

Greening Committee

Minutes, April 6, 2011, 7pm

Attending: Tara O'Hagan, Denise Santini, David Stevenson, Lisa Schrenk-Forestell, Paz Galarce, Veronica Bric

Absent: Mary Smeaton, Irene Cook, Ellen Lowden, Marylou Bozin

Invited: Karen Dobrucki, Evergreen

T. O'Hagan welcomed everyone especially Karen Dobrucki from Evergreen who was invited to review the survey results, provide guidance and feedback on initial design ideas and input on funding matters.

1. Discussion of Results of Surveys

T. O'Hagan summarized the Committee's approach in polling the various stakeholders (children, teachers, administration and parents). To date, the children's input was fully completed, teachers' partially, administration completed, and parent's surveys have been sent out with a completion date of April 12. There was significant input from the children and T. O'Hagan took the group through the results with the other Committee members who also helped adding their thoughts as well. These observances were summarized from: i) dotocracy on the site map; ii) notebook of thoughts; and, iii) one-word bucket. T. O'Hagan advised that dotted site plan and word cloud which summarizes the children's priorities will be displayed at the school for everyone to see.

Some of the main messages from the kids and teachers for inclusion in the design of the plan: shading/trees/protection from wind/sun, pleasant places to sit (benches) and read or socialize, more grass/soft places (less asphalt), everyone can play everywhere, more nature/living creatures, places for sports/activities. There was also concern from the teachers regarding the replacement of the damaged sponge in the play equipment area.

P. Galarce discussed Frank's (the long-term custodian for the school) views on the school yard. His main concerns was vandalism and believes that cameras are required. K. Dobrucki discussed the pros and cons of this insofar as lighting might provide more opportunity for unsavoury behaviour. Other ideas were i) installing motion-sensor lights, ii) put a recycling bin for the beer bottles, iii) piping unpleasant music and iv) encourage community members to use the space more creating a sense of ownership by the community and the children which tends to discourage vandalism.

It was noted that the group had yet to seek the views of other members of the community. After a lengthy discussion, both the Committee and K. Dobrucki agreed that "community" in this instance is defined as residential neighbours around the perimeter of the school, North Toronto Early Years Learning Centre, the TD at the north west corner of Bedford Park and Yonge. It was agreed that this group should be canvassed with Tara, Nadia, Paz and Veronica agreeing to take on the task in the next week.

2. Design

Given the feedback to date, the group had extensive discussion on what the priorities should be for the school yard and agreed on the below items. These are to form the basis for the first design of the plan by D. Santini. Once more input had been received from the teachers/parents/community, any updates, if required, would be forward to D. Santini and the rest of the group.

a) Exercise and Open Space – space large enough to conduct physical exercise as required by the school curriculum as well as the student’s input. It was agreed that more information from the administration and teachers is required. P. Galarce and L. Forrestell agreed to speak with K. Quinn, Mr. Monaghan, Mr. Bennacer on the curriculum requirements, use of the long-jump pit, use of the painted boxes (are they used and for what purpose), whether equipment is brought outside, use of the baseball diamond (how and for what purpose) and whether general mulch in certain areas would support various types of physical activity.

b) Outdoor Learning and play – leverage existing butterfly garden as it’s pretty much already there. This was viewed as a space that might require reconfiguring and training for teachers on how to use the space. From a reconfiguration perspective, thoughts on fenced off space with trees across from butterfly garden—possible raised planters with rockery stone around it and mulch. The whole idea is to eliminate areas where children are not allowed to go and creating environments where they could learn (perhaps planting, etc).

c) Social --benches, enclosed structures, art/murals on fencing/walls—pleasant, warm, inviting areas to read, hang out with friends. Suggestions to “warm-up” these areas were messaging what we’re doing with out playground, how to keep it clean and safe (ie “water me”, “I want to grow”, etc), poems in the garden and messaging our faith—people doing God’s work.

d) Greening (trees/shading/planting) – fencing off of trees with art tiles around fence to protect trees—also stewardship over when personalization and physical structures (hardscape), areas to plant, ivy and vertical gardening on fencing.

3. Other Matters

a) V. Bric raised the issue of the importance of measuring success on an ongoing basis both for fundraising purposes but more importantly for the children who own the space. It was agreed that the criteria for measuring success should be developed once we had a design for the space and an ongoing plan for maintenance and would be focused on whether we are meeting the goals/objectives originally set out. Some immediate ideas were: i) trees—are they growing/thriving, ii) plantings (are they thriving, is their learning on behalf of the children),

b) Goals and Objectives – K. Dobrucki raised the matter of whether the group had clearly defined the goals/objectives of the project. It was determined that there was clarity of vision but that the articulation of the G&O’s needed to be done. Key points made by the group in support of this were: i) Physical greening of the space to make it more about the children, ii) warming/inviting space directly for kid’s use, iii) Diverse play and places for discussion and social interaction, art, colour, fences, iv) being good neighbours and members of community, v) in an urban environment, inviting place to be no matter what the age, learn about outdoors in their own environment, vi) making a memorable experiences for children, vii) personal learning/creativity—they can figure out how they can use the space, viii) Encourage creativity and communing with nature, ix)How do we tie our faith into our God’s objectives (P. Galarce will try and find bible passages relating to making our spaces/world better).

N. Vattovaz agreed to distill the above items into concise and clear G&O’s and circulate to group for input and discussion at next meeting.

3. Stewardship Plan—N. Vattovaz identified the need for creation of a stewardship plan in order to ensure sustainability of the space. This will require a sub-committee or group to determine what it looks like vis-a-vis both the requirements of the fundraisers and, more importantly, in consideration of

ongoing survival of the space. The Committee noted that the lack of proper upkeep of the Butterfly Garden was an example of what happens without a site management plan. While there were no volunteers to assume the task, L. Forrestell agreed to discuss with I. Cook in her role with the Eco team) K. Dobrucki emphasized the importance of undertaking this task and it was agreed that lack of such could jeopardize funding and sustainability of the space. Some suggestions were to: i) get kids involved for DVPA (part of Eco school program or separate?), ii) maintenance plan—summertime and dedicated families per week to do watering, iii) get volunteer hours, iv) consider sharing maintenance plan and v) obtaining annual maintenance funding requirements (part of CSAC funding?).

4. V. Bric asked K. Dobrucki about hot topics/buzz words for funding success to which K. Dobrucki cited the following: i) food gardens, ii) building partnerships in the community, iii) don't single source funding (where are we getting our other funds), what about in kind donations, iv) need good strong goals and objectives, v) they're "outdoor classroom'd to death"—so need to have teachers involved and working with existing curriculum —deemphasize outdoor learning spaces and more about facilitating learning in our existing space, vi) biodiversity, vii) student involvement at all levels. Everything done on school grounds needs to tie into learning.

V. Bric also enquired about what K. Dobrucki views as obstacles to our funding success to which there was only one: ensure we have teacher support—culture buy in—need to get more of their feedback and buy-in**. D. Stevenson will send out an email to the teachers to try and get more of the responses in for the teacher survey.