

# Dufferin Grove Park Newsletter

## October 2024

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# Dufferin Grove Park newsletter, October 2024



*This newsletter is put out by CELOS, the Centre for Local Research into Public Space. Since 2000, when this little organization began at Dufferin Grove Park, we've been doing what we call "theoretical and practical research" into what makes public spaces – like parks – more hospitable and more lively. We've documented a lot of what we've seen and done, in this newsletter and on our four websites. The newsletter paused in February 2020 and resumed in June 2024. October is the last one, again.*

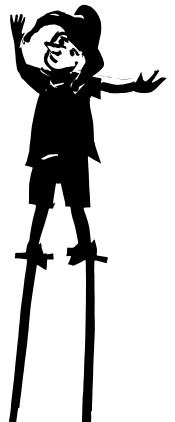
## October 26, 2024: the 25th annual Night of Dread, presented by the Clay and Paper Theatre Company

From co-directors **David and Tamara**: *"After four long years away, we are finally back at Dufferin Grove Park for workshops, puppet building and the final Night of Dread event on **Saturday, October 26th**. The pandemic and a three and half year long Clubhouse renovation made us pivot in a whole bunch of new ways. We introduced the parade-in-place, a mobile Fear Catcher puppet and expanded our programming and parade opportunities to the Christie Pits Park community. It's been a journey. But we're so happy to finally be back HOME."* To find out more, visit <https://clayandpapertheatre.org/2024/09/01/night-of-dread-festival/>

### The lead-up:

**Festival launch day, Thursday, October 3rd, from 3 to 7pm.** at the Dufferin Grove Farmers' market: Shadow show, *The Werewolf*, created and performed by **Kristine White** with live musical accompaniment. Three performances of this ten-minute long shadow show will run from **4 to 4:15pm, 5:00 to 5:15pm** and **6:00 to 6:15pm**.

**Also: Magpie Club**, a free program of workshops for youth 12 to 18, in stiltting and performance for Night of Dread. **Shrine Building Workshop.** *Create a sacred space/object, to mark an ending and remember and celebrate those who have gone before us.* **Lantern Making workshops** where we explore the theme, *"Creatures of the Night."* *We'll show you how to build a willow and tissue lantern from scratch.* **Puppet building and art making techniques:** *Help us build the Fear of the Year image and scenario, make and repair puppets, masks and props. Adults and teens are welcome.*



## **Saturday, October 26th, Night of Dread, starting at 5pm in Dufferin Grove Park.**

*Audience members sign out and carry Clay and Paper Theatre puppets for a neighbourhood procession of our fears. We then return to the park for a community theatrical spectacle in which the Fear of the Year for 2024 is announced and confronted. The spectacle is followed by a concert in the Forest of Remembrance. Park installations include The Cemetery of Our Fears, shrines and a shadow show installation with live music. The evening ends with a bonfire where the Night of Dread Fear Master names our fears and burns them for us.*

## **Dufferin Grove Park northwest corner official opening celebration**

The date for this celebration is still unknown. The timeline until now: Construction began in March of 2021/ the reconstructed rink reopened on Feb.4 2023/ the building washrooms opened November 2023/ the rest of the building reopened January 2024/ most of the construction fences were down by June 6 of this year/ June 6 was the date when the farmers' market got back to its original location/ the outside tables and chairs, to make places to sit on the broad and shady front patio, were delivered in July.

### **Some remaining issues:**

**The lights** in the building are very harsh. They can't be manually dimmed, although they shut off automatically at 8 pm every day. Then the building staff have to turn them back on manually. Nobody knows how to fix that.

**The tables and chairs for the street-facing patio** are heavy to move, so the staff keep them stacked and chained except for four hours on Thursdays for the farmers' market. This means that there's nowhere to sit on that patio the rest of the time.

The renovated building has **many large windows**, but the window blinds are pulled down on all the kitchen and staff office windows 24 hours a day. Staff say that this is to keep people from seeing that there are computers inside, and dough mixers, and trying to break in.

The **new garden** enclosures to the east of the building provide lots of low walls for sitting, but so far, neither Parks nor Recreation has yet agreed to having the care of the gardens as their job. The seating is wonderful but the gardens are orphans.



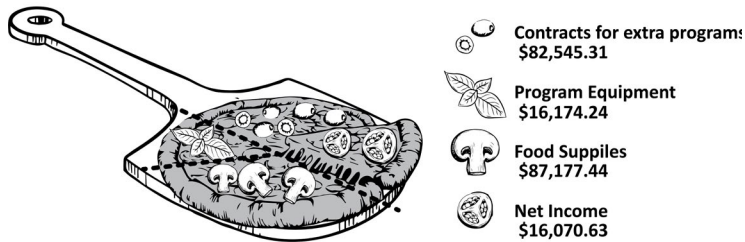
## Food in the Park

Even before the first Dufferin Grove Bake oven was built, in 1995, there was food available in the park. From the CELOS booklet *“Cooking with Fire in Public Parks”*: Our park’s “cooking-fire lady,” Isabel Perez, grew up cooking over a fire in Guatemala, and she used to miss that kind of cooking, living in Toronto. She told us that when the first people in her neighbourhood back home got gas stoves, most of their families refused to eat the food cooked on them, saying the gas made the food taste bad. Everyone wanted to keep on eating food cooked over fire. When we asked Isabel whether she would try cooking over a fire at the park, she said she’d love to.”

There’s an 11-minute 1994 film called *“The Big Backyard,”* showing Isabel making donuts with the park kids. The Youtube link is posted on the home page of the dufferinpark.ca website.

After the bake ovens were built, the first in 1995 and the second in 2000, things really got going. Soon came the playground food cart, then the rink snack bar, then the farmers’ market snack bar, then Friday Night Suppers, then the Night of Dread “Bread of the Dead,” then the Cooking Fire Theatre Festival, then the cob kitchen snack bar. In 2010 we made this poster to show the food income and what it was used for:

**Pizza graph: food-related income, 2010 (as an example)**



From the time food became part of the park, a whole lot of talented people got interested in working there. From the CELOS booklet *“Dufferin Grove Park as a neighbourhood commons - stories from 1993 to 2015”*: *If we hadn’t put the kitchen in the rink house and built the bake oven, the park would never have had all that donation-income from people who wanted the bread or Friday Night Supper or a snack at the zamboni café. If we hadn’t had all those donations for so much good food, we would never have been able to lure all those adventuresome people to help.....and think up more fun. - Will that ever come back?*

## Inclusive Economic Development

Toronto's government is run by 25 elected city councillors who formally meet once a month in various specialized committees at city hall, to talk about what should happen. The mayor is extra. During the committee meetings, city management staff sit several rows behind the councillors to answer questions. But councillors and staff also talk to each other a lot the rest of the time, sharing ideas or differences of opinion. Council as a whole gets together about 10 times a year to vote on what the various committees have recommended.

For some years, people in Toronto, and therefore their elected councillors, have been wondering how to foster more and better-paid work for one particular large group of people, called "*equity-deserving*," including the people who want to work for the city government. This term has an official definition. From a city report: The City of Toronto recognizes the following equity-seeking groups: *First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, Black and racialized peoples, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ2S+ communities, immigrants and refugees, people with low income, undocumented Torontonians, women, and vulnerable youth and seniors.*

## The Neechi Principles of community economic development

Since March, city staff have been working on a report called **A Framework to Advance Inclusive Economic Development in Toronto**. On Sept.9, Councillor Bravo convened a meeting to talk with a round-tables roomful of community-based organizations and academics, on the same theme. Participants were asked to do some reading beforehand, including one document that was really interesting. It's called the **Neechi Principles**, a collaboration between the co-op movement, the *Manitoba Indian Brotherhood* and the *Manitoba Métis Federation*. It's a radically local-focused approach to economic development, and it overlaps remarkably with (1) the economic ideas of urban thinker Jane Jacobs and with (2) what used to work well in the former "*Dufferin Grove Commons*."



It seems like the document didn't get a lot of attention at Councillor Bravo's meeting, since it was deemed to refer mainly to reconciliation. But if there is to be more than the standard land acknowledgment to shape the city's future, then studying this document together with Indigenous/ Métis people could open some new possibilities for all of us.

## How Parks and Recreation got to be like it is now

**From the editor:** One Friday morning in late November 2003, just before a newly-elected mayor (David Miller) was to be sworn in after a municipal election, I got a call from the Dufferin Grove staff. A thick brown envelope with my name on it had been found on the café counter when the staff opened the building in the morning. It must have been delivered by someone with a building key. There was no sender name on the envelope, and it was sealed. I came down to the park to see what was in it.



The envelope contained a document entitled *Renewing our focus - Moving forward with Structural Change in Parks and Recreation*. November 2003. Each individual page was stamped with the words *DRAFT – do not reproduce*. There was also a letter exhorting senior staff to embrace the changes and to see the abolition of their existing jobs as an exciting opportunity. There was no note inside, about who might have wanted outsiders, like me, to read this.

The plan said that there was to be one less director and 18 fewer area-managers and neighbourhood supervisors. The remaining staff were to be assigned to very large sections of the city, to float around according to a list of “*functions*” rather than being connected to any specific neighborhood. The main steps to dismantling the existing neighbourhood-based Parks and Recreation Division, and replacing it with a much more centralized structure, were to be taken on Tuesday and Wednesday of the following week.

I took the envelope home and spent the weekend talking to park friends about it. I had a few contacts among management staff, but none of them admitted to leaving the envelope for me. One of them said it could have been anybody. Apparently staff were very unhappy with the proposal, and CELOS was known to be a critic of City Hall.

So I wrote a CELOS analysis of the report. But for who? I had an idea. Mayor-elect David Miller had announced right after his election that he was setting up an advisory panel to help with the transition. The panel included two people whom I knew a little – former Toronto mayor David Crombie, and Jane Jacobs. I looked up David Crombie’s address in the phone book, and I already knew where Jane Jacobs lived. I put together two big envelopes with the CELOS report and a copy of the city’s draft, and wrote a note on the outside of the envelope. “*I plan to give this report to the mayor on Monday. Please read it and let the mayor know if you agree that this plan should be suspended until the new council meets.*” On Sunday night I drove to both their houses and stuck the envelopes in their mailboxes. I didn’t want to knock on their doors, but I crossed my

fingers that they would find them in the morning.

On Monday morning I went to City Hall to drop off the mayor's envelope. He was standing near the front doors, having his picture taken with a broom, the symbol of his campaign. He was surrounded by smiling people, so I gave the envelope to an assistant.



Later on I heard from an acquaintance at City Hall that, before the Monday afternoon meeting of the advisory panel, Jane Jacobs had followed David Miller down the hallway, waving the CELOS restructuring critique and urging him to read it. My source overheard Jacobs reading this part aloud to Miller: *“This is a very bad blow for neighbourhoods. In our area, if this change goes through, our very active ‘park friends’ group will have to work with **21 different supervisors and 6 managers** – we currently work with three supervisors and one manager. The relationships we slowly built up after the last big upheaval when the megacity was created, will disappear in one stroke. And the story will be the same for park friends and advisory councils all over the city.”*

Jacobs told the mayor that the plan was the kind of approach she had been fighting against all her life. Other councillors said they were dubious too. So Mayor Miller ordered the plan to be suspended, until there could be more community and staff input.

Most of the upper management staff were angry at this development. After months of meetings, their new plan had been ready to go, and now they were to be mired in more meetings. But they saw no choice but to roll up their sleeves and go to work. A large citywide stakeholder group was established. Then there were almost two years of public meetings, with many round tables and coloured markers and sticky notes for community ideas about how to restructure parks and recreation. After two years, many of the participants had tired of the subject and dropped out. Then a new report was released, with more or less the original plan the parks and rec management had developed in 2003. And the reshuffling went ahead.

**The regrettable end result of that plan is now visible across the city in parks and community centres.**

This is the last park newsletter, to be replaced by a blog of occasional updates and commentary on this subject, and other topics related to living in this neighbourhood and this city. To join: **mail@celos.**

## Tents in the park:

People camping in tents within the park for lack of housing have been there all summer and they are still there now. In September, City Councillor Bravo called a virtual meeting about the issue, to explain the ombudsman's position on forced removal of people in tents – as long as there are no places for these people to move to, it's against the human rights code, even though the city's bylaws say no camping.

## Dufferin Grove Farmers' market: every Thursday, 3 to 7 pm, northwest corner

In her last farmers' market newsletter, market manager Nicole Jacobs included this: *"A note from the local accessibility lobby: the extra-big seniors-bubble, resulting from the post-second-world-war recovery baby boom, is here! But they're not ready to stay in their rocking chairs. One reason, in this neighbourhood, might be the good food some of them have been buying from the farmers' market since it started over 20 years ago. All those dark leafy greens, and so much more.*

*"Even so, older healthy-local-food eaters are learning first hand what people (of any age) -- with arthritis, or vertigo, or limited vision, or low energy etc. -- have been saying for a long time: there are a lot of barriers to getting around even if there's no wheelchair involved.*

*"So it seems like a good time to see how accommodating the Parks and Rec division (which rents out the space for the farmers' market) can be. Providing more places for market goers to **sit down for a break** (in between loading up with farm produce or while catching up with neighbours) is a good start. **Access to shopping buggies** to lighten the load is another. Rec staff's attentiveness to **who needs a helping hand** is a third."*

Nicole and a few market regulars will try to get a meeting with recreation management to put good practices in place. Stay tuned.



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Printing cost donation: special thanks to **David Cayley**

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