

Editorial: Not all green space needs a purpose

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Wilmot Park

Photo: Bill Hunt/The Daily Gleaner

The city is looking for some fresh ideas for how to develop two popular parks.

At a meeting Monday evening, about 30 people gathered to kick around suggestions about Wilmot Park's future. A similar discussion about Carleton Park is slated to take place Thursday night.

Attendees proposed a number of ways to improve the park. Add lighting and picnic tables. Add more benches, pickleball courts. These are all fine suggestions and would likely be put to good use.

One suggestion, however, stood out: a community garden.

There are a few community gardens in the city, including an 85-plot space in Marysville, a 77-plot garden in St. Marys and the Fredericton Organic Community Garden on Kimble Drive.

While there are a number of community gardens around town, there isn't one on the downtown area.

Wilmot Park could be a good fit for this kind of project. For starters, there's plenty of space. The new splash pad will take up some of that space, but there will still be a lot left.

There are a lot of people in the area who either live in an apartment or don't have much by way of a backyard, making this kind of activity impossible unless there's a public space.

Community gardens are a great opportunity to teach children about where food comes from. Think of it like Science East, but with more manure.

The nearby homeless shelter could make use of it, which would reduce food costs while adding more healthy vegetables to the menu.

As the city weighs what to do with Wilmot and Carleton parks, it should consider this option: nothing.

Years ago, former Saturday Night Live writer and actor Al Franken shared his parenting strategy.

"I believe the best thing a parent can give his kid is time. And not just quality time, but big, stinking, lazy, non-productive quantity time," he wrote.

The same philosophy holds true for city recreational facilities.

At Wilmot Park alone there's all kinds of quality. There are tennis courts, a basketball court, lawn bowling, a playground and a running trail. Around the city there are soccer fields, beach volley courts, skating rinks (indoor and outdoor), pools, a BMX park, skateboard parks, pickleball courts, and the list goes on.

There's a lot of pressure these days to define things, for once something has a definition, it can be measured. Turn some green space into a court of some kind and now you can measure its success or effectiveness.

But there's something to be said for undefined green space – the quantity part of Mr. Franken's philosophy. Paint lines on grass and it becomes a sports field. Left unlined and it can be anything. It's a place for tag, picnics, flying kites, reading, sunbathing, the list goes on and on.

How a green space is used is only limited by the imaginations of the people using it.

The city wants to get a 25-year development plan for Wilmot and Carleton parks. Consulting with residents to get the most out of these assets is a good idea, but as city officials weigh the ideas, it should keep in mind the need for "big, stinking, lazy" green space.

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