



Blue Moon hiking group of friends today at No Shirt Lookout; Descending Magnusson Trailhead Hill at parking lot; GPS tracks of some of our walking groups' hikes centered at Magnusson Trailhead Hill parking lot; GPS tracks of some of our broader year-round use of hospital–Magnusson–Grey mountain Trails. General hikers are 80% female, average age 60+. Theme of today's hike was 'Our doctor says we need to go for a hike today!'

Trail Development Policy submission

March 30, 2018

Sometimes I feel I'm addressing the same issues to the same people in various city processes. However the story in each case is the same. The City needs more focus on walkers' needs.

What counts as 'real' city planning? The traditional canon of urban planning excludes people and practices that could greatly benefit it—and society. That needs to change. (<https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/03/what-counts-as-real-city-planning/556082/>)

"It is time to recognize that our shared identity as planners is based on privileging the contributions of certain individuals and groups over others."

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan talks about how *demand-based input* doesn't generally tell all the story. (See Parks and Recreation Master Plan quote at the end.) The problem is benefits-based input, such as the value and opportunities offered by walking, has little opportunity to be part of the story. With no common walking group, nor any specific walking-focused city contact person, I try, *as an individual* (See Trail Plan quote at end), to respond to city processes from the point of view of a walker.

Walking is a basic human activity, common to both sexes and all ages. I try to encourage more people to walk through identifying and creating 'destination' walks, loop walking trails; advocating for proper trail signage, more accessible and safe trails, particularly through switchbacks and trail repair; and encouraging walking groups.

My expectation is certainly not that my vision of a strong walking community is accepted by everyone, however I do count on a broad desire within the city to ensure recreation opportunities are thoughtfully planned—focussed on community health, broad participation, seniors, women, family, noncompetitive, free, safe.

Walking is non-competitive and not a sport so it falls into city gaps in planning and in Parks and Recreation. The new Trail Development Policy's mountain bike focus is a good example of this. It talks of TTFs on mountain bike trails. There are no mountain bike trails as our trails are all for general multiple users.

For me, it feels that giving detailed input on this policy is less important than trying to effect change at a higher level within the City's trails management process. The standards referenced are all about making a great mountain bike experience, nothing about how to make better walking. Simply put, the mountain bike standards referenced look at great biking experiences, with the needs of bikers for speed, fun obstacle courses, ... Even signage is focussed solely on mountain bikes.

The sites referenced give trail designs for biking. The trail plan refers to "unless otherwise restricted or prohibited." However, a non-mountain bike policy would say something like "when required, ensure a safe switchback bypasses the situation, allowing foot traffic and slower bikes to safely navigate the section".

The referenced websites talk 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 the Grey Mountain/Magnusson trails 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 Hospital/Long Lake/Grey Mountain/Magnusson area is exactly where we should be planning a destination set of walks ascending the north end of Grey Mountain to Downtown and Riverdale. It's sad to think this area would become single use.

We need trail creation on things like the hill in the photo on the front page. We need a larger parking lot here. We need trail upkeep that celebrates this incredible trail area and focuses on more use, not on a single user group.

The Trail Development Policy is a good example of a demand-based policy. What is a benefits-based approach? 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.

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 down hills. 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. (http://www.whitehorsewalks.com/_loops/LoopWalkingTrailsVRC.html) 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 but thinking that our walking group (often average age 65-70+ would design trails and hire workers doesn't seem realistic. I don't see many shovels or other trail tools being wielded by most of us. 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.

Interestingly, this new policy doesn't address how we can be involved. 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 personally 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. Notes about trail problems go unanswered. A benefits-based approach to this would have the city say how can we help?

What about walking-dedicated people evaluating proposed trails, city-led volunteer groups and work parties? How do we get neighbourhood boardwalks and switchbacks and trails built? The city needs to think outside of the easy "our 2 trail groups will build local trails" and think about what a truly inclusive trail vision requires.

From the proliferation of old bike jumps and the like in spots, the highly degraded downhill sections, poorly designed and unsafe trails that result from heavier use, thinking any group will responsibly take responsibility for

trails in the future is not credible. Trails need to be designed for more than bikes and so they will be safe in 10 or 20 years with simple maintenance.

Trail applications and documentation need to be public, on line on the city site. There should be no secret processes around trails.

Sorry, no more time for this. Thanks for reading!!

Peter Long

From the 2007 Trail Plan

From the City-wide viewpoint, key recommendations of this Plan and indeed the very format of the written document put the emphasis on grass-roots involvement of individuals and groups of all ages.

From the 2007 Parks and Recreation Master Plan....

4.1 Philosophy - The Benefits-Based Approach

Traditionally communities have used a demand-based model to govern their investment in parks and recreation facilities and programs. Recreation interests and needs were fairly basic and predictable and usually sport activity driven. If there were sufficient interest in a new activity, the council of the day would build a facility to accommodate the demand. Over the past 20 years a number of trends have emerged that suggest this approach is unsustainable. First public recreation interests are changing rapidly. People have broader interests and want more choices available. Multiplexes for example meet that criterion because they offer choice allowing families with different interests to participate in their activity of choice within the same building.

There are also more structural population changes occurring with more diversity in the cultural ethnicity of communities and changes in traditional family structure. Communities are also recognizing that they can no longer afford numerous single purpose facilities or effectively meet all resident recreation needs. The demand-based model is also a reactive approach with an inherent bias towards numbers of participants rather than the quality of the experience. The benefits-based approach to the provision of parks, recreation and leisure services evolved from the recognition that the demand-based approach was not sustainable. The benefit-based approach evolved from the concept that recreation is an integral part of personal and community wellness. It takes a more holistic approach premised on the concept that through the provision of recreation and leisure services, there are both direct and indirect benefits that accrue to the community as a whole as well as to the users of the services themselves. In the same manner, a well-maintained road system benefits both the individuals using the road and the community as a whole by providing access to goods, markets, etc, that ensure a healthy economy. The provision of municipal recreational services can be justified in the same way because there are individual health and community wellness benefits that are consistent with the fundamental goals of municipal governance.

The benefits-based approach is by nature broader, more inclusive and adaptable to change. It is still responsive to community driven and personal recreation needs but places more focus on deriving long-term health and wellness outcomes that flow from a more holistic approach.