we certainly support unions, it's unfortunate that when there is maintenance to be done, money to do it, there is still no legal recourse to do it through the private sector or even community organizations.

14) EVENTS

15) To start our local Farmer's Market, we collected 600 community signatures in support of the market

- At this point, there is pretty overwhelming community support for the market, now entering its fifth year.
- But the market has its own disputes.
- The latest dispute pertains to possible installation of a shed, which would make market set up so much easier.
- However, there are people who feel that the shed, no matter how essential to market set up, will still be an eyesore for the community.

16) Every other Tuesday night in summer, Drummers In Exile have organized a drum circle from sundown to 11 PM.

- The organizers petitioned the neighbourhood and received community support in

order to get their original permit.

-Over the years, the drum circle has been a victim of its own success to the point where it got so big that there was no way to control the crowd.

-Friends of Trinity Bellwoods and Parks and Recreation recommended that the organizers pay for security and get toilets.

-To my knowledge, they have not applied for a permit for next summer.

17) Queen West Music Festival and events like it raise questions about whether or not parks are appropriate locations for amplified music festivals and corporate advertising.

-The organizer had to petition the neighbourhood in order to sponsor the event. He received the support he needed to go forward.

-Opponents say that the commercialization of the park with large corporate logos is not appropriate use of public space.

-Neighbours also complain about perceived noise violations.

-Supporters say that west Queen West is a neighbourhood filled with musicians and a one-day amplified music event in the park is totally appropriate.

18) Community rallied to prevent park as G-20 protest destination

-The fact that Friends of Trinity Bellwoods and the Trinity Bellwoods Residents' Association already existed definitely helped the community respond to this proposal to have the G-20 protest terminate in the park.

-We tried to be very careful in this situation to take the position that we did not want the G-20 protest to be in anyone's backyard or any kind of residential neighbourhood.

19) Fundamentally, we believe that public space needs to reflect the will of the people.

20) Any time that citizens take the time to care, we have to support them in their efforts to develop and protect public space.

-At the same time, we have to understand that community building through a democratic process requires patience and good will as conflict is inevitable.