

Dumpsites prompt outrage, acceptance

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Noor Javed
Staff Reporter

They are both home to seasonal arenas closed for the summer. A throw away from baseball fields where kids and adults play league games on Sundays.

A whiff away from residents trying to get used to the idea they now have garbage dumps a short walk down their street.

But that's where the similarities end between the two communities dealing with temporary dumpsites: one in Christie Pits and the other on the edge of Runnymede Park.

The Friends of Christie Pits Park, a group of young, organized, slogan-ready activist types, started kicking up a stink days before the site in the park was officially announced. In the past week, they have held rallies and media briefings, called councillors and signed petitions to dissuade the city from opening up a dump in their park.

When it opened, despite all that, they held protests, handed out pamphlets and tried to block residents from dumping their garbage.

The quieter folk living near Runnymede Park have taken a more passive route: acceptance.

"What's the point of arguing?" shrugged retiree Mario Capizzano.

"People have to understand, the garbage has to go somewhere."

The garbage in the parking lot of George Bell Arena adds to the industrial feel of this small residential street. If Capizzano wanted to, he could make a strong case to his city councillor for why this narrow street should be the last place for the city to set up a dump. A better case, perhaps, than the one to be made at Christie Pits Park, where there are 8.9 hectares of green space, pavilions and numerous playing fields.

"I think people here are so frustrated with the strike, I think they are just happy to have an alternative place to throw out their trash," said Linda Clements, co-chair of the Junction residents' association, which has received few complaints from people in the area.

The official dumpsite has been a much cleaner alternative to the random dumping that took place in Runnymede Park during the 2002 garbage strike, recalls Glenn Edwards, a younger area resident.

Memories of the last strike also motivated the Friends of Christie Pits Park to get organized.

"We didn't want a repeat of what happened in 2002, which was that the whole park was surrounded by garbage," said Monica Gupta, a mother of two and chair of the group. "We decided to have a plan to have a petition online, and an email letter to get people to understand the issues. So that if we had to, in case of a strike, let the councillor know where we stood on the issue."

When the strike began, they sprang into action. Their motivation, Gupta stresses, is not NIMBY-ism, but the belief that public parks in the city shouldn't serve as landfills. The group has suggested instead using municipal parking lots, space under the Gardiner Expressway, and leasing private vacant land and parking lots to store garbage.

She's surprised other neighbourhoods have remained so silent. "I'm shocked and surprised that nobody else is protesting," she said.

But as the strike drags on, both complacency and activism are quickly wearing thin.

"I know I will get a lot angrier the longer it goes," said Edwards.