



Rotary Park

Past, Present and Future

A brief prepared by
The Rotary Club of St.Catharines
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Abstract

Although the Rotary Park on Pelham Road in St.Catharines is still used by the public, the Park (refer to **Appendix A**) is currently officially closed for environmental reasons. As a result City maintenance is minimal. This Brief was assembled by Rotary Club volunteers to help interested parties in the community who may have an interest in resolving current problems and defining a new evolving mandate for Rotary Park. Rotary volunteers have met with people who were involved with the Park since it's inception. As well, they have met with current City and Parks staff that is trying to correct current deficiencies as well as defining a new mandate for the Park. This Brief gives a history of the Park, describes its current environmental deficiencies and proposed technical solutions. As well, members of Rotary who have backgrounds in park planning and landscape architecture have volunteered their time to design an improved park. The Rotary Civic Affairs Committee have a very positive vision of the future development of the "12 Mile Greenbelt" from Decew Hydro Station to Lake Ontario and they have tried to come up with a concept that fits the vision as well as fit in with the environmental solutions that must be implemented by law. The capital requirements are discussed as well as proposed methods to finance the changes.

1) History of Rotary Park

Size and Location

Rotary Park is a 32-acre parcel of land on the south side of Pelham Road, opposite the Decew Hydro Generating Station and overlooking 12 Mile Creek (refer to **Appendix D**). Inside the 32 acre Park is a four-acre parcel of land designated as "The Tree Park" and a raised garden known as the "Friendship Garden". The History of these two elements is discussed below.

Previous use

The Park was a landfill site from 1970 until November 1980. During this period few environmental regulations existed and the technology for dealing with problems such as leachate seepage and methane gas were still in their infancy. When it was decommissioned in 1980 it was covered over with a thin clay layer and a bit of topsoil and as such was ready to become a city park.

At that time there was ample vacant land in the area so it was somewhat isolated. In recent years a number of subdivisions have grown up around it so it is now situated in a well-populated area.

How Rotary got involved

In 1979/80 we sponsored a young girl, Barbara Johnston, to Finland as an exchange student. In honor of her stay the host club in Finland donated a tree in a park, which they started. This was the inspiration for us to do something similar.

In Club year 1982/83 our Club member, Charlie Complin was District Governor of Rotary. As Charlie had been instrumental in getting our Club into the Youth Exchange Program a few years earlier, it seemed appropriate that during his year as District Governor, we should do something similar. By happy coincidence the disposal site was being prepared for closure and there was a feeling that there was an opportunity to help create something positive for the City.

We and the South St.Catharines Rotary Club approached the City and not surprisingly their response was very positive. The City was to maintain the Park. Four acres was to include a Tree Park and a Friendship Garden.

Upon entering the park the Friendship Garden was to be the focal point. This was to be 25' diameter raised, sloping, flower bed displaying the Rotary Wheel. In addition, people would be encouraged to plant trees in memory of someone they wanted to honor. A map would show what trees were donated and in whose name. The two Clubs would work together putting the grounds in shape. The initial cost would be \$25,000.

The Rotary International Conference was held in Toronto in 1983 and, at 3:00PM on June 9, of that year Rotary International President, Hiroji Mukasa, of Japan officially opened the Park in the presence of a large number of dignitaries and Rotarians.

The Tree Park Concept proved to be very popular with 74 trees dedicated in the first year (refer to **Appendix C**).

For environmental, reasons described in the next section, the Park soon fell into disuse or very limited use. Officially the Park is not open to the public but there appears to be little danger if people do use it.

The City has kept the grass cut but the flowerbed has filled with weeds. People still use the Park to walk their dogs and in winter children toboggan down the slopes in the Park.

2) Our Current Conclusions and Recommendations

The condition of the Park is such that our Civic Affairs Committee gave serious consideration to asking that our name be disassociated from it and public signage related to it. However, late last year we began making inquiries and meeting with City and Parks officials as well as City elected officials. We have reversed our initial position and now feel strongly that current environmental problems will be solved. More importantly, we feel that there are tremendous future opportunities in the 12 Mile Creek Greenbelt, which must not be overlooked. These are our conclusions and recommendations:

Conclusions

- 1) There is a need for the Park in this area. It is being used even in its poor present condition.
- 2) The needs or mandate of the Park have changed as it also serves as a major gateway to a green belt and trail system along the 12 Mile Creek (refer to **Appendix B**). In fact, the green belt along the 12 Mile Creek from Decew Hydro Generating Plant to Lake Ontario and back into Shorthills Provincial Park we feel has the potential to be a major health, recreation and sport corridor in the future development of the City. Consider the following:
 - a) The Henley already exists.
 - b) It has been demonstrated that there is great potential to build a world-class whitewater kayaking course in the old Niagara College area.
 - c) An informal system of trails already exists at the bottom of Rotary Park and follows the 12 Mile Creek in both directions.
 - d) This trail system connects with other systems such as The Bruce Trail and the Merritt Trail .
 - e) It will be a growing tourist and special events attraction as it is further developed.
 - f) It has the potential to become an educational facility in the fields of 'Landfill Reclamation', 'Carolinian Forest Regeneration', 'Ecology of the Niagara Region' 'Historical Mill Sites on 12 Mile Creek'.
- 3) The problems that beset the Park are obviously going to have to be rectified for environmental reasons. It makes good sense that when the Park is being torn apart, as it will almost certainly will be to remedy the environmental problems, that the contouring and landscaping for its future use should be dealt with at the same time. This will avoid expensive rework if it is done later especially if the contouring does not match a new vision or mandate. Rotary Club members with Landscape Architecture and Park Design have volunteered their time to design a Park congruent with this new vision and present it here in this report.
- 4) To help celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Rotary International in 2005, we ask that the City Council commit in Spring 2005 to a timely reopening of the Park. We understand the work can be done in three phases over three fiscal years. We recommend a June 2007 Re-opening Ceremony on the 24th Anniversary of the original opening of the Park.

The components of the recommended solution are:

Phase one: Engineering Design of remedies to define the necessary operational improvements. Public input prior to engineering is required, expected public meetings later in 2005. Council approved this study for 2005.

Phase two: Execution of site operational improvements in 2006. This is expected to be a significant expenditure in the 2006 Municipal Budget.

Phase three: Final landscaping prior to June 10, 2007, re-opening. This is expected to be a modest expenditure in the 2007 Municipal budget.

3) Current Inadequacies

a) Environmental

Leachate

At times, the present leachate collection system may not be able to keep up with excess flows. All leachate should be collected and pumped up to the Pelham Road sewer system for direction to effluent treatment. Some leachate may currently be discharging into Twelve Mile Creek but with a better cap on the landfill site, the current system may be adequate.

Site Cap Integrity

The present cap is bare to absent. Ontario Ministry requirements are a minimum clay cap of one metre thickness. Remediation must deal with the added weight of this cap.

Methane Gas Discharge

This uncontrolled discharge is apparently one of the reasons for the temporary closure of our park. The Landfill is old and gas emissions have probably diminished to the point where ventilation only is the probable technical solution.

b) Avocational

At the time of the official opening in 1982, the avocation of the park was a tree garden based on a model from Finland. At the time, financial contributions were made to purchase memorial trees. We at Rotary have now come to see the important benefit that could be derived by designating the park as an access point to the Valley of the Twelve, Shorthills, Merritt Trail and the Bruce Trail. We have a clear design of the future configuration of the park. The remedial environment works should be done to support this avocation.

4) Proposed changes to Park to meet a new vision or mandate

An overall concept was developed around three very distinct attributes of this park

1. the unique and spectacular views afforded from the east edge of the park
2. proximity of this park to exiting trail systems and to a very strategic and as of yet undeveloped 12 Mile Creek greenbelt
3. need to resurrect the involvement of local Rotary clubs including the rejuvenation of the Rotary wheel garden and tree planting park

Using this as a framework, it was determined that a park of passive usage was in greater need than a traditional local park and playground area. The park could easily co-support areas of natural regeneration and maintained areas for more intense passive use by visitors (refer to **Appendix E**). The major highlight of the park will be two observation platforms at opposing ends on the east edge of the ravine complete with instructional signage.

The natural component will consist of interconnected areas within the park, each showcasing a different ecological system such as grassland or forest. These areas will be planted with native flora indigenous to the area and complimentary to the diminishing Carolinian forests. They will also be tied into existing natural areas bordering the park

Complimentary areas of clipped grass and shade trees will be created for more intense passive uses such as picnicking, playing catch, etc. The trees of this area will incorporate and resurrect the tree planting park concept and will radiate out from the formal Rotary wheel garden and parking area at the west edge of the park.

All of these areas will be tied together with the provision of a wheelchair accessible internal trail system connecting the various points of interest within the park. These trails will also provide hiker access to external trail systems. Signage will be added to welcome, direct, inform and instruct visitors of the attributes of the park and near by points of interest (refer to **Appendix F**).

To economically accommodate this concept, it is recommended that contouring of the park to suit the proposed planting plan should take place during the implementation stage of the engineering recommendations.

5) Capital Cost and Source of Funding

We have put together a new Park plan based on the New Mandate for the Park and feel that if the plan is acceptable the capital cost of contouring should be done when the new cap is placed. This will add little cost now but more importantly; it will avoid rework later and avoid any future damage to the clay cap. Also, proposed viewing stations can be constructed while the cap is installed. The proposed contouring would be wheelchair friendly.

We propose that trees and park benches can be donated in a way originally conceived at the time the Tree Park concept was initiated. Almost all the trees that were planted when the Tree Park was first conceived are still growing. The few that are missing can be replaced and the records brought up to date. In future, service clubs can also be approached for special features such as lookout and display stations for educational purposes. Also, washrooms can be added and toilet refuse added to the leachate pumping station as it also is treated.

Alternative sources of funding would be pursued including but not limited to:

- Trillium and other foundations to fund the educational aspects of the park such as the instructional signage and eco-trails
- Provincial and Federal grants for endeavors related to or conforming with the mandate of the 'One-Tonne challenge'
- Continuation of the Rotary Tree Park concept encouraging private donations for the supply and planting of special trees in memory of loved ones
- Pursue other grant sources in support of naturalization and the rejuvenation of Carolinian forests

6) Benefits of the New Mandate

1) Tangible Benefits

- The creation of a meeting/staging area to easily access the developing Greenbelt system tied to 12 Mile Creek. The park can become a focal point in Niagara for the fast growing eco-tourism movement.
- Creation of an area that will accommodate a combination of passive uses which is much needed not only in the west end of St. Catharines but the entire Niagara Peninsula.
- The combination of the proposed parks attributes and comprehensive signage will provide a very unique educational experience especially considering the unique views and areas of historical significance within and adjacent to the park. We envision public schools making annual field trips to this park.
- A well designed parking lot, which will eliminate the hazard of parking on Pelham Road, and large enough to accommodate special events and buses for organized group outings.

2) Intangible Benefits

- This type of partnership between local Rotary clubs and the City of St. Catharines sets an important precedence for the growth of St. Catharines.
- The benefits of turning a 20 year old eyesore into a jewel in the Provincial and Federal movements for the preservation of our natural heritage along with progressive steps to regenerate of a piece of our disappearing Carolinian Forest cannot be measured.
- There is potential for realizing substantial cost savings by incorporating a plan such as this during the early stages of construction resulting from the environmental engineering study currently under way.
- The educational component of the park and the attempts to make it substantially barrier free may not only qualify this park for Provincial or Federal funding but may also inspire altruistic funding.