

Report MO-06-20

Appendix A: Resident Feedback

Resident Email #1

Addressed to Mayor Meed Ward and Councillor Nisan, Dates June 13th, 2020:

(modified to remove identifying names/details)

Mayor Meed-Ward,

I have learned of the planned re-opening of Lowville Park [on June 29th](#). For the past four years -- every weekend all summer long -- I have been part of the group of local residents living [near] Lowville Park who are directly impacted by the unmanaged crowds of people and cars coming to this Park. This has been going on for years -- BEFORE the additional complexities of opening the Park in the midst of a pandemic. The total disrespect and abuse of this beautiful environment has been a tragic result, not to mention the significant increase in safety concerns to the general public.

Again this year, I wish to point out the significant issues occurring here every weekend all summer long that will need to be addressed. Since we have had no communication at all regarding any plans to manage and improve them for this year's opening, I submit them again for your review and hopefully effective responses.

1. Although By-law officers do show up here on a random basis, there does not appear to be any regular schedule for enforcement on weekends. For the past four years, I regularly call for them to come here to ticket illegally parked cars on Saturdays and Sundays. But why aren't they towing? The cars park along the entrance driveway to the Park -- despite the fact it is marked with the standard "white stripes". This driveway should actually be marked as the "emergency route" (-- which it is anyway). That would allow for extremely higher parking fines there and perhaps this would be a greater deterrent to the illegal parking. If there was ever an emergency situation in the Park, emergency vehicles would never be able to get through into the Park. This specific issue is "an accident waiting to happen".
2. In addition, this issue becomes totally unmanageable for the bistro directly across from the Park. As the Park's parking lot becomes full (usually by [11:00am](#) on weekends) the overflow of cars is constantly trying to park in the few parking spots at the bistro for customers. The owner must "stand guard" over their parking spots all weekend, despite the fact that they have the appropriate "private property" signage and necessary forms signed with the City to ticket illegal parkers. (I'm sure you can appreciate that getting By-law up here in a reasonable time-frame is challenging, particularly with weekend staffing issues.)
3. There is a sign indicating "local traffic only" just past the main driveway to the Park. The reality is this sign no longer makes much of an impact anytime, never mind on weekends. The 'no parking' signs were recently changed to no stopping, but people still park along both sides of the street and particularly on weekends they've even blocked the resident's driveway in that area. Cars

parked in this area SHOULD be towed, not just ticketed. What other deterrents are available to use for such an issue?

4. Last year, there was a junior By-law staff person controlling access to the Park parking lot. While local residents were pleased to see this idea undertaken, it was poorly managed. I often watched as the staff person would stop each car that had turned into the main driveway, tell them the lot was full, but would then let the car through so they could “drive around and see if a spot had opened up”. The cars would not find a spot (no surprise there), and now they are trying to exit the lot and turn left to get out while a line-up of cars are waiting to try to enter the driveway on the narrow Lowville Park Rd. The result was a lot of yelling and horns honking as three-point turns were necessary to exit. The website says the parking lot will be adjusted to 80% capacity, but this is not going to solve the problem.
5. In 2019, two Park staff worked full shifts on weekends. With all of the changes that have occurred due to the pandemic, are there any plans for staff to be here on weekends this year? There was so much garbage collected on weekends last year that the two garbage bins on-site were absolutely overflowing. One weekend, the staff had to take THREE loads of garbage down to the main yard using the City truck. The total labour, time, and equipment costs of doing this has to be a ridiculously inefficient waste of City resources.

A few years ago, when the City held local meetings to gather input from the residents for the Lowville Park Master Plan, we had recommended the City adopt a “Garbage In - Garbage Out” policy. Since the City does not seem interested in managing the dangerously high numbers of people in the Park on weekends, they have to manage this garbage issue more efficiently. It actually becomes a hazard it’s so bad.

6. What are the plans in place for cleaning the two sets of washrooms in the Park? For years, people have constantly gone over to the Bistro to use their washroom facilities claiming “the Park washrooms are so dirty”.
7. People also go to the bistro asking to fill water jugs, complaining that most City Parks have free drinking water available but Lowville Park has none. Considering the significant year-over-year increase in Park utilization, why has this issue never been addressed?
8. Is the City allowing Park Permits this year? For years, the lack of management of Park Permits has become increasingly worse. Are administration staff even tracking the total number of people associated with the Permits being awarded, so they can “cut off” any further Permits once a maximum limit has been reached? Are they taking into consideration the cars associated with these numbers, and the limits of the Lowville parking lot? There has to be some kind of monitoring of the actual number of people arriving at these permitted sites, at least as one way of managing the overcrowding issues. If they exceed the number they were permitted, or if they leave the kind of gross mess of garbage and litter that happens now, why not “charge” these permit holders additional fees to clean up the messes they leave?

It’s important to be aware that groups of 100 and 200 people arriving in the Park on weekends is a common occurrence. Most of them do not even bother obtaining Park Permits anyway, so the issue will not disappear this year if there no Park Permits, and this extreme overcrowding will happen again, with all of the resulting problems.

9. There is no enforcement of any regular Park rules or even City By-laws in the Park. I have witnessed many examples of the total abuse of this City Park, such as:

- picnickers dumping used hot charcoal into the river
- dirty diapers thrown under trees when there are garbage bins just yards away
- huge barbecue spits brought into the Park on wheeled trolleys
- barbecues being set up on top of the picnic tables leaving melted/burned tables
- large music speakers/megaphones being used (since many of the groups are 100+)
- large tents/canopies being installed
- day campsites being set up in the back forested areas, and open camp fires on the grass.

I firmly believe this degree of regular abuse does not occur in most of the more urban Burlington City Parks. We all recognize that Lowville Park is a very unique rural City amenity. Over the thirteen years I have lived here, I have chatted with many Park users, and firmly believe a significant percentage are not even Burlington tax-payers taking advantage of this beautiful space provided by the City. In past years, we have suggested to the City that they start charging some form of fee for use of this amenity in order to help fund its maintenance as a naturalized space and control/manage its use.

This total disrespect for the Lowville Park environment has been going on for years now, and so far the City has not made much headway in successfully addressing this real tragedy. At a minimum the website should provide much more detailed and specific information about using Lowville Park. This Park is a unique, rural, natural environment that the City should take far more pride in managing -- before it is lost.

I hope you find this information and my thoughts of some use in your examination and discussions to begin solving these issues once and for all. Many of us local tax-payers been talking about the same issues for at least four years now -- and unfortunately they have only gotten worse. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Resident Email #2:

Addressed to Councillor Rory Nisan, Dated June 19th, 2020:

(modified to remove identifying names/details)

Hi Rory,

[Residents] got together this afternoon to discuss the park issues that we have observed in the past and foresee taking place as it opens to the public again. As our residences are [close] to the park we are most aware of how it is used and therefore will represent the community. All correspondence as well as in person meetings will be with us only to keep things simple. We will pass on information and discuss with the community as required. [We] will also ensure that the other members of LARA are involved.

As residents, observers and self-proclaimed stewards of the Lowville area we have witnessed great changes in our environment during the park closure. Plant material of all kinds seem to have rejoiced in having a vacation from humans. Wildlife has returned like we have never seen before. For the first time in 25 years we see deer, foxes (who now have a den and cubs beside the park), rabbits, all kinds of birds, turtles... the list goes on. From an environmental standpoint perhaps human activity in the park should be slowly reintroduced to both protect and allow nature to adapt again. Having a sudden onslaught of crowds descend could be detrimental to the wildlife that has moved in. Perhaps all parks should regularly get a vacation from humans... what an impressive statement that would make on a city!!!

Our concerns for the park and our residents are two-fold ... Awareness of the Covid pandemic issues and regulations, as well as a long history of overcrowding, parking and traffic problems and the inability to control these and other issues. We are experiencing parking issues already and the park has not yet opened. I don't think any of us want a Trinity-Bellwoods Park fiasco to happen here.

We have concerns in regard to social distancing in the park and the 10-person gathering rule, particularly as it relates to the large groups that we have witnessed in the past as well as the use of the limited bathroom facilities. Monitoring and enforcing this would be a potential problem. Limiting the number of cars permitted to park could be a solution. Calculations could be made as to the number of people per car, the total number of people in the park at any given time and the amount that the restrooms could be used safely. It might be an interesting method to understand the park capacity for COVID safety.

Picnic areas, by city design, have encouraged large group picnics. Perhaps removing many of the picnic tables so that there are only two tables in each designated picnic area would by nature discourage large gatherings and make it COVID-safety acceptable. BBQs have always been an issue for us. They encourage people to stay all day long as well as typically creating fire hazards by the dumping of charcoal embers everywhere... hardly ever in the concrete containers provided. Perhaps this is a good time to restrict any BBQ activities in the park thus reducing the group size, length of time in the park as well as fire and injury hazards.

The playground certainly should be closed during the current pandemic. Certainly, cordoning the area off would be a start. However, given the influx of large numbers of visitors to the park who would enforce this? This is far beyond the capabilities of a summer student. Perhaps full-time weekend by-law officers should be present in the park.

We all feel that traffic management and parking will be more of an issue than it has been in the past. Limiting the number of cars permitted to park would certainly be advisable. How this is enforced and managed would be critical. Cars need an area to turn around and leave if the park is at capacity. If the backlog of cars is too much, they will certainly end up on the Guelph line...at the bottom of the hill...where speeding and accidents are already a concern. The Lowville Bistro has had problems for years with people using their parking spaces on private property as well as making it difficult for their patrons to park. Who would be enforcing this and where would the checkpoint be...again not an endeavor for a summer student? Perhaps at the entrance to the park there could be an area set up for two people to count cars and once the parking area has reached maximum capacity they could direct and ensure that the cars can turn around safely and exit via Guelph Line. This would also ensure that in the event of an emergency situation in the park that police, ambulance and fire can respond safely and quickly. We have had great concerns regarding this in the past.

An issue that has been of constant debate is the paid parking concept. Perhaps this is a good time to re-evaluate this option. A gate house could easily be created and manned on weekends. This would allow for a great deal of control over parking as well as the opportunity to pass on park rules and guidelines to visitors.

During the continued COVID safety concerns it might be advisable to adopt a policy that Conservation Halton has in place in which they limit the amount of time visitors can stay in their parks, as they've done for Crawford Lake. It seems to be working for them and their visitors.

As always, we would like to be involved in the decision-making process as well as continued conversations and input in the future. We would appreciate a meeting at the park before opening to review the plan and would like to schedule that as soon as possible. Then we would request to reconnect after the opening week to discuss how the new policies have worked and modify as required. A month later after the August 3rd long weekend might be another check in opportunity to evaluate the parks operation.