

# Dufferin Street Neighbourhood Group

## **September 13 Community Meeting Minutes**

Evergreen Seniors Centre

7:00 – 9:00

Agenda:

Stop the use of Pesticides along the GJR

Construction and Maintenance of the Trans Canada Trail

Other

Attendance: approximately 37 people attended. Not everyone signed the attendance sheet. Therefore names are not included.

**Vicki Beard and Ian Finlay** opened the meeting and explained that we were not here to make any decisions tonight, only to voice concerns and ask questions.

**Joanne McAuley** introduced Ian and Vicki and thanked them for taking initiative in pushing our issues forward.

**Charlie** (George Street) asked about the structure of the GJR and how decisions were made. **Ian** explained that the Board was a corporation owned by the City and operated at arm's length to the City. There are 3 Councillors plus the Mayor who sit on the Board plus 5 – 6 members at large with various expertise.

**Jack** asked if any Board members were invited and present at the meeting,.

**Ian:** The Board was invited but no one from the Board attended the meeting.

**Wally** (Tiffany Street): expressed concern about the debris and lack of maintenance at the end of Tiffany Street along the tracks. He has tried repeatedly for 30 years to find someone who is responsible for the clean up but keeps getting the run around.

He asked who was going to maintain the trail along the tracks

**Vicki:** The City will be responsible for the trail and the GJR will be responsible for the maintenance of the tracks.

**Ian:** the trail be wheelchair accessible, bike friendly, grass, snow and garbage will be picked up by Operations.

**Brian** (John Street) Pesticides were applied in early August without notice. The City is ultimately responsible for this.

**John** (John Street) Will the GJR continue to spray?

**Ian:** the GJR has referred this decision to the Governance Committee for review. They are aware that past and present practices are not acceptable. We need to find a solution that works for the GJR and the community.

**Someone** asked what alternatives were available besides pesticides.

**Vicki:** The trains can be equipped with chains that are used to weed wack. She also mentioned that Ward 2 is not the only Ward affected by the GJR practices, we need to consider all the neighbourhoods affected.

**John** (John Street) If the GJR continues to spray there will be overspray on the Trans Canada Trail) TCT. He questioned whether this was a good location for the TCT.

**Vicki:** Council will work with the GJR to stop the use of pesticides in all of Guelph.

**John** (John) suggested putting the trail away from the tracks.

**Ian:** council approved the trail design. A Public Liaison Committee (PLC) was created to look at alternatives.

**John:** was on the PLC and said the PLC was not able to discuss the layout of the trail, the trail alignment was set.

**Vicki:** some have said they like the trail alignment.

**Wally** was angered that he was asked to leave the PLC meeting on the site walk as he was not a member. He was told he did not have a right to participate. Wally also noted snow removal problems with the trail, and trail maintenance problems.

**Lynn:** What is the role of the Governance Committee?

**Ian:** It is a committee within the Board that reviews policy. It includes public consultation.

**Ruth** (Dufferin St) commented that she is happy with the spraying of Round up because she is affected by ragweed. She is also happy with the trail. She also said she uses Round up in her own garden.

**Graeme** (Clarence) The dead debris left after the use of pesticides and the dead wood left by the GJR after cutting along the tracks is a fire hazard and looks bad.

**Ian** concurred. The GJR stewardship is dismal. He said he uses the area for his run in the morning and has also noticed the debris left after clearing. He hopes that regular maintenance with the TCT will improve the current practices.

**Graeme** As citizens (in a termite zone), we are asked to remove all dead wood – the GJR should too.

**Ian:** The GJR need to change it's practices in light of the termite zone.

**B:** How will the City approach the GJR to change it's practices?

**Vicki:** Council will direct the GJR to clean up and find an alternative to pesticides.

**B:** Why doesn't Council tell the GJR they can't use pesticides.

**Vicki:** Councillors cannot tell staff what to do, they can only direct staff.

**B:** Can a Pesticide – free trail be a city policy?

**Wally:** was concerned about tree debris left for weeks beside his house along the tracks. He has been unable to find anyone who is responsible for cleaning it up.

**Brian:** expressed concern that there was no public notification during the spraying in August, people use the tracks, people had direct contact with the spray. This is a public health issue.

**Beth (Mac):** noted that a number of trees had been cut down during trail construction. She also learned from GJR staff that some had been cut down accidentally. Will more trees be planted?

**Vicki:** yes, planting is included as a component of trail construction.

**Norm (Mac):** No one from the GJR is present tonight. The GJR have proven themselves to be irresponsible. How can we make recommendations to an incompetent group? Council should not give suggestions to the GJR, they should give directives. Specifically, no pesticides, responsible clearing practices.

**Beth:** Can the GJR say they messed up when they did not post signs in August regarding spraying. We need an apology or an admission.

**Charles:** for decades people have used the trail beside the tracks. He uses the trail daily to commute, there were no signs. GJR staff are lying to City staff, the MOE and the Community when they say they did in fact post signs. This should be cause for termination.

**Wally:** Who pays Tom Sagaskie's (Manager of the GJR) salary?

**Ian:** Tom works for the City. The City pays his salary. Ian said that he needed to be careful when talking about staff in a public venue and therefore cannot comment on the points raised. He said there are a litany of problems with the GJR, including governance, administration and operations. These problems cannot be solved overnight but he will do his best to solve the issues raised here. Patience will be required.

**B:** The GJR is unaccountable.

**Ian:** Unfortunately, this is the structure. We need to change the structure.

**John:** Can we stop the construction of the TCT until these issues are resolved.

**Ian:** Council has approved the TCT.

**Vicki:** Tenders have been awarded.

**Kathy (John St.)**

1. We need a liaison while the TCT is being constructed.

2. Also the Source Protection Program has identified this area as vulnerable to filtration into our groundwater and drinking water. We don't want pesticides to filter into our drinking water.

Can the City guarantee that our groundwater will be pesticide free?

3. The trail alignment is a problem and the concerns of the community need to be acknowledged and appreciated. These problems will keep coming up unless they are addressed.

**Charlie:** questioned why city Councillors cannot force staff to change practices. People elect Councillors, staff are public servants. Do the staff not have a boss?

**Vicki:** We need to abide by City policy.

**Ian:** We have a CAO who administers staff. Councillors have contact with the CAO. The CAO is responsible for City policy

**B:** What is Tom Sagaskie's role?

**Ian:** General Manager of GJR

**B:** Is the CAO supervising Tom?

**Vicki:** No, the GJR Board is.

**Ian:** all complaints should be forwarded to the GJR Board.

**Norm:** wrote to the Chair (Paul Smith) of the GJR Board 2 weeks ago and has not received a response. Now he is asking for more submissions?

**Ian and Vicki:** it took 2 weeks for them to get a response for the GJR Board.

**Brian:** when will we hear back from the Board?

**Ian:** the timeframe is not known.

**Mike Darmon:** The GJR is not compelled to spray pesticides, they can use alternatives.

**Ian:** Current practices are not acceptable.

**David McAuley:** the GJR runs through most wards. Can other Councillors be involved? Can other neighbourhood groups get involved?

**Vicki:** This is not just a Ward 2 issue. We need a policy that includes the whole GJR

**Norm:** The GJR Manager has said things that are false, now the GJR Board will ask Tom for recommendations. For instance, no fires have been reported to Transportation Ontario.

**Vicki:** there was a fire in Cambellville.

**Lynn:** it was not reported.

**June Hofland:** Have past and future maintenance practices being addressed?

**Vicki:** there are no details yet.

**June:** Can the Board meetings be open to the public.

**Ian:** Board meetings are public but he is not sure how they are advertised.

Once the Governance committee has made a recommendation to the Board the public can participate.

**June:** wanted to request that the GJR report back on industry standards, best practices and costings for all alternatives. She also asked that the GJR Board write a letter of apology to the Community.

**Patti:** Can this have a time line on the Governance Committee response?

**Ian:** there is no timeline set.

**Beth:** Are there community representatives on the Board? Is this possible?

**Vicki.** will suggest this.

**Wally:** when the trail gets to Tiffany is there any leeway with the alignment? He thinks snow removal will be a problem. It will be hard to get a front end loader down the street. With the trail barriers etc. at the end of the street, he can't see how snow removal can work.

**Beth:** If the trail barrier (guard rail) is a problem then don't put it in.

**Charlie** also noted that the guard rails may be a problem if someone is caught on the tracks with a train coming. Can there be modifications to the trail? Can the z gates be removed?

**Brian:** Brought up snow removal at the TCT PLC many times and it was not addressed.

**Charlie:** There are many problems with having a trail beside the tracks, in addition to snow removal and pesticides. Can the trail be moved?

**Graeme:** There are two separate maintenance activities for the GJR and the trail?

**Ian:** the Trail will be maintained by the City. The Tracks will be maintained by the GJR.

**Wally:** 2 years ago there was too much snow and the tracks could not be cleared. So they got dump trucks to clear the tracks. This can't be done with barriers in the way. Wally noted that he has been in the neighbourhood for 50 years and no one is listening to him or asking him for advice.

**Ian:** will get the Manager of winter maintenance to contact Wally regarding snow removal.

**Patti:** does not think that the trail alignment should be carved in stone. There have been many points brought up tonight that may cause change. What can we expect?

**Ian:** will pursue these issues until there is a resolution

**Bonnie:** there are 2 issues. 1. Pesticide use 2. Trail alignment changes. The trail is happening. The GJR must get people off the tracks.

**Kathy:** was not able to participate in the PLC. We cannot ignore the fact that the trail alignment is an issue, if every time we have a meeting it keeps coming up. We need to address this issue. Is it possible to change the trail. Do we want a trail at all? We need to be heard, we need to make changes.

**Ria** ( Dufferin Street) the GJR is private property.

**Vicki:** Trespassing on the tracks can result in a fine of \$25,000-\$50,000.

**John:** We are led to believe that we can change, referring to stopping the use of pesticides on the tracks. Why can we not then, change the alignment of the trail? There will be approximately 8 – 10 z gates, the trail will cross 3 roads and cost 1.2 million. Why can there be no change?

**Vicki:** a risk assessment was done on every issue and each decision comes with reasons.

**John:** If the trail is not beside the tracks we avoid a number of issues. The PLC was never asked to suggest trail alignment alternatives.

**Lynn** agreed that the PLC was never asked to suggest alternatives.

**Vicki:** the alignment was altered between Mac and Earl. Z gates are needed to get insurance.

**Kathy:** Have we really chosen the best spot for the trail?

**Beth:** z gates are not reasonable for commuters. They will use the path of least resistance. Is this really a liability issue?

**Brenda:** 34% of Canadians have allergies. If we don't use pesticides then 1/3 of the people cannot use the trail.

**Vicki:** Ragweed can be hand cut.

**Kathy:** Looking at the TCT across Canada, where else has incurred liability by putting the trail beside an active rail line? Spend money on a trail in a location that makes more sense. The trail is supposed to be wheelchair accessible but there is no parking at either end.

**Wally:** 2 years ago there was a trail derailment. If there are gates then what happens? How can the GJR deal with this section of the rail line?

**Brian:** The PLC was not allowed to look at alternatives to the alignment of the trail. No options were given to the PLC.

**Kathy:** There has been no fatality on the tracks, no patrolling, no fires, the community uses the trail and tracks respectfully. Can we just leave it the way it is now?

**Joanne:** adjourned the meeting as it was 9:00 but invited everyone to stay after to discuss any issue.