

Monday October 3, 2022

## Mayor and Council,

The Airport Perimeter Trail above Drury Street remains a problem. Erosion has reduced the trail width to a narrow strip. The Airport has not yet moved their fence over. It's October and snow could arrive any day. Inflation is predicted to be high over the next while and gas prices to be high. Covid still ranges causing self-isolation and the need for having safe places to walk.

The city just celebrated the International Day of Older Persons where we were told "You must take care of your own health", that to stay healthy we need to be stay active. The event took place at the Canada Games Center, missing noting that walking outside on our city trails is always a year-round free activity.

Council's agenda analysis for the Puckett's Gulch item notes the importance of the airport perimeter trail south and suggests that citizens can talk to Parks about having them work on trail issues. However, it goes on to say that Parks won't do anything because it's not an official trail.

What the analysis missed, or at least what I had hoped to convey, was the importance of the escarpment trail for pure recreational walking.

So today I ask Mayor and Council, our elected representatives, for help in getting the airport fence moved. My ask here is to please work with the people at Yukon Government to get the airport fence moved now, not next spring, or next fall or in a few years, but now.

A quick summary.:

- One of my earlier letters on this issue was to Parks where they responded that they couldn't help because the fence was not their jurisdiction and they saw no solution without moving the fence.
- The Yukon Government wrote me that it was not currently considering adjusting the fence to facilitate the unofficial trail.
- Then last week, the Yukon Government wrote me: "The City of Whitehorse owns and operates the official city trail network, including the trail at the north side of the Whitehorse Airport which links the Black Street stairs and the trail along the Alaska Highway, ...and it...continues to work with the City of Whitehorse on the City's current and future plans for trails in the Whitehorse area."
- The analysis notes people can ask Parks for help.
- The analysis notes Parks says for it to help, this trail would need to be an official trail.

I feel dizzy, between a rock and a hard place!

The 1959 NRC escarpment report recommended putting the fence well back from the edge and to stop building in the area, particularly where the old Bridle Path road came up to where the earlier airforce building site sat on the edge of the escarpment. Now, decades of erosion and climate change, lots of foot traffic and even the occasional wheeled vehicle use on the perimeter trail on the outside of the fence, and on the inside of the fence, a perimeter road plowed in the winter and sometimes even used by heavy airport vehicles, have caused the escarpment edge to nudge over to almost beside the airport fence.

Previous reports on this area over the years, including Airport Plans, recognized the perimeter trail going around the outside of the airport fence, that it was public, important and there needed to be enough space for it to work as a trail.



We need access to using this trail. Active living requires some longer natural walking trails. Living Downtown presents challenges for this.

First, the scope of the steps Parks is proposing seems very similar to the trail plan processes the city organized for other neighbourhoods when the City was creating the first 6 neighbourhood/area trail plans and designating official trails. It would make good sense to have a Downtown area trail plan to do the steps Parks lists so we can address our many Downtown trail needs.

However, I am very concerned that it is the beginning of October and snow will shortly fall and we will be stuck for another winter or likely longer, not being able to safely use our trail while the many steps Parks has listed for Official Trail status happen, such as getting a budget, hiring consultants, public meetings, mapping. This could all easily take a few years, if not more. Then the need to move the fence would still be there as a goal of the trail plan and we'd need to wait til Parks got this on its agenda and still the fence would be there and YG would need to be approached to please move their fence.....

So to buy Parks some time to have a trail planning exercise for the Downtown area, let's be clear that I'm only asking for a land use process to happen for the small area of trail problem above Drury Street. We're talking a generous 10 to 20 meters of fence movement.

The agenda analysis notes there are steps for creating a new trail that must be followed. This is in no way a new trail. I personally have been able to walk up here for at least the past 40 years. And let's not forget that First Nation people crisscrossed this area using common routes for thousands of years.

Let me propose a simple solution.

To facilitate our ability to walk there, what is needed is that as part of the Puckett's Gulch/Runway Expansion Process discussed tonight, Council instruct city officials to work with the Yukon government to negotiate a land swap (as Jim Gilpin eloquently suggested), or an easement (as used for the Rotary Centennial Bridge) or some similar method that results in the airport moving their fence over.

The result, the City goes forward knowing that they've cleared a monster stumbling block in establishing a future Official Airport Trail, or one of the new OCP's downtown escarpment nature zone parks, or an active transportation connector such as the Bike Network Plan proposes. The Airport goes about its business knowing it can have a standards-compliant runway, has fulfilled a corporate role of being a good downtown neighbour, has strengthened intergovernmental working relationships, as well as demonstrated a commitment to walking and green active living.

The Airport has already built a bypass for their perimeter road. I suggest that before the snow flies, officials work to help the airport install a new fence beside it. Then once land use issues are resolved, the old fence can come down and we can use our trail without it needing to become Official.

Later we can do whatever further steps Parks and Downtown residents wish.

Thanks, Peter

PS, I'd be more than happy to lead a walk to the spot if anyone wishes to understand the area more.

*Peter Honey*

