

How rink users got a campfire permit for Greenwood Rink, February 2010

From: rink user

To: City Councillor Paula Fletcher

Date: January 13, 2010

To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of a group of avid skaters. We have for years enjoyed and appreciated the city's offering of beautifully maintained rinks - and most notably the refrigerated rinks. On a rare and special occasion we have happened upon a local gathering at a rink that offered a coordinated campfire. They are wonderful, memorable and something we would like to bring to our neighbourhood rink.

Specifically, we are writing to inquire about creating occasional campfires on Friday nights at the Greenwood Park rinks for the community rink users. There is a large group of us who use the rinks regularly and we especially like to convene on Friday evenings.

We want to propose Friday January 29, 2010 as our inaugural campfire/ skate night. We have a solid group of willing volunteers to help.

Can you point us in the right direction? What would be required to make this happen? What are the steps we need to take?

Thank you for your interest and we look forward to hearing from you,

From: City Councillor Paula Fletcher's assistant

Date: Jan. 14, 2010

Thanks for your email to Councillor Fletcher. Sorry, but I don't think it's legal to have a campfire in a City park but I have copied Parks Supervisor Mark Hawkins for a response. This raises a lot insurance/liability issues and he can give you a definitive response.

From: Parks supervisor

Date: January 15, 2010

Campfire in our parks require a permit through our permit office, as well as permission from Toronto Fire. You would need to contact our permit officer who handles these types of request. However Greenwood does not have a fire pit and I would not recommend fire permits at Greenwood.

From: Jutta Mason, cityrinks.ca

To: Parks supervisor Date: January 15, 2010

[This rink user] forwarded us your message. I just sent her a list of all the parks that have had community campfires (i.e. public recreation-run campfires, not private permits) within the past couple of years: Rennie Rink, Campbell Rink, Dufferin Rink, Wallace Rink, Lakeshore Park, Thorncliffe Park, Trinity Bellwoods Park, Bell Manor Park, Crombie Park, and Withrow Park

There was a lovely hot chocolate fire at Rennie Rink on New Year's Eve: <http://www.swanseagirlshockey.com/>

I'm not sure why you would recommend against community campfires at Greenwood specifically -- seems like you have a great group of rink users there, whose contributions should be supported, do you agree?

From: Parks supervisor

Date: January 15, 2010

Greenwood is a excellent community and the community is very active within the park and its usages.

Greenwood does not currently have a designated fire pit however [the rink user] can apply for a permit through our permit office for an open air fire.

From: rink user

Date: January 15, 2010

Thank you. I will reach out to [the permit officer] today. I look forward to getting this program up and happening at Greenwood. We appreciate your support.

From: rink user to permit officer

Date: January 15, 2010

As you have heard, we are looking to create a campfire program program at Greenwood Park. We are a group of neighbours and avid skaters. We would like to bring a campfire program that some of us have experienced at other city parks like Rennie Rink, Campbell Rink, Dufferin Rink, Wallace Rink, Lakeshore Park, Thorncliffe Park, Trinity Bellwoods Park, Bell Manor Park, Crombie Park, and Withrow Park.

I know we will require a site visit to determine where we can build a fire. And we have some information as to the requirements night of.

As it is a program we are looking to create, is it a 'permit' we need, or is there a broader definition/term we should use? I may be confused with the terms. As winter is short, I hope we could get this happening shortly. Ideally we would have our first skate and campfire Jan 29.

Please let me know what I can/need to do.

From: Parks supervisor

Date: January 15, 2010

Where about in the park were you thinking of having the fire

From: rink user

Date: January 15, 2010

We thought on the east side of the north rink - due north of the gate. (The general skating rink vs the shinny rink). This would allow access for the Zamboni while also offer ease of enjoyment to the skaters. There would be enough room for the Zamboni to pass and for benches to be set up around the fire. It would be mounted on concrete vs grass area.

...no response....

From: rink user to cityrinks, forwarded to citywide Recreation rink supervisor

Date: January 21, 2010

We are wondering how we can get a site visit set up to Greenwood Park for the campfire program. Can you help us?

We were aiming to have our inaugural event a week Friday on the 29th. It seems we are stalled out. I have spoken with [permit officer] and she has put it on the program. What next?

Recreation supervisor to rink user, Jan 21, 2010

This visits needs to co-ordinate through the PARKS supervisor.

Has he contacted you or do you have his contact info?

Rink user to recreation supervisor, Jan 21

Thanks for the response. No, I have not heard from him. What is his name? A week or so ago I heard from Mark Hawkins, is that who you are referring to?

Please advise. Thanks.

Recreation supervisor to rink user Jan 21

Yes, I have copied him on this email.

Let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Cityrinks.ca to rink user, after a phone call, Jan.22

E-mail the Parks supervisor a gentle reminder about getting the campfire location approved so you can have your lovely campfire next Friday, mention you have to have a staff there from Recreation, i.e. you want this to be a City program, not a special permit, and cc:

Sandy Straw <sstraw@toronto.ca> (his manager)

Andy Koropski <akoropes@toronto.ca> (their director)

Brenda Patterson <bpatter2@toronto.ca> (general manager)

Councillor Paula Fletcher <councillor_fletcher@toronto.ca>

Kelvin Seow <KLSEOW@toronto.ca> (manager of Recreation)

Antonio Andrade <aandrade@toronto.ca> (the new supervisor of Recreation for Greenwood and beyond)

From rink user to Parks supervisor, Jan.22, with all suggested cc's

This is an email followup to our request to get the final site approval complete so that we may have our inaugural campfire program next Friday, January 29 at Greenwood rink/park. I gather from Wendy at Councillor Fletcher's office that you may have some concerns specific to Greenwood Park.

The permit officer, who you had pointed me to, confirmed that she has included this as a program. So we have that front complete. We need confirmation of recreation staff with us to assist with this.

If I understand correctly, all we need now is the site visit to confirm location for the campfire.

Looking forward to hearing back from you.

Jan. 22 Councillor Fletcher's assistant to rink user

As I mentioned in our phone conversation, Councillor Fletcher has not been consulted on this issue and has spent the past several years working on a master plan for this park with the community. There's been no consultation on the issue of campfires with them so this is a bit premature.

Mark Hawkins, Parks Supervisor from Ward 30, also has some serious safety concerns about campfires at this park in particular.

I've forwarded your contact information to Mark so he can speak to you directly.

From cityrinks.ca to Councillor Fletcher's assistant, Jan 22

I just got your message to [rink user] as a cc, and am intrigued. Does the master plan include specific ideas for Greenwood Rink? Is the material public? I'd love to have a look at the rink part of it. CityRinks is always hoping the outdoor rinks can be brought up to their potential, that's also why we're excited to hear about [the rink users'] Friday Night plan.

From Councillor Fletcher's assistant to cityrinks.ca, Jan 22

I think you should have a discussion with the parks supervisor, before this goes any further. He has some

serious safety concerns with this site and frankly, the Councillor wasn't consulted. I don't know how the date of Jan 29 was put out there and am a little curious.

From cityrinks.ca to Councillor Fletcher's assistant, Jan. 22

The Parks supervisor is certainly welcome to call me if he wants to get reassurance about campfire safety concerns --we've done 16 years of them in various parks in the west with very little problem, and they're one of our best park safety tools (joyful family activities scare off vandalism). As for the reason for this date -- you'd have to ask Deb and Sally, but I imagine it's because there are only 5 weeks left in the outdoor rink season, and they want to do more than one Friday evening?

I do recall Councillor Fletcher being quoted in the papers a couple of years ago, about liking campfires. Around here they're regarded as a regular city program and therefore not anything the councillor would normally be asked about -- I'm guessing Paula has a more hands-on approach? I'm cc-ing Deborah and Sally on this -- maybe they ought to have a talk with Paula, who told me once that she'd love the rinks in her ward to be more lively. It's always great when the initiative comes from rink users. I'm cc-ing Mark too, so he can have my phone number if he wants to call.

And lastly, I'm cc'ing Chris Gallop, your opposite number in Councillor Giambrone's office -- so that he's up to speed in case you want to find out their experiences with Wallace Rink and Campbell Rink too. It's been a wonderful way to bring family skating attendance up at those rinks.

Jan 22 from Councillor Fletcher's assistant to cityrinks.ca, Jan 22

Yes, the Councillor is very hands on and this is something we should run by her. She does like active rinks but the Parks supervisor absolutely needs to be consulted. You should have a conversation with him about this.

We have homeless people, parties in the north end of the park and long after the families are gone is when the safety issues arise.

Rink user phone call to cityrinks.ca, Jan.22

...saying she was told that because of the waterlines and utilities buildings nearby, there could be an explosion, and also that the city is trying to phase out all campfires.

From the Parks supervisor to the rink user, Jan.22

Have you applied for the permit as of yet through our permit office?

From the rink user to the Parks supervisor, Jan.22

Thanks for the voice mail. Sorry I missed you. Just tried you back but you were on the other line.

We have not done a permit as in an event permit, we have it noted as a permit for a program through the permits office. So we have that form of permit.

Hope this helps clarify.

From the permit officer to the rink user, Jan.22, lots of cc's

I'm a little upset with the email you had sent to Mark Hawkins as well as the other people you had cc'd, indicating that I had given you authorization to have your camp fire at Greenwood Park. If you are going to use my name I should be aware, just to clarify with you I DO NOT HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO PUT PROGRAMS INTO OUR BROCHURE. What I said to you was it must be a designated fire pit area and Greenwood Park is not suited for this type of event....At no time will I issue a permit for a fire without supervisor's approval.

In the future if you are going to use my name please include me in the email.

From the rink user to the permit officer, Jan 24, lots of cc's

I was genuinely taken aback by your email. It was an oversight in not having cc'd you on the email I sent to the Parks supervisor. My apologies for that and for my confusion. In no way did I mean to misinterpret what you said. In fact when we spoke last week, I was delighted to have someone call and walk me through the process. I thought I was following what you had said. And yes, you did explain that Greenwood Park did not have a designated fire pit area. I had not understood that we needed any further interface or that there was another step to take before interfacing with the Parks supervisor. My understanding was that next step was a site visit to select an acceptable area for the campfire, assuming the Parks supervisor deemed Greenwood Park acceptable for a campfire.

I have found the process of trying to get what we thought was a small and community driven program off the ground in our park, as exists in many other city parks, not only difficult but cumbersome and wrought with mixed messages, misunderstanding and upset. It is very disheartening.

We live in a brilliant and vibrant city. We use the city programs extensively and attribute our love of the winter months largely through the use of the outdoor rinks (it is especially true in a winter such as this where there is no snow for sledding...). Greenwood Park is our choice of rink to skate for a plethora of reasons, not the least of which is that it is our closest rink. We love the view from the change space, we love the dual rinks, we love that while it is well used and that it is never wall-to-wall people. We love that we have made Friday nights our family, friends and community skate night. Any Friday night we will have at minimum 7 and up to easily 35 people joining us. We are now in our third year. An occasional campfire would be a beautiful and special program for this community.

We hope and trust that there will be a solution to this.

From cityrinks.ca to Councillor Fletcher's assistant, the Parks supervisor, and the permit officer, Jan.25

I thought it might be helpful to send you the city's open-air burning policy. It's a little confusing but it does set out the procedure to approve a fire site. I note that it calls for Community Recreation to coordinate internal or partnership requests, and I think that this is what [this rink user] was asking for, although she didn't always know the right lingo. Given that this process has wobbled a bit, I've cc'd the Recreation manager on this, hoping he can help get it back on the rails.

I note that there seems to be an impression (e.g. see below) that [this rink user] did not adequately consult Councillor Fletcher nor the Parks supervisor in this process. The e-mail thread doesn't support that -- Councillor Fletcher was cc'd on the very first request (January 13), her assistant's first response came Jan.14. The Parks supervisor responded on Jan.15, telling [the rink user] she could contact the permit officer, which she did the same day. Then silence, until [the rink user] tried again a week later. Then lots of confusion and heartache.

Maybe Recreation can help this have a happy outcome, for everybody. And I'm glad to talk about community campfires to anyone who wants to.

Recreation supervisor to rink user, Jan 26

It was a pleasure to meet with you this morning and work out the details for the Campfire at Greenwood. I will work with Toronto Fire to get approval from them for the fire. As agreed the location at the North/East side provides both suitable and safe environment.

Parks supervisor to rink user, Jan.26, cc Recreation supervisor.

I will contact the permit officer to let her know that we have approved the location for the permit. As I mention your group as part of the permit can purchase insurance through the City when you apply for the permit. The permit officer will be able to tell you the what the cost for the insurance is.

I will have my staff drop off sand, picnic tables, 2 watering buckets, 1 shovel and a garbage and recycling

container for the event. If you need any clarification on the process please give me a call at 416-392-1758 or email me.

From cityrinks.ca to rink users, Jan.26

The problem with the campfire policy is that it's confusingly worded. It's great that the Parks supervisor has approved the site and hopefully got Fire to sign off on it. But if the city lumps Greenwood with the other outside permits, Customer Service can allocate the Greenwood permits centrally. That's not what happens at Dufferin nor the other parks we've been using as examples. Centrally-booked permits are more appropriate for big groups in the ravine parks or the island. In your case, if I understand you, you want a little local rec event, with some responsible volunteers, backed up by rec staff. It's easy and it works well, and it certainly helps make an outdoor rink even nicer!

Keep me posted. I've added the Toronto/East York Recreation manager to this list, since he and I talked about this a bit the other day. He says that he "gets it" and that he went to a recreation-sponsored Wallace Rink campfire and had hot chocolate there four years ago -- maybe he can soon join you for hot chocolate and a skate at Greenwood.

From rink user to Park supervisor, Jan 28

Have attached a simple flyer. Can you let us know if/when it would be okay to let people know that this will go ahead.

From Parks supervisor to Recreation supervisor and rink user, Jan.28

I have no issue with it please just get permission from the Recreation supervisor as Recreation operates the facility.

Jan.31 from rink user to neighbours There will be a campfire at Greenwood Park's ice rink from 5:30-8:30 on Friday February 5th. Some friends from Dufferin Grove are bringing bread from their park's outdoor ovens + a few other treats for over the fire. Hope you can drop by and enjoy the atmosphere. Feel free to forward to friends and neighbours.

From Recreation supervisor to rink users, Feb 1

I was out of the office Thursday and Friday so I could not get back to folks until now.

I have spoken to the Toronto/East York Recreation manager and we are going to treat this as a partnership and as a trial for this Friday night.

We have a few concerns in terms of unauthorized fires (arson and vandalism) at the park in the past , so we need to make sure that this sanctioned activity does not serve to "promote" the illegal ones. Also, we are in the midst of some service planning which will allow for us to be able to better say what activities are within our scope which will make it easier for us to partner with community groups in a more strategic way.

I asked the Parks supervisor on Friday to follow up with the Fire department as we have not yet received their approval.

Please make sure that the volunteers tending the fire are fully trained. The volunteers will be responsible for the fire including making sure that it is properly and safely extinguished at the end.

The Building Attendant at Greenwood Rink will be ready to assist you with the equipment if needed.

As soon as we get approval from Fire we should be a go.

I'm looking forward to it and I hope it will be a big success.

From rink user to the Parks supervisor, Feb 2

Thanks for the key to the field house. We have begun loading in our materials for Friday. I wanted to confirm the things that you are bringing. I noted picnic tables X 5, recycling bins, garbage bin, mats, buckets and that there would be a drop of sand at the fire pit location. You had offered wood and bricks. While we have both, we could use more of each, so if it is an easy request, we gratefully accept.

We are awaiting final word from the fire inspection and trust that all systems are go. We are pleased that the forecast (thus far) is calling for mild (just below 0) temperatures and no precipitation. The fire component to the evening will run from 5:30 - 8pm.

Thank you for your support and efforts.

From the Parks supervisor to the Recreation supervisor, Feb.2

The Fire for Greenwood Park on Friday February 5, 2010 has been approved by Toronto Fire.

The Recreation supervisor to cityrinks.ca, Feb 4

We will review the staffing and programming for next season.

I have been directed not to expand any programs and to make every effort to stay within our existing budget envelope. With respect to this partnership the fire was to be volunteer led and managed.

From cityrinks.ca to the Recreation supervisor, Feb 4

Re: campfire safety training done by a volunteer, followed by campfires "volunteer-led and managed" -- good precedent, or rather a return to past practice. This should make it easier the next time park users want to collaborate with Recreation to enliven the parks and bring in more small-scale fun.

From rink users to City Councillor Paula Fletcher, the Parks supervisor, the Recreation supervisor, cityrinks.ca, and others, Feb.6, 2010

A truly magical evening at Greenwood Park ice rink.

Thank you.

We look forward to the next campfire, mid-morning on Sunday Feb 28th as our community bids farewell to the skating season.

