

March 6, 2009

Dear _____,

Thank you for your email of February 22, 2009 to the Parks & Environment Committee in which you raise concerns about the Neshama inclusive playground project proposed for Oriole Park.

We acknowledge that Oriole Park is a Neighbourhood Park whose character and place in the community needs to be respected. To that end, please be advised that the design process for the playground to commence in March 2009 will be an open and transparent process that will focus on good communication and community engagement. Accordingly, our Capital Projects Section who are leading the design process have committed to:

- maintain open and ongoing communication with the community;
- provide information on the project status using the newly installed billboard in the park and a soon to be developed project web site;
- hire a consulting Landscape Architectural team with specific proven skills in public consultation and facilitation;
- require the consulting team is to prepare a Communication Plan that outlines a comprehensive strategy to receive and provide information to the community;
- The Communication Plan will include:
 - workshop style meetings with the Oriole Park Working Group, disability user groups, and stakeholders—including Friends of Oriole Park and any public members, occurring over the late winter and spring of 2009;
 - public presentation/consultation events;
 - development and regular updating of the project web page;
 - regular updating of billboard information;
 - notices of information in the mail.

The City continues to support universal accessibility in all city facilities including parks and playgrounds. When a donor group comes forward pledging a significant (\$1M) contribution towards the development of an inclusive, accessible playground in this part of the city, we feel it is a proposal we need to listen to carefully and act on the opportunity if it is feasible and acceptable to the community.

City Council in July 2005 endorsed this project by giving authority for the donor group “A Bunch of Guys” to seek private donations for improvements to the playground at Oriole Park and the

establishment of a reserve fund to accept the donations. Council as well agreed to the renaming of the playground in Oriole Park to “Neshama Playground”. See:

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2005/agendas/council/cc050719/pof7rpt/cl049.pdf>

In June 2008, an updated presentation on the Neshama Playground Project was made to Parks & Environment Committee. See:

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/pe/decisions/2008-06-11-pe17-dd.pdf>

We do not see this as a city-wide facility nor do we classify Oriole Park as a ‘destination’ park. This playground, if it comes to fruition, will be a resource for children of all abilities in this part of the city, but will only be one of many such facilities that hopefully will be realized in the future to serve children in all parts of the city. When donors come forward in other wards and other parts of the city, we hope that similar playgrounds and inclusive facilities can be realized, through a good planning and design process within their respective communities.

Regarding concerns expressed about the potential expenditure of a total of \$2.5 million in this park, please note that the final project cost will be guided by the design process and community consultation outlined above. However, potential parts of this project can have significant costs attached with them (e.g. much needed renovation of the washroom building: \$600,000, new waterplay area: \$450,000 as well as specialized playground components) and these can only be realized with a significant project budget.

During the design process, we look forward to your input and that of other members of the community as well as key stakeholders including disability user groups. Although a concept ‘demonstration plan’ was prepared earlier to guide fundraising efforts, it is important to emphasize that the character, scale, specific elements and the appropriate overall project budget will be confirmed through a design process that will benefit from the input of our consultant team, community members, stakeholders and staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Batterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brenda Patterson
General Manager
Parks, Forestry and Recreation