

THE FRIENDS OF RYERSON PARK
PROPOSAL TO THE TOWN OF NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE
REDUCING THE VOLUME OF TRAFFIC AND USE OF RYERSON PARK

DECEMBER 2020

THE FRIENDS OF RYERSON PARK

The “Friends of Ryerson Park” is a large group of Niagara on the Lake Residents (see list attached) who are concerned over the preservation of the integrity of the unique Chautauqua neighbourhood. A major issue of this group is the overuse of Ryerson Park and the extensive traffic flow on streets and boulevards leading to and surrounding this area. Concerns by the Friends has been growing as volumes have been demonstrably increasing for several years. The “Friends” have defined the issues and developed reasonable and positive remedies for the consideration of the Town of Niagara-on-the Lake.

This report is an updated version of our November 2020 report. It has been updated to reflect changes in our proposed Remedies that we have made after consultation with Town Administration, Councillors and Residents.

RYERSON PARK

Ryerson Park was originally designed for the use of residents so parking was deliberately limited. The park was initially owned and maintained by residents of the unique Chautauqua area but eventually that responsibility was transferred to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. There has historically been a comfortable balance of use by both residents and visitors.

The underlying cause of most of the current Ryerson Park issues is the dramatic increase in use by those now considering it a tourist destination. The park is neither designed nor large enough to accommodate the extremely large number of users. During the summer of 2020 it has been excessively overcrowded on many days, with the numbers being exacerbated on the weekends and for evening sunsets. The use by visitors exceeds that of residents most of whom are, for personal safety, avoiding their very own park during peak periods. Simply stated - the historic balance between resident and visitor use is gone and must be restored.

The reason for the increase in use by visitors can be traced to several critical factors which include:

- Promotion of the park by owners of “Air B&Bs” & other short-term rentals
- Promotion on internet sites including “Trip Advisor”
- Online misrepresentation of Mississauga Beach as a major swimming destination
- Inclusion in motoring and motorcycle publications as a great touring route
- Promotion of the best place to view a sunset through plethora of media
- Increased population created by the large number of short-term rental housing units in the area

These issues are not new and have been growing in intensity for several years. Consequently, we do not expect them to be either reduced or disappear when the protocols related to COVID 19 are lifted as none are directly linked to that issue. In

fact, the “Friends” anticipate the opposite because the number of short-term rentals is growing; ‘word of mouth’ from those visiting this year; the use of the internet as a reliable source of information expands; traffic by U.S visitors will increase when the border reopens; and, of course, the reopening of the Shaw Festival will also attract large numbers.

ISSUES RELATED TO RYERSON PARK

Below are a few examples of the reality experienced by those with residences adjacent to Ryerson Park. The underlying truth is that our huge number of visitors consider the area a resort and feel free to use the Park and in fact our community in that casual and wanton manner.

1. SAFETY

The underlying major issue of the excessive volume of visitors using the park is Safety including:

- **Emergency Vehicle Access**

The street layout of Chautauqua is unusual and many streets (technically laneways) are narrower than in other town areas. The increase in vehicle traffic and the crowded parking situation has led to issues regarding access by emergency vehicles. One resident has researched the issue and communicated with the NOTL Fire Chief, who has agreed that the area around Ryerson Park is a safety concern in that fire trucks & paramedic vehicles may not be able to get through the traffic in a timely manner. There was a recent incident where an ambulance could not make it down Shakespeare Ave because of parked vehicles.

- **Personal Sanitation**

A huge issue is personal sanitation (residents have, on occasion, found condoms and used toilet paper on their property). Many visitors stay several hours and are using several locations for relief including:

- The fence and hedge at the east end of the park
- The bushes at the west end of the park
- The lake
- Resident properties
- Containers in vehicles which are subsequently dumped on adjacent properties
- Two exceptionally dangerous situations occurred when visitors have grossly violated resident’s personal privacy. One entered the house of woman who was alone at the time and asked to use the bathroom.

- **Pedestrians**
There is a significant concern with the safety of pedestrians, particularly children crossing Niagara Boulevard on bikes, skateboards or on foot to get to the parkette. Remember there are no curbs, gutters or sidewalk in this unique area of the town.
- **Public Decency**
Many of the visitors change in and out of their swimsuits in the parkette or beside their parked cars, often in public view.
- **Barbeques**
There is a real issue from barbeques. Visitors have buried hot coals in the sand and against tree trunks. There is also a huge issue with barbeques and spillage on the picnic tables.
- **Loose garbage**
Lots of garbage is not being put in the receptacles. There are often loose and extremely offensive types of garbage on the beach, on the grass and at the side of streets, which residents have often cleaned up.

2. TRAFFIC FLOW

The volume of traffic on Shakespeare and Niagara Boulevard has increased dramatically. This has created a myriad of issues including:

- **Congestion**
Traffic congestion is excessive in the evenings and weekends which impedes the ability of everyone to safely and efficiently drive along both Niagara Boulevard and Shakespeare Ave. (Once again - There are no sidewalks)
- **Frequent Stopping**
Visitors stop frequently in all areas including those specifying “no parking” and either take pictures from their vehicle or even leave the vehicle to walk to the shore. The stopping is often sudden and dangerous – it always slows traffic. Vehicles stopping at the turn from Niagara Boulevard to Shakespeare significantly impede traffic, shine headlights into the adjacent home and cause noise pollution while idling from 10 – 15 minutes.
- **Noise and Exhaust Pollution**
The noise and exhaust pollution, particularly from motorcycles and sports cars is unbelievably excessive. Strong, unmuffled acceleration is very common. Residents along both Shakespeare and Niagara Boulevard keep their windows closed in an often vain attempt to block both from interfering with the peace and quiet enjoyment of their premises.
- **Frequent Excessive Speed**
In periods when there is no congestion there is often excessive acceleration and speeding especially around the corner from Shakespeare on to Niagara

Boulevard. This has led to significant local concerns over the safety of pedestrians (especially children) as well as cyclists.

- **Stop Sign on Niagara Boulevard**

By local resident count only approximately 27% of vehicles stop or appear to stop.

3. PARKING

The narrow streets of Chautauqua, particularly Vincent and Wilberforce, can only accommodate two-way traffic at best (even when no cars are parked). Even parking on one-side of the street often severely impairs one-way traffic. Residents often have trouble accessing their own driveways, while others have had to back up the total length of the road.

4. OTHER ISSUES

There are several other significant issues all of which relate either to the excessive volume of visitors or to their wanton disregard of the attributes of Ryerson Park including:

- **Damage to the Park**

Visitors are damaging vegetation in the parkette, including the 200-year-old oak trees. Recently a group was seen damaging the branches of one of the trees to hang a pinata. Others have hammered things into the tree and have had BBQ flames near the base of historic trees.

- **No Parking Signage**

There are insufficient “No Parking” signs in some areas where parking is prohibited. This results in a great deal of illegal parking. When By-law officers or residents talk to the parking violators, they complain that there is no sign prohibiting the parking.

- **Hours of Use**

The parkette is routinely used by people well into the early hours of the morning. This includes:

- Loud noise and partying
- Drinking on the beach
- Suspected drug trading deals
- People in the parkette signaling to boats in the water for suspected illicit purposes

- **Limitation of Use by Residents**

Visitors often monopolize the picnic tables and benches, sometimes for hours on end. On the grass, there is sometimes very little area to stand, particularly at sunset and in compliance with social distancing. The sheer numbers of visitors outweigh the number of residents.

REMEDIES TO MINIMIZE ISSUES WITH RYERSON PARK

The issues the Resident's Group have identified are significant and detrimental to their way of life but most particularly to their right to the peaceful and quiet enjoyment of their premises. It is incumbent upon the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to address these problems with several remedies which collectively will reduce the volume pressure on the Park. The recommendations of the Resident's Group are as follows:

PARKING

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| 1. Designate that portion of Shakespeare Avenue around the turn at Ryerson Park as "NO VEHICLE STOPPING - TOW AWAY ZONE". |
| 2. No on-street parking in the unique Chautauqua area without a NOTL resident permit (each household will receive one visitor parking permit for the use of guests). Residents with a permit may only park on one side of the street. |
| 3. Clearly sign in those areas where parking is prohibited OR permitted by residential permit |

SIGNAGE

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| 4. Erect two (2) large permanent welcome signs (i.e.: Welcome To Our Neighbourhood Park), at entry points to Ryerson Park stating, "Resident's Park; no BBQ's, fires and tents; nearest washrooms at Simcoe Park; Park closes at 10:00 pm". Place similar signage on picnic tables. Include notice that <u>all</u> violations will be ticketed. |
| 5. Erect Large Signage at Queen and Mississauga: directing north bound Queen traffic to
a. turn left for QEW, and to Lakeshore Ave
b. Straight ahead Local Traffic Only
c. Compliment this sign by remarking white pavement lines on Queen Street at this intersection so that 'main' lane is the left turn lane and the 'secondary' lane is straight through |
| 6. Erect Signage at the entrance to Dixie, Oak and Shakespeare off Lakeshore, at Circle Street off William and at Niagara Blvd. at Lansdowne that says " <u>Welcome to the Community of Chautauqua, Parking by Permit Only, Speed Limit 35 kph</u> " |

STRONGER ENFORCEMENT

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| 7. Increase Fines for All Offences to \$100 |
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8. Set speed limit to 35 kph for all areas of Chautauqua
9. Enforce stop on Niagara Blvd. at Vincent.
10. Enforce no motorized vehicles in the Park
11. Change to and Enforce 10:00 pm closure of Ryerson
12. Ensure Bylaw officers are clear as to enforcement guidelines. Enforce <u>all</u> violations including fires, barbeques, tents, parking etc. Enforcement must be timely, consistent and fair

COMMUNICATIONS

13. Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Resident’s Communications strategy aimed at clarifying Social Media and other internet site misstatements
14. Work with the Town, Chamber of Commerce and Tourist Agencies to ensure the correct messages pertaining to the Parkette are properly communicated
15. Work with the Town to assist in explaining traffic flow and parking changes to residents
16. De-emphasize the name “Mississauga Beach”

ANTICIPATED RESULT OF IMPLEMENTING THE MAJORITY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The members of the “Friends of Ryerson Park” are fully supportive of these recommendations. Implementation of these remedies in the spring of 2021 will be met with tremendous support and appreciation by the people of our unique neighbourhood in the beautiful town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.