

Cambrian Heights

COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION
Celebrating 60 Years of Community, 1956 - 2016

An Open Letter From Cambrian Heights Community Association

May 10, 2018

Calgary Parks
The City of Calgary
Calgary Municipal Building
800 Macleod Trail SE
Calgary, Alberta

Attention: Calgary Parks Director Anne Charlton

Subject: Proposed Expansion of Queen's Park Cemetery into
Cambrian Heights Community Reserve Park

Director Charlton,

On March 12, 2018 representatives of Calgary Parks informed the Cambrian Heights Community Association ("CHCA") of Calgary Parks' intent to expand Queens Park Cemetery ("QPC") into a Reserve Park permitted as an off leash dog area since 2007. They firmly stated that these lands were always part of Queens Park Cemetery and there was no requirement for public consultation or approvals. This was not the first time Cambrian Heights has heard announcements like this from Calgary Parks. On October 19, 2005 Calgary Parks similarly advised our community that this park space had always been part of the Parks inventory slated for Queen's Park Cemetery development.

The area, covering approximately 7.8 acres, is bordered by Queens Park Cemetery on its north and east boundaries and by the Community of Cambrian Heights to the west along 10th Street and the south along 32 Avenue.

In 2006, and again 12 years later, the CHCA was forced to establish that Calgary Parks was incorrect, the area lay within the community of Cambrian Heights since its inception and was recognized in the 1956 certificate of title registered with the South Alberta Land Registration District by the City of Calgary.
The parcel of land was designated;

"for Public Reserve Purposes Only"

The land is shown on City of Calgary Plans as Block 19 of Plan 5971HB.

On July 26, 2006 Calgary Parks first attempt to acquire our Community's Park Reserve land ended with a Calgary City Council motion that directed Calgary Parks to;

"Not pursue the disposition of the southwest corner site (Block 19, Plan 5971HB) adjacent to Queen's Park Cemetery for Cemetery purposes".

Despite this advance notice, on March 12, 2018 the Calgary Parks published the statement;

"To continue to meet the needs of the community for the next several years, we will be expanding the cemetery into the south-west corner of the site, currently used as an off-leash area."

What happened to the planning process from 2006? Did they not recognize the finite boundaries of QPC? Had they no long term planning? Did they ever consider densification?

Recognizing their error once again, on March 19th Calgary Parks submitted an application to Calgary Planning and Development requesting a change in land designation of our Park Reserve land to allow for a cemetery, an extension of the existing Queens Park Cemetery. Were they surreptitious in advertising this re-designation as a dog park issue relocation rather than a park space annexation? Under the original time line there was not even an Open House until after expiry of residents comments. Justification for the expansion was never even mentioned.

Calgary City Council's July 24, 2006 motion assigned Calgary Parks the responsibility to;

"Investigate the purchase of land for cemetery use as part of the south Calgary planning process".

Since July 24, 2006 the task responsibility taken on by Calgary Parks was clear. Site, construct and open a South Calgary Cemetery before Queen's Park reaches capacity. On April 9 and 26, 2018, close to 12 years since undertaking this task, Calgary Parks admitted they would fail this responsibility. We were told there would be a gap between the time Queen's Park reached capacity and the South Calgary Cemetery opened and that is why the Community Park reserve lands were needed. No specific facts were tabled to verify this statement.

Based upon public information we are mystified as to why there is any gap!

Public statements made by Calgary Parks representatives on April 9 and 26 forecast the remaining lifespan of QPC at between 2.5 to 3 years. In 2014 Calgary Parks announced a final preferred concept had been designed for the new Southeast Cemetery situated to the east of Ralph Klein Park. The announcement went on to state and, as recently as April 30 of this year, the City of Calgary Cemeteries webpage confirmed that;

"Work on the new Southeast Cemetery will begin in 2018. The cemetery is scheduled to open in late 2019."

This statement was confirmed by Calgary Parks representatives directly to CHCA at meetings on March 12 and April 9. If construction requires a year longer than expected, double the time estimated, there is still no need for the Community Reserve Lands based on their own estimates.

It appears to the Community that City Parks is simply insuring a perpetuation of a northwest City cemetery. A statement was made on QR66 radio by a senior Calgary Parks official that suggested long term City objectives will continue to involve a NW City cemetery and QPC needs to be a focal point of this strategy until sometime in the future. Where is this plan published and what does it mean for the remainder of the Park Reserve lands bordering QPC?

It has further come to our attention through questioning of Calgary Parks officials that QPC could easily control its annual sale of "pre-sold" casket burial plots to extend the lifespan of the cemetery well beyond 2.5 -3 years. In 2017, we were told over 500 casket burial plots were sold as pre-need by QPC to families or investors benefitted by Provincial regulated "buyback" provisions. These plots represent space that may not be needed for 5, 10, 15 or more years. Approximately 200 plots were required for "at need" casket burial the same year. On April 9 a QPC representative estimated the life span of the Cemetery could be extended by 4 years if the "pre-selling" of casket burial plots was halted completely. Thus, a 50% reduction would still allow an additional two years of inventory.

On April 9 and 26 we were advised Calgary Parks is awaiting an opinion from the City's legal department on the Joint Use Trust Payment requirements outlined in the Municipal Government Act. At question is whether in acquiring the land will there be a cost to be paid into the Joint Use Reserve Fund and, if so, how is the value of the land to be determined?

In its July 2006 decision one of Calgary City Council's considerations was;

"The estimated cost per acre of acquiring the reserve land from the Joint Use Reserve Fund is \$900K to \$1.2M, whereas the cost per acre to acquire new land in the area of the city that is currently under-serviced (i.e. south Calgary) would be \$200K to \$300K a saving of \$700K to \$900K per acre."

As previously stated the Cambrian Heights community reserve covers an area of approximately 7.8 acres. **As agreed by Calgary Parks in 2006** (they supported the resolution), the cost to the City of Calgary in acquiring the Cambrian Heights Park Reserve land for cemetery use was estimated to be from \$7.0 to \$9.3 million. From a fair cost perspective, we compared the 2018 City of Calgary Property Assessment Notice for a residential property, within 100 meters of our park, to its 2006 property assessment. There have been no structural changes or major renovations to the property. Any increase in value would therefore be attributed to land value only. The City of Calgary's assessed property value increased 95% from 2006 to 2018.

What could therefore the cost be in 2018 for Calgary Parks to acquire our park reserve land from the Joint Use Reserve Fund? Was it wise for Calgary Parks to submit an application for land use re-designation without knowing the cost outcome? Are City Parks attempting to promote pre-need sales of burial plots as a near term profit incentive to annex our Community of its Park Reserve Lands. Or is this just a first step in annexing additional Reserve Park lands in the future to sell premium priced cemetery plots into an active market?

Cambrian Heights committed no action to bring about the current threat to its Park Reserve land. Our Community did not fall short in not completing an action that now may bring about the possible loss of our Park Reserve lands.

If Calgary Parks forecasts it may fail its 2006 task responsibility to open a new South Calgary Cemetery before Queen's Park reaches capacity, it should accept that fault and either move up the opening date of South Calgary, prioritize a small initial development strategy or control the annual sale of "pre-need" plots to extend the life of Queen's Park.

Director Charlton, we find clarity and strength in your words within the "Letter from the Director" contained in "Imagine Parks, A long-term vision of Calgary's public parks and open space";

"Parks are an essential part of quality urban living and parks and pathways have a special place in the hearts of Calgarians. We value our parks, actively using them for sports, festivals and exercise as well as for quiet respite and enjoyment of nature. Great parks contribute to healthy communities and a high quality of life in Calgary."

This land is a vibrant community asset that encourages residents to meet one another and develop pride and a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood. In these times of mass social media is it not the directive of Calgary Parks to promote live social interaction for all ages outdoors? This flat and essentially treeless park provides accessibility, safety and a sense of community for Cambrian Heights residents. We have lost our library and YMCA over the last years based upon economic arguments. There is no justification for QPC expansion onto these lands. Let Calgary Parks and the Community of Cambrian Heights stand together to do what is right. Save our Park Reserve lands for residents today and in the future.

We submit this letter on behalf of our Community and remain available and will welcome the opportunity to meet with you on these issues.

Respectfully,



Daryl Connolly
President
Cambrian Heights
Community Association



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cc. Kurt Hanson, Jeff Fielding, Devery Corbin, Sean Chu