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Under too much water

By Christopher Reynolds

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FRANCIS CRESCIA/TOWN CRIER

SPLISH SPLASH: Connie Harding's boots may protect her and her son Jared from the poor drainage in Greenwood Park, but she is pressing for a more permanent solution.

The parents group looking to improve the playground in Greenwood Park call themselves the frogs, which is an apt title, given that they spend so much time in the water, they say.

Unfortunately, Friends of Greenwood Park (FROG) haven't been basking in it as much as they've been annoyed by it. The park, like many others in the east end, suffers from poor drainage that the parents find inhibits playtime.

Three years ago the group set out on a mission to improve conditions in their part of the park, mostly around the field house and the playground, where their children play.

Along the way they've put together petitions for city funding, enlisted corporate sponsors and painted, planted and tidied up the community.

And yet, says group member Connie Harding, the group stands alone when it comes to improving drainage on the playground.

"We've been hearing from (councillor Paula Fletcher) for three years, "Oh no, we're not going to spend money on the playground, you're in line after Riverdale East, or some other place," she said.

Harding and her two young sons have been visiting the park for years and are fed up with what they said has been a lack of support from the city.

"We've had to do everything ourselves," she said.

Adding to Harding's dismay is the park's recently completed off-leash dog area. That portion of the park is pristine, she says, and features proper

fencing and a manicured, well-drained surface. Her group feels like the dogs got a good deal while the kids were left croaking.

"I've heard that. That there's money for dogs but none for kids," responded Fletcher, who defended the decision to put in the off-leash area first because, she said, it helps more than just the mothers.

She pointed out that it was built in part to address the group's original concerns that the dogs in the area were defecating in the playground.

In addition, prior to the installation of the improved off-leash dog area, Riverdale High School wanted to use the soccer pitch but couldn't because it had been damaged by dogs.

"Now that the dog area is permanent they're able to use it," said Fletcher.

But Harding says that still leaves their kids standing in puddles with no plan from the city.

Fletcher disagrees.

On March 1, her office organized a meeting between Friends of Greenwood Park, a city landscape architect and Wendy Kirschner, Fletcher's constituency assistant.

Kirschner said that the meeting would be one of two or three meetings. The process will eventually consult the broader community and move toward a plan before spring is out.

According to Harding, the plans may be coming together, but money's a different matter.

"To be told, 'There's no money in the budget, but these are the things that I would do with your park,' is really deflating," said Harding.

But Fletcher admitted cash flow could be an issue.

"There's a lot of problems in the park that will call for serious capital," said Fletcher, referring to the drainage issues. "And there isn't a whole lot of big money rolling around at the moment."

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