

Seeking a Healing Forest Garden at the fire hall park

MOTION (from the Park Committee)

WHEREAS the GCA wishes to take advantage of reconciliation and respect–building partnerships with the Algonquin community, the Healing Forests initiative, the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Horticultural Society’s Community Planting Program at the new seniors’ park; and

WHEREAS spring construction of the senior’s park at 365 O’Connor needs to incorporate changes that will support this approach to park design;

THEREFORE the GCA asks the Councillor to ensure:

THAT a reconciliation, partnership and native plantings approach be incorporated into the final design of the 365 O’Connor seniors park; and

THAT this spring’s excavation plans take these issues into account and include grading and soil removal/replacement for a rain garden, and enabling other plantings that support climate resilience and the resilience of owners of the unceded territories on which we sit.

Background

Immediate intervention with the City on design of the fire hall park will be necessary if we are to successfully incorporate a new opportunity for Reconciliation and Respect into the design of the senior’s park near the fire hall.

A new National Healing Forest initiative has now raised the possibility of furthering a spirit of reconciliation and respect for Ottawa’s indigenous community, for survivors of residential schools, and for climate sustainability, using native and sacred plantings and ceremony to promote healing here in the Glebe, in collaboration with the local Algonquin community.

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Parks Committee and the City have been exploring whether an Algonquin name incorporating the concept of respect for elders might be appropriate for the park being developed for seniors. As well (although not yet supported by the City) the Committee has discussed the desirability of planting native plants to support ecological sustainability, and to enhance park interest for seniors by attracting butterflies, birds and wildlife, creating an enriched ecological zone.

City park designers often do not incorporate standard planting beds into parks due to ongoing maintenance issues. However, perennial native plantings require far less maintenance and when left to naturalize, will minimize soil disruption, will help with healing the soil, will reduce City maintenance costs, and will improve safety by keeping foot traffic away from guy-wire hazards.

The GCA's established garden angels program, along with gardening seniors and the possibility of ongoing interest by the Algonquin community, could all be called upon for maintenance assistance were it needed. Some city staff already see the educational opportunities here for rain gardens and pollinator gardens.

Potential partnerships among the local Algonquin community, the City, the GCA, and the Ottawa Horticultural Society and its community exemplify how the Healing Forest and Garden initiative may bring people together to reconcile, build mutual respect and achieve climate sustainability goals.

Next Steps

While these discussions are emergent, park construction will go forward this spring, and these opportunities may be entirely lost if not incorporated into the construction schedule.

At the very least, grading of the space between the driveway and the east-west sidewalk into the fire hall is needed to establish a runoff rain garden (not unlike the City's innovative rain catchment gardens along Sunnyside Ave), with an educational and native plantings component. Contaminated soil on the site will require soil removal and replacement and cost savings dictate this should be done along with other site preparation work.

Many of the native planting areas will be along the periphery of the park, but all plantings need to be planned in a way that will meet with existing site use requirements identified by the city, while location of new trees, and of native, traditional, sacred, pollinator and educational plantings need to be developed in dialogue with the Algonquin community for planting in fall 2022.