

**Parks and Recreation Master Plan submission**

**March 15, 2018**

Recreation is a significant part of community health, and walking is generally the most common aspect of that. What else? Seniors are a growing part of our population. Society's desire, and the city's, should be to keep us active and healthy as long as possible. Keep us out of hospitals and in our own homes as long as possible.

**B**ut first, let me talk briefly about Aquafit. This is a great program that I try to attend 5 days a week. That said, it could be better. There's a pretty strong core group of people, mostly seniors, mostly women, who regularly attend. The city is missing out on offering this program at higher standards of programming. Some instructors are excellent—some aren't. It feels that these young people are not supported in becoming better teachers; I feel embarrassed for them at times. We've never been canvassed for our feedback and while there's a suggestion box at the CGC, generally there's been no response and people give up trying to give feedback.

Looking at the mix of attendees, older, larger, a number using canes, these are people who believe that being physically fit will help extend their healthy years. It's very moving to see days with 30-40+ people in the pool. The city is missing an opportunity to expand the success of this program. As a workout it often can be much more challenging. It is an exercise class after all.

The best thing would be more instructors who are motivated to give us a good fun workout. A better sound system, both for the music and for talking to the class. Better, more relevant music. Have the good instructors work with those who aren't to get better. Really, this class is a missed city opportunity.

**O**ne of my passions is walking. As part of bettering our community walking experience, I helped instigate a seniors' walking group within Elderactive Recreation Association(ERA.) It's interesting who comes out and why. Participants could be characterized as pretty hearty active walkers, mostly older women, some of whom are trail walking for the first time after running a family for years, or wishing to keep their walking skills even as they age and lose abilities. But mostly it's because we like walking in nature and the social experience of hiking as a group of friends.

The group faces challenges, often around trail experiences. A big limiting thing is walking on trails with steep slippery downhill. There's an extreme fear of falling among some members. Bear in mind some of these people are over 80, orienteers, and active hikers. They really like getting out in nature, seeing different parts of the city and hiking with others. Another fear is getting lost. The intent of the walking group is to create a palette of walks that fit a variety of needs so the group is able to be self-sustaining. I've chosen around 20 loops with varying success.

The reality is we're seniors, we're aging and if the group is to work it must be able to do the walks with the people who show up. The problem is that while maps, routes and direction of travel are presented, most of our trails are just not well marked. The group has in the past not gone on a walk because of fear of getting lost, not having confidence in the leadership of a member who steps forward.

These same bad trail experiences also apply to visitors, or to people who are not used to walking in the woods. I've created a set of loop walks starting at the VRC that meet the needs of the international Volkssport Federation. Great trails, scenic, starting and ending downtown, but I don't want to go through the process of having them accepted as official 'Permanent Trails' when even locals get lost trying to find their way. We really need to move forward with better trail marking. The current system is inadequate. Those that say too many signs ruins their wilderness experience are exhibiting NIMBY ideas. These signs need not be billboards, rather tasteful, fun, informative waymarking.

ERA is a large group and thinking that our walking group would design trails and hire workers doesn't seem realistic. I don't see many shovels or other trail tools being wielded by our group. Our goal is to have more people join us for walks on more days of the week in more parts of the city on ever more spectacular trails! I'm guessing we can offer advice, support, help with funding.

Things that would make our experience better would appeal to a lot of people and make Whitehorse more of an outdoor destination. Many of our visitors are older bus tour people. Look at trail problems in the Miles Canyon area. One day someone will fall and find out that I pointed out problems there that were never responded to. On the flip side, Miles Canyon is one of Whitehorse's premier recreation walking area. Two tramways (Hepburn and Macaulay) go by there. One leads directly to a large Kwanlin Dün land parcel. The largest ERA walk had 27 people the day we walked part of the Hepburn Tramway, around and through the KDFN parcel. People were thrilled with the story and the route. Unfortunately, depending on who shows up for walks, we can't walk some of the east side canyon walks. We're a one for all, all for one hiking group.

I do have a collection of specific trail improvements that would help our senior walking group but must admit to feeling discouraged as to how to present them. As a person who works hard to improve walking I feel marginalized. The city puts lots of focus on sports and large user groups. Walkers get little say. When I try to suggest trail improvements during various city processes, I often don't even get the courtesy of a reply, my input is ignored. A benefits-based approach to this would have the city say how can we help?

By walking not being a sport, it falls into gaps such as Parks and Recreation's sport focus. The mountain bike focus on trails in the new Trail Development Policy is a good example.

IMBA is all about making a great mountain bike experience, nothing about how to make better walking. It talks about the need for separate trail experiences. How does this fit an 'inclusive' focus on recreation? Is the intent to make the winter trails only for snowbike-approved use? Facebook talk is about educating runners! Or is the intent to make areas like Grey Mountain/Magnusson solely for mountain biking (... trails that envelope riders in a zone of exhilaration and successfully provide that desired result when they are specifically designated for mountain bikers. Trails designated for speed...

Does this matter? Looking at walking possibilities in the city core, the Grey Mountain/Magnusson are exactly where we should be planning a destination set of walks ascending the north end of Grey Mountain. It's sad to think this would even be lightly thought of as single use.

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan talks about us all getting along. There's too much emphasis on motorized trails and this will remain divisive until there's a fair open dialog. Seeing the pure anger at the Whitehorse South Trail Task Force around motorized vehicles and neighbourhood trails, I hate to think what kind of community tensions will come if the few trails on Grey Mountain are proposed to be given to single use.

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