

Neshama Playground

Community Working Group Evaluation

July 30, 2008

VISION

Oriole Park is a mature and well-used natural oasis from Toronto's urban landscape that magically screens the surrounding high-rise, industrial and single family homes so as they visually do not exist.

The Neshama Playground project will represent a new working model for all parks in the City of Toronto that illustrates the possi-

bilities of creating an "all inclusive" natural playground with an alliance of private, public and community based cooperation.

The redesign of the play areas will incorporate innovative designs and techniques that work in harmony with existing usage of the park creating a place where children (regardless of their



physical or mental abilities) can come together spring, summer, winter and fall to explore, imagine and grow.

Mission & Operating Philosophy

- Successful implementation in 2009 of an expanded, enhanced and inclusive playground (Neshama) that is integrated with Oriole Park and balanced with the needs of the existing user-base and local residents.

- Achieve a "best result solution" for Oriole Park users of all abilities and ages that ensures the character, appearance, experience, physical fabric and natural environment of Oriole Park is maintained or bettered.

- To create a ground-breaking "all inclusive park" that does not

disturb the roots of the park or the community it serves. Every park is unique and needs to be designed and built with a holistic process; it should organically enhance the location and work with instead of against how a park has matured.

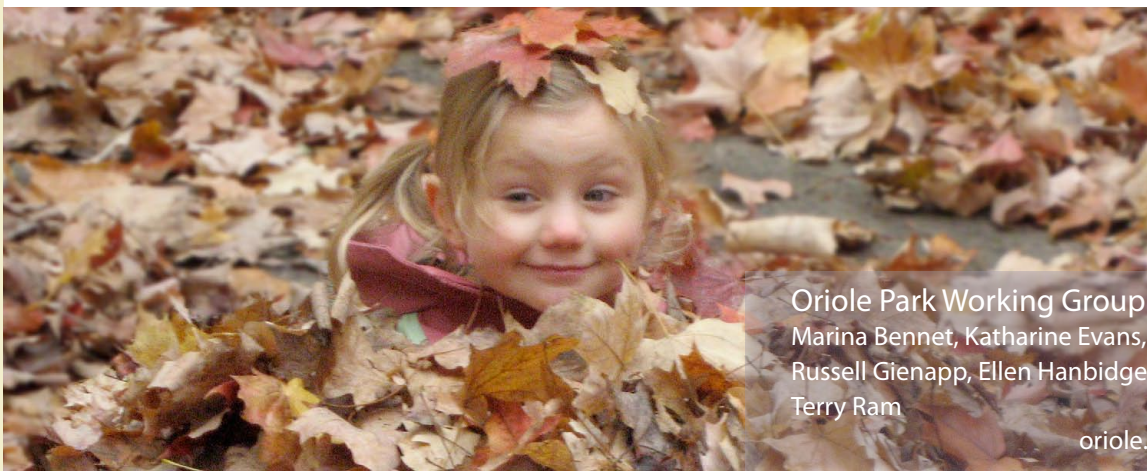
Operating Philosophy: We are joining forces for the enhancement of outdoor play opportunities for children of all abilities in Oriole Park and blazing a trail for the rest of Toronto to realize the same goals. *We are committed to:*

- Seeking input from disabled

groups, local residents and existing users of Oriole Park and incorporating their needs into the final design.

- Realizing a partnership with private, public and community participants that will transform the paradigm of public parks projects in Toronto.

- Guiding beliefs that value *cooperation, integrity, flexibility*, pursue practical and ecologically sustainable design principles and maintain an unwavering commitment to better the outdoor natural experience of ALL children.



Oriole Park Working Group

Marina Bennet, Katharine Evans, Ian Ferguson,
Russell Gienapp, Ellen Hanbidge, Terry Mills,
Terry Ram

oriole.park@yahoo.com

Main Recommendations

(1) Maintain existing location of tennis courts and refurbish

- Ensures local community does not lose existing facilities.



• Solution minimizes: incremental costs, impact on trees, impact on adjacent residents and disruption time that Oriole Park will be “off-line” as well as enhancing the “secluded” and “secure” nature of this corner of the park.

• “Status quo” option immediately eliminates a significant component of local opposition to proposed redevelopment and puts project on a faster track to gaining local support and completion.

(2) Design an appropriately sized inclusive playground around existing tennis courts

• Ensure appropriate balance between new structures and unprogrammed green space, without loss of trees.

• Optimize balance between structured play utilizing new inclusive playground elements and unstructured play using the natural environment of the Eastern Park.

• The existing playground plans produced by Parks Staff, which incorporate at least 8 distinct elements, represent the “best design possible” for fundraising purposes only. A reduced scope for the playground, which takes into ac-

count the impact on leisure and passive areas for Oriole Park as a whole, is appropriate.

• A balance should be found between the desire to implement a “flagship” inclusive park for the City and an inclusive park that complements or “fits” into Oriole Park as a whole.

• Success of this flagship project will be measured by usage and community acceptance of Neshama, rather than the scale of playground expansion.

• A design which effectively converts an intensively used, small 3 hectare local neighborhood park into a city-wide specialty or destination park, at the expense of its current user-base, would put the entire project at risk.

• Potential increase in densification of the area (new condo developments on Yonge at Merton and at Millwood) will increase the pressure on this “local” park.

• Disabled parking and other additional parking should be incorporated into City and TTC lands surrounding the park to avoid further reduction of green space in Oriole Park and putting the existing tree line at risk.

• To accommodate incremental non-disabled parking needs, the south-side of Frobisher Ave could be rezoned for exclusive park usage during daylight hours (space is currently a free parking zone during daylight hours frequented by non-local or non-park users).



(3) Take advantage of Natural & Inclusive Playground design principles

• Create an inclusive playground that engages and challenges children of all abilities.

• Blend natural materials, features, and vegetation with creative landforms and variation of landscape elevations together with inclusive structures and principles while protecting open green free-play spaces.

(4) Park re-development process should be transparent and accountable

• Input from disabled groups, local residents, members of Oriole Park Working Group and existing users should be solicited by the design consultant chosen in the Parks Division’s Request for Proposal (RFP) process and incorporated into the final design.

• Consultant should visit other playgrounds and parks in Toronto and research national/international innovations in playground concepts (“inclusive” and “natural”) and comment on these findings.

• Development must be acceptable to all interested parties – disabled groups, local residents, users of Oriole Park, City of Toronto, private fundraisers.

• Working Group to meet with chosen consultant and be provided the opportunity to give feedback on draft plans prior to next public meeting.

Critical Considerations

Security requirements

- Implement recommendations outlined in Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) memo, dated Mar 12, 2008. (see Appendix A).

- Improved and additional lighting sources, trim trees to improve sightlines, redistribution of picnic tables etc.

- Introduce park enhancements to discourage “after-hours” activities in the park – adequate and pro-active maintenance and supervision will be required to ensure this important project does not fall into disrepair.

Park Study

- Take into consideration issues raised in the “Oriole Park Brief” document, drafted by Terry Mills (Arris Strategy Studio), dated July 14, 2008. (see Appendix B)

- Impact of enhanced playground on reducing leisure and passive areas, overburdening existing tree root structures etc.

All-season accessibility

- Investigate & cost the option of installing and operating a temporary ice surface on the refurbished tennis courts and other ways to enhance play in all four seasons.

Residential Impact

- Redevelopment must not adversely affect local residents.

Environmental Impact

- Redevelopment should minimize any impact and stress on existing tree root structures. At particular risk is the perimeter tree line that may be exposed if new parking is developed on the north side of Frobisher Ave.

- This tree line buffers the park from the TTC yard, car traffic and residences and if disrupted or broken, it will dispel the “quiet enjoyment” Oriole Park provides to its users and neighbours.

- Implementing new parking on the north side of Frobisher may affect a driver’s sightline. He/She may no longer be able to see a child or dog run onto the road between parked cars.

Park Traffic Impact

- Redevelopment should study potential increase in park traffic and how it will impact this local neighborhood park.

Park Usage Balance

- Redevelopment should take into account the impact on existing passive, semi-active and leisure usage of the Eastern Park (unstructured play, ball tossing, dog-walking, soccer, reading, sunbathing, games, bicycling, picnicking, walking, social gatherings etc.).

- A balanced approach must

be taken in terms of expanding the playground and the potential reduction of green space and ensuing shift of activities to other areas of the park.

Inclusive for all park-users

- Playground cannot be developed in isolation as it may result in unintended consequences regarding the use of Oriole Park as a whole. Integrity of the park and playground will ultimately be dependent on the local community that frequent the park regularly. A significant increase in distinct structures may inhibit access to more natural elements of the park. If by unfortunate accident, Neshama is perceived to be exclusive of the surrounding community, then it would become a less frequent destination.

Sustainability

- Ensure design that is feasible to maintain in the long-run. Developing a one-off “theme-park” in Oriole Park may not be the best model to serve as an inspiration for other communities to develop inclusive playgrounds.

- Oriole Park will be the first of many redeveloped inclusive playgrounds which, in turn, should diminish the need for Neshama to be of a “grand design”.

Specific Recommendations for other areas of Oriole Park

Make (Central Park) more inclusive:

- Build pathway between Eastern and Western Parks to connect both “active” areas of Oriole Park, encouraging users of the playground and baseball diamond to “cross-pollinate”.

- Trim tree canopy to allow more sunlight.

- Add picnic tables

- However, careful consideration should be given to any redevelopment of this passive and “forested”

area – it should be “natural” and fit with the natural environment it provides Oriole Park.

Additional recommendations

- Ensure a “natural” buffer between the rear fences of the adjacent residences north of the Eastern Park (e.g. see “garden in the NW corner of existing playground).

- Add more benches along paths throughout Oriole Park particularly for older people to rest, meet friends or watch park activities.

Also consider chess-board tables.

- Add fitness type apparatus for joggers along the pathways – as part of a larger potential circuit of the Belt-Line — design should have a simple and “natural” look that fits with park.

- Better lighting along sidewalk from Davisville station to the park – canopy of tree inhibits current light sources.

- Add dedicated dog fountains (e.g. like in Eglinton Park)