



Nov. 18, 2013

Dear Mayor David Raven and Revelstoke City Council,

I'm writing to once again request that Revelstoke City Council approve the Kovach Park location for the proposed new Revelstoke youth park/skatepark. I'm repeating the request the CVSA made at our Oct. 8 delegation to city council.

I am also writing to express serious concern following recent developments at the parks committee and the development services committee.

The skatepark site selection process has been convoluted. Over the past four years, city staff have proposed Kovach Park, a baseball field at Centennial Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, the parking lot at Centennial Park, again at Kovach Park and now once more we're leaning towards the parking lot at Centennial Park.

This lack of clear process has taken its toll on our volunteer group.

It's our belief that Kovach Park is the best location, and we feel that the city's plan to explore a geotechnical survey of all of Centennial Park will be a costly waste of taxpayers' money. This idea comes in a recommendation from the development services committee's Nov. 14 meeting, which has prompted us to write this letter today.

Let me explain the history of our project. The Columbia Valley Skateboard Association has been working for about five years on the new Revelstoke skatepark, and has been engaged with the City of Revelstoke for about four years in an attempt to find a location, which is an essential first step for success in seeking grants and other outside funding.

On July 26, 2011, council approved in principle the parking lot area next to the Workers' Memorial in Centennial Park.

Since then, the CVSA has fundraised for a preliminary geotechnical analysis of the location. The former planning director represented this to be a relatively informal exercise, more or less involving digging a few holes, and getting a simple assessment from an engineer.

The CVSA has had concerns about the landfill underneath the location since the start. We undertook research to find out the history of the exact location of the park, but couldn't find conclusive evidence from the city's engineering department or through a site tour with a past public works foreman, and other methods.

We raised money to complete the geotechnical analysis, and gathered many in-kind commitments to help complete the work. Over time, the city requirements became more onerous. What started as a quick study costing a few thousand soon morphed into thousands, then tens of thousands of dollars. We fully respect this engineering requirement.

Then, this summer, city engineering director Mike Thomas and city parks director Laurie Donato requested a meeting with the CVSA executive, and attended our June 12, 2013 meeting.

At that meeting, Mr. Thomas told the CVSA executive that the Centennial Park location was not a good option. The reason Mr. Thomas presented was engineering concerns over the decommissioned garbage dump under the park. Even if the exact location wasn't a landfill, Mr. Thomas said, uncontrolled filling in the area would escalate engineering costs, potentially making the project cost-prohibitive.

At that meeting, Mr. Thomas and Ms. Donato suggested relocating to Kovach Park.

We took Mr. Thomas's engineering expertise and authority at face value, and agreed with the two senior City of Revelstoke staff members to refocus our efforts on Kovach Park.

At that point, we once again began engaging the direct neighbours of Kovach Park, who, it turns out, were not at all receptive to the idea.

We empathize with neighbours of Kovach Park. The city's planning department worked with them to create a park plan, and they were under the impression that the new skatepark was not on the table, although the existing skatepark would remain in place. We think they are right to question the city's planning process; we do too.

From the CVSA's perspective, once again a convoluted city process meant creating needless controversy and inflicting unnecessary divisions in our community. The CVSA executive are adult volunteers united by a belief that skateboarding has been a positive influence to our lives, and that a skatepark will be another positive recreation opportunity for youth in our community.

We do notice the derisive, unfortunate comments directed at us, including those published on the Oct. 8 Revelstoke City Council agenda. Creating rifts and strained relations with friends, acquaintances and fellow community members is not why we volunteer.

Recently, Ms. Donato's Oct. 9 presentation to the City of Revelstoke's Parks, Recreation and Culture committee reaffirmed previous studies: Kovach Park and Centennial Park are the frontrunners, but Centennial Park will be much more costly.

Let me itemize some of the additional costs of the Centennial Park location, which would be built on about three metres of uncontrolled, uneven fill atop of an unknown base:

—A localized geotechnical report of the site is estimated to cost \$15,000 to \$30,000.

—The city's development services committee is now proposing a geotechnical study of all of Centennial Park, which will cost taxpayers \$60,000–\$100,000, estimated by city engineering.

—The extra engineering and construction costs to build on three or four metres of uncontrolled landfill atop of an unknown base is estimated to cost between zero and \$200,000, and could even be "significantly higher" according to Mr. Thomas's Nov. 1, 2013 report.

—If the engineering survey of the entire park reveals environmental contamination that triggers provincial environmental assessment, this huge can of worms would very likely be prohibitively costly.

The city's parks department estimated site preparation costs could range from \$150,000–\$500,000.

All of the above numbers have been provided by City of Revelstoke staff reports.

Developing the Centennial Park location could require driving hundreds of piles through the uncontrolled landfill, and adding a whole bunch of extra concrete reinforcing.

Before making a final decision, we ask each councillor to go to the Kokanee baseball field and stand in the left field position. Notice the sagging around you – approaching 15 centimetres in some places.

That's without any load on the field – imagine the consequences of placing hundreds of tonnes of concrete on that same material! The potential for disaster is real.

The Centennial Park location will mean at least a year of delay for a consultant's report, and potentially years more if environmental remediation is required by provincial authorities. This will likely sink the project, or require city taxpayers to make up the hundreds of thousands if it is to proceed.

The Kovach Park location is on a proven site already used as a skatepark. Once complete, it will replace the worn, old park with a new, much improved, more aesthetically pleasing park with modern engineering solutions to deal with noise concerns. The park will be modestly bigger – about 25 per cent, maybe less. Building a new youth park in Kovach Park will cost less – likely a hundred if not hundreds of thousands less.

Through this process, we've dealt with good people, be they city staff, city councillors, supporters of the park, or local opponents of the various proposed skatepark locations.

Our problem has been a terrible process, which continues with the development services committee's Nov. 14 recommendation to hire consultants for an expensive, year-long geotechnical study of the entire park. This will not get us any closer to our goal. In our view, it will have very limited benefit future development plans in the park, as localized geotechnical studies will still be needed if new bleachers, washrooms, buildings or other permanent facilities are built.

The CVSA executive feels all of this extra cost, staff time and more volunteer frustration can be avoided: we urge council to make a political decision now that will put the location question to rest. It's clear: the CVSA, parks staff and engineering staff all indicate Kovach Park is the best option. Four years of study has shown there is no perfect location, and more years of study will bear out the same conclusion.

Sincerely,

Karl Jost

President, Columbia Valley Skateboard Association

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