

Toilet project down the drain without more funding

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A composting toilet which won its designer the Green Toronto award and landed her the runner-up position for the Hometown Hero's award at the fifth annual Earth Day gala, still isn't up and flushing in Dufferin Grove park.

The earth-bag foundation, which was laid on top chunks of "urbanite", reclaimed concrete picked from rubbish piles, was laid down in 2006 by Georgie Donais, a home-schooling parent with a passion for earthen art.

Donais, who moved to Toronto from Saskatchewan in 1988, has already erected a courtyard wall by the park's splash pad, with the help of park staff and volunteers.

"We ended up enticing about 500 people (to help)," said Donais. "It's fairly large, so the amount of human power was substantial."

Zio Hersh, a member of the park's staff, helped to construct the wall.

"When you're creating something together, and that bond and ownership that comes out of that, it makes you feel good about yourself and it makes you feel good about the community," he said.

Donais' design is made of cob, a traditional mixture of sand, straw, clay, and water, and is commonly used in Africa, Europe, South and Central America, and Asia. Donais said the materials were mixed on a tarp by foot. Donais said the availability of the materials make the project cheap.

"They were all conceived as community art projects," said Donais. She said her toilet problems started once the courtyard wall had been completed.

"I think some neighbours thought the wall popped up too quickly without their consent," she said. "When they saw the toilet they weren't going to let it go without a fight."

Peter Leiss, the park supervisor for Dufferin Grove, has heard a lot of feedback from the community on the project.

"We've had feedback both positive and negative," he said. He said the negative callers cited health problems which could arise from having the toilet in the park.

"They don't appreciate it being there, they don't think consultation was done appropriately."

Donais said complaints from residents and difficulties in obtaining building permits hampered production. And now that the permit has finally been obtained, a lack of funding has brought work on the toilet to a halt, even though the foundation has been built and an \$8,600 composting toilet, which would use wood chips to break down human waste, has been bought and paid for.

Donais said the toilet wasn't cheap, but the cost of plumbing would be much greater, and isn't even possible given the location.

When construction began an oak tree had blocked the site from the sun, Donais said, but it has since died and now they could use solar power to operate the fan, the only electrical component of the project. She said the bill for the solar-powered fan would be \$1,000.

"You can imagine a building like this is rather unusual," she said. "Code requirements and code interpretations can get things pretty mired. I guess in the building department there's not a lot of incentive to take risks and get behind things."

She said lack of communication and funding means the earth-bag foundation that should be a toilet isn't much more than a park bench for now.

She also said that although she realizes the city has already paid more than they ever agreed to, she isn't about to finish the

job with money out of her own pocket.

Leiss said the city has gone above and beyond the call of duty and completion of the toilet rests in the hands of Donais and the community group. He said the city estimates a further \$7,500 is needed to finish the job, mainly to build the structure enclosing the toilet. "I'm hoping that it's going to be finished," he said.

"Nobody wanted this to go on this long," said Donais, who said she can't spin her wheels on this issue for much longer.