



# A campfire handbook for parks

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The light and warmth and smell of a campfire gather people in. A fire reminds people of when they were younger, perhaps of singing together and making music, or of telling campfire stories. A campfire is also one of the oldest ways to cook food. Almost everyone, no matter what country they were born in, seems to have a recollection of eating something delicious cooked over fire. People feel strongly about campfires. When we began to make campfires at Dufferin Grove Park, everything changed.

### ***Why should park staff encourage campfires?***

A campfire is such an old sign of human gathering that even today its power to signal community is undiminished. Wherever there is a campfire, one knows there are some people nearby. There also seems to be an ancient etiquette common to all cultures, that allows strangers to approach a fire. One can't come right into the circle but one can draw near. At Dufferin Grove Park campfires there is sometimes a whole second tier, an outer circle of passersby standing back a little way, just watching the fire for a while.

A campfire is less private than a picnic barbecue. For that reason, a campfire in a park is very suggestive of *what is possible* among strangers. It may be that most people living in cities treasure their privacy and their distance from one another, but for almost everyone that same privacy sometimes feels like loneliness. For some people, the occasion of a campfire may make the awareness of bonds that have been lost more acute, for instance if the fire evokes memories of village life in a different country. But at the same time, many people, when they draw near a campfire, seem to feel that they can talk a little to the strangers near them, perhaps about some overlapping memories of other campfires. Even when there is no talk, but rather, a reflective silence — people staring into the flames — the campfire seems to make a connection between those around it, although they may never have met before.

Because a campfire in an ordinary city park is so unusual, when people come across such a fire they are surprised, amazed. They may feel that *tonight*, in the dark, they've seen something worth thinking about. It reminds them that their park, and perhaps their city, is beautiful. It may even make them boast, the way the young guys who use the basketball court beside Dufferin Grove Park's fire circle boast: "nobody else has a park like this one, man, *nobody*."

### **Campfire Safety:**

Although much fire safety is common sense, there are a few specifics. Sand is a safer way to put out a fire quickly than water, for instance (no steam). Water finishes the job and cools it down, so there should be two buckets of sand and two of water right beside the fire, and a shovel to move things around if necessary. In our experience it's best to build the fire on level ground, not dig a pit. That way there's no slope for anyone to stumble down toward the flames. For additional safety, some might wish to erect a tripod over the fire.

**In thirteen years of frequent cooking fires at Dufferin Grove Park,** with between 5 and 25 people around each campfire, with school classes and day camps and people who don't speak each other's language, the park campfires have never had an accident. That's partly good fortune — unexpected things can happen — but it's also from paying good attention to safety details.

— The main thing is to **locate the fire on level ground**, with ample room for people to keep a distance on all sides of the fire. There should be **no nearby obstruction** — a bush, a wall, a picnic table, a path — that requires people to walk too near the fire to get somewhere else.

— Because of its heat, fire carries its own natural incentives for people to stay back and have respect. Once in a long while you encounter a person who seems not to notice their position relative to the fire and gets dangerously close without appearing to be aware of it. **It's important to point this out to them if they persist.** If the person doesn't respond with greater awareness, or actually clowns around or enlarges the fire or takes out pieces of flaming wood, they need to leave the fire-site at once.

**Children's curiosity about fire:** in our experience, children are very careful around fire, and also very curious. Some people feel strongly that children must not be allowed near the fire. For them, it's probably best to have the campfire without children present, or not to have the campfire at all. Otherwise it's too frustrating for the children. We've noticed that when we allowed very curious children to have long sticks which they could poke into the fire, they could experiment safely with us right there watching. They quickly learned what they wanted to know about combustion. Fire safety for children means allowing them to learn under the watchful attention of adults, not barring them from the fire site.

## Campfire stories from the park

*From: Cooking with Fire in Public Space, written by Jutta Mason and illustrated by Jane LowBeer, published by the Centre for local research into public space (CELOS) 2001.*

**Isabel, the first Dufferin Grove Park “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 once said 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. But she wasn't used to it anymore, and some familiar arrangements were missing. Back home in Guatemala her father had built a clay fireplace in their courtyard, with support for a grill. But in our park we had no fireplace. Isabel wanted to cook tortillas with the kids at the park, and for that she needed a level grill. In the park we first tried to balance the grill on some rocks stacked around the campfire, but the rocks were unsteady, and then we tried a semi-

circle of firebricks but the bricks were very heavy to set up each time. One day we happened to come across a window display of cast-iron four-legged pot stands, built for cooking-fires, at a hardware store in an Italian part of town. We bought a big stand, one foot high and two feet in diameter, for \$39.95.

A week later we went back and bought a smaller stand, 8 inches by 16 inches, as well. That was the end of our troubles. Pots sat on the cast iron stands as steady as can be, or if we wanted, we laid a grill across the stand. Isabel made donuts with the camp kids in the summer, and tortillas, and dobladas, and pasta with sauce, in a big iron pot.

Sometimes when Isabel was cooking at the fire, the smoke would curl slowly upwards through the trees and people going by would just stop in their tracks and stare. Cooking over a fire is a time warp. The cook moves more slowly and the food smells different. The sight of such a thing is surprising and disorienting for people walking through the park, and after they have stopped to take a look, they often walk away shaking their heads and smiling.

**A school visit:** The second year after we got the campfire permit we began to let the nearby schools know they could book a park day with us and we would set them up with a fire and some food. Soon after we started this, Margie, who was in charge of the playground then, had booked two classes at the same time, on a Monday. It threatened rain all morning until just before the kids arrived. Then, as they made their way from the bus stop across the park, it began to pour. We thought we should send them away. But when the classes – a little United Nations - got to the campfire area, the kids were excited, squealing and hugging each other as they took shelter under the half-in-leaf maples. We said to the teachers – you should probably just go back to the school. But they said, no, it's really warm today and there's no wind, and we'll have a good time anyway. Can we maybe put up your tarp?

So we unfolded the giant blue tarp and ten or more kids helped stretch it out and tie it to the tree branches. They pulled the picnic tables underneath and set themselves up in their “kitchen,” with the cooking fire steaming and sputtering nearby. The teachers lined up the kids with paper plates and one of them held a big black umbrella over Isabel while she dished up warm macaroni and sauce from the pot.

There was a grand banquet under the tarp, with the kids shouting loud, outrageous jokes back and forth while they ate. The rain fell in sheets. Every few minutes one of the kids would poke a big branch upwards to raise the centre of the sagging tarp and a great fall of water would slide off the edge, with excited screams from everywhere.

After half an hour the rain slowed down to a light drizzle. A few groups began to break off into their own little umbrella-houses, six or seven umbrellas with a tipi-cloth stretched overtop. Soon the big central banquet was split up into a village of smaller “huts,” with some of the braver kids leaving shelter altogether, to try out the stilts or dig a river-channel in the sand pit.

By the time the rain stopped, fort-building was in progress in the sand pit, with a bridge over the river channel and a stone-reinforced embankment for a castle that only girls were allowed to go into. Margie and the teachers built the fire back

up, so that it would be warm for the kids who were wet. The fire was the centre of this scene, with kids going out to build and to play and then coming back again to get warm.

By the end of the afternoon, when the two classes left, Margie and I thought we should present medals to those teachers, real gold medals with shovels and fire engraved on them, for being so kind and adventuresome with their students.

**The rink campfire:** When we first started to try making the rink a bit more civilized, I used to come down on Sundays and make a campfire, beside the rink. Sometimes Fabio and Jennifer, aged 11 and 13, and I made chicken soup, cutting up the chicken and the vegetables at a picnic table beside the fire. We'd sell styrofoam cups of soup right from the fire, and we'd have a pot of hot chocolate simmering there too. Skaters would come over and sit on the benches and warm their hands on their soup cup or their hot chocolate cup.

One Sunday a man came over with his three children and sat by the campfire, and I noticed his right hand had no fingers. The stump looked swollen, dark red. He saw me looking. He said, "next week it will be one year since I lost my fingers." He said he worked in a tool and die factory and he'd been trying to fix his stamping machine. It was stuck. Suddenly it came unstuck and came down on his hand. As he told me this I could see he was back there again and the machine was coming down again. He told me that he now has terrible phantom pain. They had told him at the clinic that the pain would get better after six months. But it had got even worse.

His wife came over. She wore a sari under her winter jacket. I had never met her (or anyone in this family) before, but she, like her husband, seemed to have no desire to hide their situation. She watched him as he poked at the campfire with his other hand, and said, "he suffers all the time." And, indeed, he sat there suffering, getting his children some soup, talking to them, and suffering in the intervals, his shoulders hunched.

The campfire was his rightful forum, where he could find witnesses for his suffering, and for his bravery. This is another ancient reason for campfires.

**The beating:** A group of five families were having a campfire on the Sunday of Labour Day Weekend. At about 9.30 p.m. a fight broke out near the basketball court, and it turned into a group attack by 6-10 guys who kicked one person repeatedly about the head and chest. When the families at the fire circle realized what was happening, they yelled at these guys to stop. Some left the park then, but three of the attackers continued with the kicking. Because there were so many people in the campfire group, some of them got up the nerve to run over. That finally made everyone else leave. But the fellow who was being kicked wasn't moving – he was unconscious. They called 911 and gave him first aid. Then the ambulance came, and he was just coming around when they took him away.

The families put out the campfire and left too. They told us the next day that seeing this terrible beating was revolting, and also they were really worried about the effect on their kids. But I said they shouldn't underestimate the positive effect

on their children. How many children get to see for themselves that their parents are brave and help out people in danger, instead of turning away?

They said they guessed that was true. Thank God all those families were in the park with the campfire. Who knows how that fellow would have ended up otherwise?

**Hallowe'en:** Children from the Hawthorne-on-Essex Daycare Centre, and their parents, held a Hallowe'en Fundraiser. I went over to check on them after dark. They had made a big campfire in the fire circle, and there were sheet ghosts flapping in the trees. The park is usually pretty empty at this point in the year, but not that night. There were children everywhere, playing games in the dark and rolling down the hills and jumping out at each other from behind the trees. A lot of the parents had dressed up. I asked the kids what they were eating, and they told me: *haunted hot dogs* and *terrible treats* (popcorn stuffed into see-through latex gloves with jellybean fingernails), and drinking *eerie drinks* (mulled cider).

There was a storyteller off to one side of the fire, telling a ghost story to a group of big-eyed kids, all of them very quiet.

Charlotte, who organized this campfire, told me that the kids had such a wonderful time that everyone wants to make this event a yearly happening. And she said they raised \$380 for new toys for their daycare.

**Chestnuts:** A woman named Anna told me this: “Our campfire in the park last Saturday was on a very cold day. When I came into the rink house with my little boy a few days later, the staff asked me if we all froze. But we didn’t. We made a good fire and kept warm.

“We roasted my parents’ homemade Italian sausages and a kind of hard homemade cheese that doesn’t really have a name. We also roasted chestnuts, by making a slit in each nut and shaking them over the fire in an old frying pan. It worked okay, although my parents said it would have been better if we’d had a pan with holes in it, like people use back home for roasting chestnuts.

“Some kids we didn’t know came over from the playground and we gave them some nuts. There was so much food, it was no problem sharing it.

“My parents had told me beforehand that a campfire at this time of year was silly. But at the park (there were twelve of us there), my parents started telling us about when they were young and still lived in Sicily. They used to go out to other farms to pick olives and if the weather turned bad, they’d make a fire and roast some food, and then go home without picking any olives, but with a full stomach. Now here they were again so many years later, cooking food over a campfire on a cold day in Canada, with their children and grandchildren. We had a really good time.”

## Campfire recipes

A lot of people use a campfire to cook hot dogs or toast marshmallows. If you want to go beyond that, you could try:

Bread on a stick

Corn roasted in the coals  
 Bread baked in the coals  
 Potatoes in the coals  
 Donuts  
 Apple fritters

From *Iroquois Uses of Maize and other Food Plants*, by A.C.Parker (1910):

— **Corn-cob in the husk,**  
**Wades'konduk o'nis'ta:** The embers from the camp or hearth fire were brushed aside and a row of unhusked ears laid in the hot stones or ground. These were then covered with cold ashes from the ash pit. Embers were now heaped over and a hot fire built and continued until the corn beneath was thought sufficiently baked. "Corn baked in this manner has a fine flavor and never becomes scorched." (p.68)

— **Baked scraped corn, Ogo n sa'**  
**ohon'sta':** the corn is scraped from the cob, pounded in a mortar or mashed in a wooden bowl with a stone, patted into cakes, sprinkled with dry meal.....For baking in the ashes the cakes are wrapped in husk and covered with ashes. Embers are heaped over and a brisk fire built, this being kept going until the akes were considered baked.....a British traveler.....says of this dish "better flavoured bread I never ate in this country." (Sometimes cooked cranberry beans or berries were mixed with corn before it was baked.)

### **Campfire apple fritters:**

The batter is adapted from *The Joy of Cooking*.

To make the batter:

2 eggs, beaten  
 2/3 cup milk  
 1 tablespoon melted butter or sunflower seed oil  
 1 cup all-purpose flour  
 1/4 teaspoon salt  
 1 tablespoon sugar.

Mix it well. The *Joy of Cooking* says, let the batter stand for 2 hours at least. Then beat the mixture again.

While your batter is resting, make a medium-size campfire, and tend it until you have a solid bed of glowing coals as a base. While you're tending the fire, peel and core **twenty ripe but firm apples**, cut into ½ inch thick cross sections. Have a bowl of sugar on hand for dipping the fritters.

When the campfire is well established and the batter is two hours old, set up a **small table** or cooking platform by the fire. Put on this table: your **bowl of sugar**, your **apple sections**, a **colander lined with paper towel** for draining the apple fritters, your batter, a **slotted spoon**, a **pair of tongs**, and a pile of **paper napkins** weighed down with a **stone**, so they don't fly off in the wind. You can use the paper napkins for wiping your fingers from time to time. Have a trash basket nearby, for the used napkins

Position a **fire stand** in the fire and put a cast-iron **dutch oven** on it, with about three inches of **vegetable oil**. When the oil is hot, test it with a small piece of apple-in-batter. If the apple rises quickly to the surface and foams, the oil is hot enough. Dip each apple slice into batter and drop it gently in the hot oil, being careful not to overcrowd the pot and thereby take the oil temperature down too much. Turn each slice once with the tongs and deep fry until it's golden on both sides. Remove with the slotted spoon and roll the slice in sugar, then wrap it in a napkin and pass it to the eager eaters who may be waiting.

Make sure you keep feeding the fire with small pieces of wood so the flames are hot enough to keep the oil hot. If the apple fritters begin to sink to the bottom, put more wood on the fire and cover the pot briefly with a lid (leave a slit open) until the oil gets hot enough again. (When the oil isn't hot enough, the apple fritters will cook, but they'll be very greasy.)

Apple fritters are most delicious in mid-winter. If you make them when there's snow on the ground, pick your fire location carefully. It should be on a slight hump, because any hollow will quickly fill up with melted snow from the fire, and if you're standing there making the fritters, you'll be standing in an icy puddle.

Deep-frying outdoors in winter is a very challenging way to learn to manage a fire. You begin to learn the meaning of "variables" — all the different factors, all inter-related, that affect the transformation of food through cooking: the outdoor temperature, the type of wood you're using, the kind of apples you have, what happens when it starts to snow. It's a very interesting activity, and so many people will tell you how delicious your food is that your head will spin (but your feet will be cold).

*From: Cooking with Fire in Public Space, written by Jutta Mason and illustrated by Jane LowBeer, published by the Centre for local research into public space (CELOS) 2001.*

### Campfire support letters

Why have campfires in neighbourhood parks? Campfires put more life into the park in the evenings (increasing park safety). Campfires draw families, friends, neighbours together. Food tastes more delicious. And campfires are a story magnet -- people often get more sociable, and the park therefore gets nicer. Some people call this "community development."

When Parks management ordered the campfires to stop, in January 2007, here's what park users wrote to the mayor:

**Kathryn Scharf:** "Just a few weeks ago, on January 13, I got a campfire permit to celebrate my son's birthday in the park, and on a warm sunny day my four-year-old and several cronies toasted marshmallows around the fire. Some kids we didn't know stopped by and they toasted some too. All of the adults there said what a wonderful thing it was to be able to do something so simple yet special in a public park."

**Erella Ganon:** "Fires warm more than just beverages, I think. Sometimes they warm spirits too."

**Angela O'Hara:** “Having a cooking fire is one of the simplest and most pleasurable ways for people to come together and the ability to do this in a park in the city is cherished by the community.”

**Ann Bjorseth:** “How wonderful it is for all of us in this community to go to the park and have a campfire: young and old, a variety of cultures, middle class or whatever class, with special emphasis on inclusion and friendliness. I have had a fire permit on several occasions, for children in my daughter's school, and for family events. The fires have been a wonderful opportunity for fun and celebration.”

**Nadya Burton:** “My family has used the fire pits for numerous family birthday parties, and I have attended gatherings of others at these fire pits in both winter and summer. Additionally, my family skates often at the Dufferin Rink. One of the delights of the rink is the small fire burning nearby, sometimes heating cider or hot chocolate, or just burning a few logs (it is never a large fire). I have, over the past decade, observed families (including my own) with toddlers and young children, and older kids and teenagers, as well as adults, all congregate around these fires. It provides meaningful, healthy, creative opportunities for teenagers, young families and many individuals marginalized in other communities to share outdoor space in a wonderful way. The park fires are an integral and wonderful part of this community.”

**Kyla Dixon-Muir, and George A. Moore:** “My husband and I are the coordinators of Riverdale Meadow Community Garden. As wood from this garden becomes weathered, we donate it to Dufferin Grove, so it goes from use in growing foods to use in cooking foods -- a fine furtherance, we think.

Fire is something connected deep within our psyches and ancestral memories, and should not be reserved for the lucky few who can afford houses with fireplaces or who must drive hundreds of miles to campgrounds and cottages. When I think of all the good food I've eaten, cooked over open fires, from those in my back yard as a child in Toronto or at summer camps, to meals shared with family and friends on camping trips in northern Ontario, to the most recent, eaten late December at Toronto Islands, I realize how elemental, ancestral, and integral open fire is to my life. Nothing tastes better than grilled, charred, caramelized foods eaten outdoors.

Feeling the Canadian elements of warm toes and a cool back late in the evening, even in July, seeing loved ones draw close to the glows of each other and the embers, I reflect on its importance as a means to draw us into ourselves, to slow down, and to literally get grounded.”

**Suzanne Wilson & Ralph Kircher:** “There is something about a wood fire, in particular in the cold winter months, that draws people together and fosters a sense of community and friendliness. Particularly for those of us with small children, it's a welcome addition to the long winter that helps draw us out to the park to play.”

**Alan Carlisle:** “Ontario's public parks have thousands of campers enjoying and using fire as a fundamental activity for cooking and warmth and to generate that wonderful feeling of involvement with one's companions. Indeed, fires create a connection that consciously and unconsciously links us to our forebearers, to whom

fire was a fundamental essential of life. Many communities in the rural areas tolerate fires as a direct symbol and activity of winter fun. Skating ponds from New Brunswick to Grenadier Pond typically have a casual small fire nearby for cozy evocations and practical warmth. Participants over the day and night, feed the fire and it is an engaging invitation that is real in its essence. It is not shopping, buying services, watching TV, computer time or driving. It is a modest, real activity that nourishes our soul and spirit. That's just as true for campfires here in the park.“

**Mary-Margaret Jones:** “Volunteers have put a lot of time and effort to build a community that comes together for arts festivals, the summer playground, skating and -- yes -- campfires. Personally, I hosted a Thanksgiving Dinner at Dufferin Grove in 2006 and it was fabulous. People of all ages gathered around the fire to share food in a very meaningful way.”

**Jane Price:** “Dufferin Grove is not all about ‘programs’ that people sign up for. Quite to the contrary, it is a place where people have a chance to make things happen from cooking fires to pizza parties to outdoor theatre. It is a place where urban dwellers can make their own fun in a way that we can never do if we are joining into someone else's program or set of instructional sessions. And, because people have the feeling they can "make the park their own," it is a fabulous place for people to gather, meet, and maybe go from being strangers to acquaintances and sometimes even, to friends. All of that happens around the cooking fires.”

**Kathy Patterson:** ”As a family with a small child we have come to love the chance to enjoy a warm outdoor fire in the middle of winter. I think the many varied dynamics at the park help grow a safer community- with better bonds between people of all ages and with lots of things for young people to engage in instead of getting lost to boredom.”

**Bob Edwards, Registrar, 62nd Toronto Scout Group:**

“We have held many campfires in the park. For some of our inner-city youth it's the first 'real' fire they've seen. It's a neighbourhood opportunity to teach fire safety and cooking skills etc. Last summer we had a campfire for a group of Scouts visiting from Liverpool UK. They had never seen a city park with such community involvement and spirit. Several commented that they would like to borrow the ‘Friends of...’ concept to use at home where parks are lifeless, dangerous places after dark.”

**Gillian Green:** “We have reserved the firepit to celebrate many occasions over the years. We have had the fortunate pleasure of sharing our unique park with friends and relatives from across the country. Many of them have been delighted and inspired by the community spirit and unanticipated adventure the park has to offer. The firepit is one of the strong elements that allows for the interaction and celebration to occur. We have booked the firepits to allow a warm focus to our gathering events; skating parties; outdoor wiener roasts and summer night fireside story telling. Each time we marvel at how lucky we are to have such a wonderful opportunity right in the middle of an urban setting!”

**Charlotte Elder:** “When my daughter and I were living in a tiny attic garret on busy Dovercourt Road six years ago, we spent a lot of time at Dufferin Grove Park. At that time, my daughter and I had as much chance as going camping or to a cottage as flying to the moon. Imagine my delight to be able to hold campfire

dinners in downtown Toronto with my daughter and her other inner-city friends, some who had never ever experienced a campfire! We sang songs, we baked potatoes and corn, we had great times with our friends. We even held a daycare fundraiser there. We were carefully prepped about safety and how to handle the fire and our responsibility to clean up the area afterward. No issue ever arose. I cherish those memories with my young daughter.

I cannot describe the feeling of adventure and confidence that this possibility meant for us: suddenly my relationship to my city changed. I realised that I had always assumed that some hidden administration held the power over our common space--suddenly I realised that as a citizen, I could bring forward ideas about public space and what we could do with it. I realised that my idea of this 'hidden administration' dictating what could and couldn't be done in our public space was an idea I had made up. It was an exciting change, and I am sure, had an empowering effect on my daughter about her relationship with her city."

### **Whose parks are they anyway?**

On January 26, 2007, the existing campfire permission in Dufferin Grove Park was cancelled. Thirteen years of campfires at the park with no injury, and suddenly they were stopped!

The Parks supervisor was concerned about the safety of having all those campfires in parks, and unhappy about their "inadequate protocol."

When the order came to cancel the campfires, Dufferin Rink staff had to call all the people planning birthday parties or family get-togethers around campfires, telling them their gathering was off. (The staff said it was not a happy job, making those calls.) One woman wrote a protest e-mail to the Parks supervisor, so he let her have her campfire after all, even though everyone else was banned. A new, uniform protocol, now meant to apply across the whole city, was devised, rewritten, and rewritten again. The first meeting to discuss the new fire protocol didn't include any Dufferin Grove Recreation staff or park friends. The next two meetings allowed two recreation staff to come, but still no community people.

All was confusion. One day it seemed that all campfires would revert to the jurisdiction of the central permitting office, costing \$53.50 each time, with no recreation staff supervision. Then it seemed that recreation staff would have to be present every minute to oversee the campfire groups – a staffing expense for which there is no budget (and no need). It was impossible for park friends to get a place at the table, to be part of the discussion.

An e-mail to 'campfire friends' brought the letters to the Councillor and the mayor's office which are excerpted in this handbook. Four days later, and still before any new rink protocol was offered for public presentation, the Park Supervisor called Dufferin Rink to tell the Recreation staff that the campfires had been temporarily restored. This would be in effect for a weekend, or maybe even for a month. The rules would be the old fire safety rules that have been in place for thirteen years, now renamed the "Pilot Project" rules.

Meantime, meetings continued. As time went on, e-mails began to accumulate. Only some of these e-mails were sent to me or carbon copied to me, so

the chronicle that follows is a bit like looking through a keyhole, with only my e-mails clear to me and the staff exchanges spotty. Even so, I have enough to make a twenty-page narrative that I've called "The campfires of bureaucracy." It gives an idea of the twists and turns that follow when open conversation is excluded and orders are unilateral. The "f" word reared its head: *failing* to meet conditions, *failure* to comply; and "p" words peppered the e-mails -- Permits, Pilots, Policies, Protocol, Procedure, Process.

Thirteen years of campfires at Dufferin Grove Park were made to sound like an illicit activity. Although the park campfires were established and have been maintained for many years with the explicit blessing of both the Fire Department and Parks and Recreation management, the new wave of Parks management seemed to find that hard to credit. So their first step was drastic: to halt all the campfires. Only then did they begin talking, still in a very limited way that mostly kept park users out of the conversation as outsiders.

This development has been both astonishing and frustrating to park friends. There's an urge to say "I don't need this," and leave. But when citizens are met with a series of bureaucratic "No's" in their public spaces – not only for campfires, but for so many other initiatives too – and they turn away, their parks often become orphans. Following the bureaucrats and challenging them to open up to citizens is a difficult alternative, but it has a chance of working out better in the long run.

Tracking the bureaucracy starts with finding out who's doing what with their power. To that end, here is the story so far.

## **THE CAMPFIRES OF BUREAUCRACY: IN 25 SHORT E-MAIL CHAPTERS**

### **Chapter 1. Dark clouds**

Jan.24 Recreation Supervisor to Permits/Fire dept., asking for a cooking fire permit for Wallace every Sunday. Response: any campfire/ cooking fire has to be ***30 meters from a building***.

Jan.25 Park friend Jutta Mason to Recreation Supervisor, to pass along to the Fire department: 30 meters is too far. 13 years of campfires at Dufferin, no injury. ***Proximity to a building gives wind protection.*** "We burn hardwood, no softwood and no paper, and there are seldom sparks that travel more than a few inches. The campfire site is on snow and frozen earth. We have the means right beside the fire to extinguish the fire within one minute or less."

### **Chapter 2. Insults and exclusion**

Jan.26 Meeting with Parks Supervisor and Fire Captain, who said: "***the people who make these fires are imbeciles.***"

Recreation Supervisor, e-mail to park friend Jutta Mason: "Jutta, as per this morning's meeting, ***all cooking fires in Ward 18 are to stop***...I will try to set up a meeting next week with all the necessary staff in order to reach a resolution."

Jan.26 Park friend Jutta Mason to Recreation Supervisor: "I would like to emphasize that the experts in safe, successful park campfires are the people who have done them now for many years. That includes me, and also the senior park staff who have used these campfires so successfully for community-building. So, ***no back-room, fait-accomplit planning, please.*** We will need to be at the table when any new regulations are discussed. That also allows me to communicate these deliberations to all the many other community people who have successfully made campfires in Dufferin Grove Park, campgrounds, etc. for many years. And it allows your

senior rink/ park staff to give accurate information to the community people whose gatherings have been cancelled.”

Jan.26 campfire friend Rebecca Houston to Councillor Giambrone, “I am so sad to hear that my birthday party at Dufferin Grove Park has been doused. I booked the fire pit for Feb.4th and had started inviting a long list of friends and family to come out for a skating/tobogganing/campfire party. It was set to be my best birthday in years.”

### **Chapter 3. The legislation**

Jan.26 Councillor’s Assistant to Recreation Supervisor: “It would also be very helpful if someone could clarify, for Councillor Giambrone and I, what the existing policy is on camp fires / cooking fires in Parks, and any other relevant legislation or policy, so that we can get a better sense of the legislative and policy context of this issue.”

Jan.27 Jutta Mason to Rebecca Houston: “Some mildly good news for you: There is no legal requirement for a cooking fire permit from the Fire Department. But you won’t be able to have the fire in the park. Parks are owned by the corporation of the City of Toronto, and as the agents of the property-owner, the staff in charge of parks can give permission or not, as they choose. At this point, the Parks Supervisor chooses not to.”

**ONTARIO FIRE CODE 2.6.3.4. “*Open Air Burning shall not be permitted unless approved, OR unless such burning consists of a small, confined fire, supervised at all times, and used to cook food on a grill or a barbecue.*”**

“So you are allowed to have a cooking fire, Rebecca, where your family and friends can sit around and toast marshmallows or make hot chocolate, as long as the fire is as small as the cooking fires we have at Dufferin Grove.

#### ***Forest Fires Prevention Act - O. Reg. 207/96***

8.5 No person shall start a fire outdoors outside of a restricted fire zone during the fire season for cooking or warmth unless all of the following conditions are met:

1. The site of the fire is bare rock or other non-combustible material.
2. The fire is at least one metre from any flammable material.
3. The space above the one metre area around the fire is at least three metres from vegetation.
4. The fire does not exceed one metre in height and one metre in diameter.

#### ***Toronto Fire Services web site***

Open air burning shall not be permitted unless approved, **OR** unless such burning consists of a small, confined fire, supervised at all times, and used to cook food on a grill or a barbecue.

#### ***Kitchener Fire Services web site***

Can I have a fire to cook food?

***Cooking fires are allowed without permit*** provided they meet the following:

- \* must be located a minimum of 10' away from the property line, house, outside buildings, wooden fence
- \* maximum grill area and maximum interior fuel surface area of 24" x 24"
- \* may only be used to cook or grill food
- \* may not be used for open burning, refer to open burning permit if required
- \* must extinguish flame and briquets or wood chips upon completion of cooking
- \* may not continue with fire after cooking has been completed, may not use for entertainment purposes
- \* must be suitably enclosed so that briquets or wood chips are maintained within structure of barbecue or barbecue pit.

#### **Chapter 4. Fines, penalties, and exemptions**

Jan.30 Parks Supervisor to Councillor's Assistant: "To be clear I am not opposed to Camp fires in Parks. I am however bound by City policies and bylaws. The City Bylaw requires the following: § 608-10. Campfires and barbecues.

While in a park, no person shall:

- A. Light, build or stoke an open fire or bonfire unless authorized by permit;
- B. Use any portable barbeques unless authorized by permit **or where posted to allow the use**
- C. Use fuel other than charcoal or briquettes in permanently fixed barbeques; or
- D. Leave a barbecue or campfire without extinguishing the fire and ensuring that the embers are cold.

The set fine for this is:

Light/Build/Stoke) (open fire/ bonfire) in park without permit §608-10A \$300.00

In order to obtain a permit one has to apply to the permitting section and the fire department needs to approve. The Recreation section has not done either of these in this case.

The Fire department requires the following to approve an open fire:

Open air burning is not permitted within the City of Toronto except with approval by the Toronto Fire Services Fire Prevention Division.

***Open air burning shall not be permitted unless approved, OR unless such burning consists of a small, confined fire, supervised at all times, and used to cook food on a grill or a barbecue.***

The authority to approve open air burning is provided by the Fire Chief to Chief Officers of the Fire Prevention Division.

Open air burning shall meet a number of conditions. These fires shall be all of the following:

(a) Small. (b) Confined. (c) Supervised at all times. (d) Food cooking on a grill or other TFS "approved" fires. (e) Outdoor fireplaces are not approved."

#### **Chapter 5. The “f” word: Failing to meet conditions, failure to comply, and other offences**

Jan.30 Parks Supervisor: "Any open fire failing to meet all of the listed conditions shall be ordered extinguished by the Incident Commander. Failure to comply with open air burning regulations is an offense for which a person can be charged under the Fire Code. Written requests for open air burning authorization should be sent to the attention of the applicable Fire Prevention Division District Chief. In order to approve Rebecca's birthday event all that is required is for Recreation to make the proper applications. ***This process was approved by Council. I cannot disregard this process.***"

#### **Chapter 6. Fire Rings “in the system”**

Jan.30 Recreation Supervisor to campfire friend Rebecca Houston: "You can apply for a permit for the Parks approved FIRE ring at Dufferin Grove Park as this is in the permitting system. This Fire ring is available for permits through the permit office. Chislett, Heather, her information is below. Office Information Support Assistant A Citizen Focused Services A Office Address Metro Hall main floor"

Jan.30 2007 Clarification, phone call from Park friend Jutta Mason to Recreation Supervisor. He said that the "fire ring" is the fire circle in the centre of the park, also used for programming. This location is actually an "administrative booking," which means that there are no central bookings without the Recreation Supervisor's clearance. The existing "fire rings" in the City system are: Derrydowns Park, Dovercourt Park, Downsview Dells Park, Dufferin Grove Park, ET Seton Park, Earl Bales Park, G Ross Lord Park, Humber Bay Park East, L'Amoreaux Sports Centre, Morningside Park, Northwood Park, Riverdale Farm, Tam O'Shanter, Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum, Toronto Islands - 25 firepits, Wilket Creek Park, Withrow Park.

## **Chapter 7. A cooking fire protocol, from the folks who started cooking fires**

Jan.30 Jutta Mason to Councillor's Assistant: "As promised for today, the Dufferin Grove proposed cooking fire protocol. ***It's based on the practice we've had here for many years*** combined with the various policies and regulations we found in our research."

**Site:** In winter, when there's snow or at least the ground is solidly frozen: The site should be at least 2 meters from any buildings, fences, bushes or trees. The area within one meter of the fire circle should be clear of combustible materials, including exposed tree roots, picnic tables, and overhanging branches.

In summer: the site should be at least 3 meters from from any buildings, fences, bushes or trees. The area within one meter of the fire circle should be clear of combustible materials, including exposed tree roots and picnic tables. There should be no overhanging branches within three meters above the fire site.

**Wind protection:** The site should have some wind protection otherwise the flames will get too high and/or the food will burn.

**Fire:** The fire circle should have a maximum diameter and height of 24 inches. Keep the fire as small as possible, since you have to bend over it sometimes to cook.

The fire must be built on a non-combustible surface. Define the fire circle with stones or bricks and make sure that no wood is outside that circle, so that the fire is contained by that circle.

The fire must be attended at all times by a designated person.

**Safety Equipment:** Have two buckets of water and one bucket of sand close enough to be able to put the fire out fast if necessary, except in winter. In winter, have two buckets of water close enough to the fire that the water doesn't freeze, and also have one bucket of snow. Sand is usually frozen solid in winter, and snow works well also.

A shovel helps you to turn logs or rearrange the fire if you want to damp it down or build it up. Then use it to stir the ashes when extinguishing the fire.

**Cooking equipment:** *Use a solid trivet and grill or a similar system, or a metal spit for barbecuing. Make sure any grill or pot is very stable over the fire.*

**Extinguish the fire:** Note: a bucket of sand is safer for extinguishing a fire which is still hot (no steam). Either suffocate the fire by putting sand on it, followed by water, or put water on the coals and stir them to dampen them and put them out. Add more sand to suffocate the embers. Make sure they are cold to the touch.

In a non-designated fire circle, scrape up the coals and ashes and remove them from the site. If you removed any soil to create a depression for the cooking fire, cover up the fire circle again with the soil that was removed.

## **Chapter 8. Who makes cooking fire policy?**

Jan.30 Jutta Mason to Recreation Director Don Boyle: "I'm confused about the relation of recreation programming and Permits. The cooking fire program has been developed over many years at Dufferin Grove Park, and it has recently worked out very well at Trinity, Wallace, MacGregor, Campbell, and Susan Tibaldi Parkette. This is an inexpensive but powerful community development tool. Is it true that your recreation staff now need to get approval from Permits to do this program? This is a major change from practice up to now. If there is a new protocol being developed, ***shouldn't Recreation be taking the lead?*** And shouldn't there be direct input from park users who enjoy this program?"

Jan.30 Don Boyle is on holidays. Malcolm Bromley, acting director: "I just spoke to Parks Director Paul Ronan and he assures me that a prompt response and resolution is forthcoming."

Jan.30 From Councillor Adam Giambrone to Parks, Forestry and Recreation General Manager Brenda Librecz, Recreation Director Don Boyle, and recreation manager Malcolm Bromley: "I'd also appreciate some clarity on this ASAP. My own staff have been spending a lot of time trying to get this sorted out and there seems to be a lot of confusion among Parks & Rec staff as to what the proper procedure is.

*I have attended some of these camp fires in the past and can personally attest to their enormous success and their value as a community building tool.* I do not think it is fair to the community to have such a successful program be in limbo and I want this sorted out fast!!!"

Jan.30 From District Fire Chief Kim Dobson to Councillor's Assistant:

**"The Toronto Fire Services has prohibited all open fires in the city unless approved, (except if the fire is contained in a barbecue, supervised and used for cooking).** Without this prohibition there would be small campfires throughout the city in people's backyards which in turn leads to nuisance and real alarms for the Fire Services and complaints due to smoke throughout the neighbourhood. It is not our intention to ban open fires in parks, but we do want to ensure that they are done safely and that we have record of when and where they are."

Jan.31 from Jutta Mason to Councillor's Assistant, "The 30-meters-from-any-structure rule that fire services has requested, which is unprecedented anywhere else, will make our cooking fires impossible.

It is also huge overkill on fire safety grounds. I would suggest that we have a large public meeting at which the fire people to demonstrate how a concrete-block building 90 feet away (the rink house) can be ignited by our cooking fire (i.e they would actually do a fire test, we have the huge zamboni hoses to put it out, or they could have their truck standing by). Then they can show us how they can ignite the rink house with our cooking fire from 20 feet, then from ten, and finally from two feet away. If they can't make any of that happen, we'll need to take up their policy as being indefensible, especially since *explosive cooking devices (gas barbecues), which are permitted everywhere, follow no such 30-meters-from-a-structure rule*. Logs in campfires can't explode.

These are the issues:

1. The way the cooking fires have nourished community, here and through the ages. We can let the campfire advocates speak for themselves as this stuff gets out. The distance-from-structures rule subverts this success.
2. The Ontario Fire Code is being reinterpreted by limiting "confined fire" to "barbecue."
3. The risk of smoky backyard campfires is a red herring -- lots of people have backyard gas barbecues and they smoke a lot, and a semi-enclosed wood fire in a fixed outdoor fireplace--permitted -- makes the same amount of smoke.
4. *Our 13-year practice is not being acknowledged despite our excellent safety record. "*

### **Chapter 9. Staff only, community butt out**

Jan.31, from Parks director Paul Ronan to Jutta Mason: "A [staff] meeting is scheduled for tomorrow at Coronation Park offices to discuss this matter fully. The intent of this meeting will be to establish protocols which will offer flexibility to Recreation/Community Programming, while at the same time establishing clear and consistent guidelines.

I am confident that the staff involved in this meeting will be able to come up with a set of criteria that will address the issue of fires beyond the designated firepit areas. A follow-up to this meeting will be provided to you and I commit that this issue will be resolved in a timely manner."

Jan.31 Jutta Mason to Parks Director Paul Ronan: "May I suggest an alternative? That the meeting takes place at Dufferin Rink instead of Coronation Park, to get better grounding and involve all the players. You would also get better coffee (Fair Trade Organic) and muffins. Plus

fresh bread from the outdoor ovens, since Thursday is farmers' market day and the outdoor bake ovens are still allowed to be fired up."

Feb.1, Parks Director Paul Ronan to Jutta Mason: "The intent of the meeting is to get our own staff together to discuss this issue and get a better overall picture. A workable resolve that meets the needs of the community and is conducted in a safe managed manner is what I believe to be our common goal."

### **Chapter 10. The Parks Supervisor takes over**

Feb.1 Parks Supervisor to campfire friend Rebecca Houston: "I am happy to report to you that as a result of our discussions today we will be permitting you have a cooking fire for your birthday event this weekend. This permission is for your event and your event alone. I hope this will allow you to have a happy birthday.

You will have recreationist on site to supervise the cooking fire.

This cooking fire will have to similar to the cooking fires that have occurred previously.

The fire have to be a minimum of 10 feet or 3 metres from any buildings, structures shrubs or trees and tree roots in the Park. The fire will have to be small and for cooking only. The fire will be to contained in a circle of approximately 24 inches of non combustible materials surrounding it (ie stones) and should not be more than 24 inches high. You will have to have a pail of sand and two pails of water immediately available to douse the fire. You will have to ensure that the fire is completely extinguished at the completion of your event. You will responsible for ensuring the all of the materials are removed after you event is completed.

There will be no fee for this cooking fire."

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me directly."

Feb.1 Parks Supervisor to everybody: "At our meeting today a number of items were resolved.

1 The existing fire pit in the center of Dufferin Grove park will permitted through the permitting department only. The Fire department is satisfied with this location.

2 We will be holding another meeting next week to discuss the cooking Fire issue.

3 We will be forming a Policy for Cooking fires going forward.

4 We have approved on a one time basis and one time only the Cooking fire for Rebecca's birthday this weekend at no charge."

### **Chapter 11. Resistance is futile**

Feb.1 Jutta Mason to Parks Supervisor: "As you are already aware, the "resolved" items #1 to 3 are not acceptable to me. I will now undertake to contact as many other cooking fire users as possible and see how they feel. Although you have not asked any of us for guidance, I'm afraid you may need to collaborate with us anyway."

Feb.2 meeting between Parks Manager and Jutta Mason at the Nova Era coffee shop. Manager had just returned from New York City where she and some colleagues spent three days studying NYC models of community engagement and Park rangers. Manager said that she loves campfires and feels she can get this problem worked out in collaboration with the community. She also said that she feels more like rules need to be followed than she did when she was younger.

Feb.2 Parks Manager to Jutta Mason: "Further to our meeting this morning, I am still gathering and reviewing the activities from while I was away in New York, it would be helpful if you outline why these 3 are unacceptable to you and how you would like to see them changed....I will let you know as soon as I hear back from those that were involved at the first meeting. At the very least you and the Dufferin crew will have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft work being done."

Feb.2 Jutta Mason to Parks Manager:

"From Parks Supervisor: 1. The existing fire pit in the center of Dufferin Grove park will permitted through the permitting department only.

From Jutta: ***this is a program area and it helps keep the park safe after dark*** -- moving it to central permitting will interfere very seriously with that goal and damage our park  
 From Parks Supervisor: 2. We will be holding another meeting next week to discuss the cooking Fire issue.

From Jutta: meeting without proper community and on-site staff representation wastes staff time because ***it omits the main players***

From Parks Supervisor : 3 We will be forming a Policy for Cooking fires going forward. From Jutta: ***forming a campfire policy that omits the people who developed and run this program is unacceptable***

From Parks Supervisor: 4. We have approved on a one time basis and one time only the Cooking fire for Rebecca's birthday this weekend at no charge."

From Jutta: I only found out today that the Parks Supersvisor gave Rebecca the rink fire location. Dufferin Grove Recreation staff told me that Rebecca had originally been given middle-of-the-park fire circle because another long-time cooking-fire group had already asked to use the rink site. ***The group that got it first was cancelled (on the Parks Supervisor's order) and now he gave it to Rebecca instead. That's the kind of mess he's created.***

Feb.4, Update from Jutta Mason: "the one-time-only fire permit for Rebecca: high of minus 16, blowing snow, no fire danger anywhere. The birthday party cooking fire went ahead without any more trouble than the other 1000+ cooking fires in the park since 1993. Except that it was really, really cold and the staff invited the party inside the rink house to have their birthday cake. The Recreation staff person dumped extra water on the coals of the fire instead of letting it burn itself out with people sitting companionably around the fire, as he would have done before all this drama. The ashes mixed with water turned into a black puddle on the ground and began to freeze instantly.

***None of the officials were there, not the Parks Supervisor, not the Fire Safety Chief.*** One police officer did come, on an enormous police horse, but that was only Rebecca's brother, having ridden up all the way from the stables near Ft. York to say hi to his sister on her birthday."

## Chapter 12. Hunting for the rules

Jan.31 Park friend Jutta Mason to Support Assistant A, Citizen Focused Services A (Formerly Permits) "I just found out yesterday that the Dufferin Grove Park fire circle is listed as a City Fire Ring which can be permitted when not in use for programming. I see that there are 16 other locations as well. Could you let me know: 1. what you charge for such permits 2. what kind of staff support there is for such permits 3. what the fire safety rules are that you attach to such permits 4. Are all of these locations active?"

Feb.2, Jutta Mason to Permits Support Assistant: I have not heard back from you yet and I need this information for a report I'm writing -- I'm sure you are very busy, but would you be able to take a few minutes to answer my questions? Thanks -- much appreciated.

Feb.6 from Councillor's Assistant to Permits Support Assistant: I'd be most appreciative if you could answer Jutta's question as soon as possible, copying me, if you have not done so already.  
Feb.6 from Permits Support Assistant to Councillor's Assistant:

As per Manager of Customer Services, the reply should come from one of the Supervisors. I have sent them both Jutta's email.

Feb.6 From Councillor's Assistant to Manager of Customer Services: Can you please expedite a response to Jutta re: her questions below, copying me so I can brief Councillor Giambrone.

Feb.6 from Manager of Customer Services to Councillor's Assistant: The supervisor from my staff will provide you with the information to the attached questions.

Feb.7 from Supervisor Customer Service, Toronto & East York District, to Jutta Mason: "I provide the response to your questions below. If I can be of further assistance, do not hesitate to contact me directly. Thank you.

> 1. what you charge for such permits **\$53.50** > 2. what kind of staff support there is for such permits **Parks Supervisors are advised, Parks Patrol Staff and Bi-Law Enforcement Officers**  
 > 3. what the fire safety rules are that you attach to such permits **Fire Safety is outlined by Toronto Fire. Please contact them directly.** > 4. Are all of these locations active **Not all locations are active. The following Parks have removed the Fire pits: Serena Gundy; ET Seton. > Humber Bay, Northwood and High Park are no longer active.”**

Feb.8 from Jutta Mason to Supervisor, Customer Service: “Thank you . As you may know, the Parks Supervisor is working on developing a City campfire policy at the moment. Hence my interest in what is done elsewhere. So I'm hoping you can confirm or clarify several things in your responses:

1. Does a Parks supervisor or someone on his staff speak to each permit prior to the campfire?
2. What is the nature of fire supervision given by the by-law officer or Park Patrol staff?
3. What I meant about fire safety information is -- who is responsible for explaining the fire rules to the campfire permits? Do you mean that Fire Services contacts each fire permit and explains the rules?
4. Regarding the list of parks for which a campfire permit is centrally available -- it seems to be shrinking. Is this an intentional part of city policy? Is the city planning to eliminate campfires from parks eventually?”

Feb.8 from Supervisor, Customer Service, to Jutta Mason: “These are all issues of policy and work direction within the Parks Branch. Perhaps the Parks Supervisor can respond to your questions.”

### **Chapter 13. Calling all campfire friends**

Feb.11 Jutta Mason to list of campfire friends, asking for letters of campfire support and: “If your day has any flexibility in it, the other thing needed is some hours of your presence at a deputation at City Hall on Tuesday February 20. That's when the Parks Committee meets. If our issue gets held over until after lunch, there will also be a zamboni-cafe-picnic and a skating time at City Hall rink. This will be a great civics lesson for kids (with a storyteller too). And a sociable time for grownups. (People who wish to be kept informed by cellphone can limit their attendance to the right moment, if they can get down there quickly.)

***The deputation is meant to persuade the Parks Committee to instruct Parks management to stop working against Dufferin Grove friends and work with us instead.”***

### **Chapter 14. Shining a light on the risks in the closet**

Feb.14 Jutta Mason to Parks Supervisor: “I asked Dufferin Grove lead Recreation staff about Susan Tibaldi Park campfire permission. She said that you are concerned about possible effects of a cooking fire on the TTC line underneath. I offered to check for her, and so I asked the chair of the TTC.

Councillor Giambrone says he feels confident that a cooking fire in Susan Tibaldi Park will not interfere with the TTC. I hope this suffices. Please let the community know when the neighbours of Susan Tibaldi Park will be able to resume their excellent "take back the park" campfire program, working together with Dufferin Grove staff.”

Feb.14 Jutta Mason to Parks Supervisor re Campbell Park, cc to Technical Services Supervisor: “I asked the Dufferin Grove lead Recreation staff what's happening with the Campbell Rink cooking fires with youth on Fridays. She said they are still on hold. Please open your planning for that rink to community people as well, since a few of us have been part of this program all along. The lead Recreation staff said you see the ideal program location that we've used in the past two years, i.e. two meters west of the header trench, as a problem, because of **a potential ammonia explosion**. I have checked with the TSSA and they sent the following information:

**Ammonia gas has an explosive range of 16 to 25 per cent by volume in air. It is classified as NON-flammable under WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) and the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations.**

Beyond that, the lead Recreation staff says it's your impression that Campbell Rink is still direct ammonia and therefore there would be ammonia in the header trench. ***Campbell Rink was rebuilt for \$700,000 in 1997 or 1998 and it's brine or glycol, not direct ammonia.*** That would mean there is NO ammonia in the header trench pipes. Could you check that please, and let us all know? The next campfire date is for the Campbell youth tournament on Feb.25, and I'm worried this issue will not be clarified in time."

Feb 14 from a Dufferin Grove Recreation staff person who has a degree in Chemistry, to Jutta Mason, forwarded to Parks Supervisor and Fire Services:

"Ammonia is generally not considered a serious fire or explosion hazard because ammonia-air mixtures are difficult to ignite and a relatively high concentration of the gas is required. However, a large and intense energy source may cause ignition and/or an explosion in a confined space.

**The human detection of ammonia occurs at concentrations far below those that would create irreversible health damage or create a significant fire/explosion hazard** (see windex example). Hence, no matter how mesmerizing a cooking fire may be, people would be alerted to the ammonia and could douse the fire and seek the refuge of distance from the ammonia source."

Sources:

[www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/chemicals/chem\\_profiles/ammonia/working\\_ammonia.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/chemicals/chem_profiles/ammonia/working_ammonia.html)

[www.osha.gov/SLTC/ammoniarefrigeration/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/ammoniarefrigeration/index.html)

Feb.15 from Tech Services Supervisor to Jutta Mason: "***The Campbell Rink is a glycol system.***"

Feb.15 from Jutta Mason to Parks Supervisor: "I assume that the Technical Services Supervisor copied you on this. I could have told you at the time. It's good to make use of the resources you have, to avoid wasting time."

## Chapter 15. Distant echoes of a “Pilot Project”

Feb.15 from Jutta Mason to Councillor's Assistant: "I'm hoping you can help me. Because of the Feb.20 agenda postponement, I have to do an update mailing re cooking fires to my list today, and I am still out of the loop. These are the questions I need answered:

1. When will I be invited back into this discussion? (Now would be good.)
2. Can I have a copy of the current protocol re permits?
3. Can I have a copy of the current protocol re fire safety?
4. ***is it true that our 13-year-old campfire program is being called a "pilot project"? If so, whose pilot? I don't see Parks monitoring it (i.e being present for fires) -- so who is monitoring it, where are the reports going?***
5. What is the status of the ammonia concern re Campbell?
6. What is the status of the TTC concern re Susan Tibaldi?
7. When can the Wallace Family Sundays cooking fire program resume?"

Feb.15, from Councillor's Assistant to Jutta: "Assuming the meeting tomorrow morning goes according to plan, we will then have a framework ready that will allow the Rec staff to resume Dufferin Grove cooking fire programming immediately via the new protocol; and also we will be able to share them with you and other interested members of the public for comment and feedback, including hard copies of the new rules.

Parks staff have indeed started using the term "pilot-project." It would be more accurate to say that it is a pilot-project to test these new rules. I agree that more clarification is needed on

what criteria will be used to evaluate the pilot, who will be doing the evaluating, and what other feedback mechanisms will be in place, such as public consultation. I will ask these questions at the meeting tomorrow morning.

We will try to get the locations at the other parks approved at the meeting tomorrow morning as well. If there are outstanding safety concerns that can't be resolved at the meeting, then it will take a few more days to sort out. *My own personal goal is to have all of this sorted out and the resumption of Rec programmed cooking and warming fires, at all requested Ward 18 park locations, by next Friday Feb.23* at the absolute latest. The sooner the better, and we'll have more news after the meeting tomorrow."

**Chapter 16. The letter “P”: Permits, Pilots, Policies, Protocol, Procedure, Process – in Parks**

Feb.15, from Parks Supervisor to campfire friend Mary-Margaret Jones: "I am not trying to stop Cooking Fires or Warming Fires at Dufferin Grove. The bylaws as they apply to Parks require that any open fire requires a permit. In 2006 no permit was requested for fires at Dufferin Grove therefore no permit was issued. *This also meant that there was no liability insurance in place.* Safety and safe use of the Park are concerns of mine as they are for all Park users. In the event of an incident or injury I would be required to demonstrate that I have followed all of the required procedures to hold an event in a Park. *I am obliged by law follow the bylaws and policies and procedures that the City uses.*

I am currently working with Park staff to put in place a protocol that meets the needs and desires of the local community and fits within the process of the City. I have had a number of meetings with Recreation staff, Fire Department staff, Permitting staff and Parks staff to resolve this issue. I have also approved *a Pilot at Dufferin Grove Park* to allow Cooking Fires and to test the protocol that has been formed to date."

### **Chapter 17. No time at City Hall for campfire friends**

Feb.16, Jutta Mason to campfire friends: "The Feb.20 Parks committee deputation-rink party can't happen. It turns out that *no Parks matters are on the agenda for this month's meeting*, because the councillors are taking a day to listen to the experts talking about global warming. So we have to wait at least another month.

However, all those letters have definitely helped to focus attention on the campfire ban. Councillor Giambrone has put pressure on City management staff to get the permits going again. In fact, it sounds as though the Dufferin Grove fires may be reconstituted almost exactly as before. There is a meeting as I write, still without park user participation, but with some Dufferin Rink staff at the table.

***The Dufferin Grove Park campfire safety protocol is pretty well back to the safety rules we've worked out over the past 13 years.*** But what a lot of everybody's time such a bureaucratic explosion takes!

The other sites are still contentious (Wallace Family Sundays cooking fires, Campbell Rink Friday night youth cooking fires, MacGregor Park art-events campfires, and Susan Tibaldi take-back-the-park cooking fire events). The Parks Supervisor had safety concerns about Susan Tibaldi Park being on top of the subway line and about Campbell Rink having potentially explosive ammonia in the rink pipes near the youth program campfire site.

However, the chair of the TTC said he does not feel that a campfire at Susan Tibaldi Park will interfere with subway operations. And we were able to let the Parks Supervisor know that Campbell Rink was rebuilt in 1997 and does not have ammonia in the pipes (plus ammonia in the open air is not explosive).

Hopefully those campfire programs will also return soon."

### **Chapter 18. Recreation did it**

Feb.16 Recreation director Don Boyle to the Recreation Manager, cc to Jutta Mason: “Can you get me the background on this issue.. bullet point with a suggestion on how this can be resolved. Please highlight specifically who is responsible for the overall program or each of the measures required to operate the program.”

Feb.19 Parks Supervisor to campfire friends and City management: “Parks did not ban fires in Parks. ***In fact it was Recreation that banned fires.*** Parks requested that these fires follow the proscribed process including permitting, Fire department approval and Parks approval. There was no permit for 2006. ***There was no approval of sites with the Fire Department. This resulted in no indemnification for the City in the event of any incident or injury.***

In an effort to assist Recreation in providing a valued service for residents Parks set up a number of meetings ....Parks has utilized the existing process to assist in forming the Protocol and as such the residents using fires in Parks should see little or no difference.

***Parks always welcomes input from the public.*** Parks, will upon an agreement being reached, with Forestry, Recreation, Permitting and Fire provide the protocol to the Public for input.”

### **Chapter 19. Four weeks after the ban from Parks.....**

Feb.23 Jutta Mason to City Hall management and councillors: “Today is exactly four weeks since all the park cooking fire/ campfire permits were cancelled. Recently, you have allowed interim/temporary/’pilot’ permits in several locations. However, the new campfire rules you propose have not been made public. According to the Councillor’s Assistant, the Parks Manager set last Friday as the date when the City’s new protocol would finally be available to those of us who started the campfire program (and who help to continue it), to comment on.

But there has been nothing except reports of another internal (Parks only) meeting this past Wednesday.

### **Chapter 20. Are Dufferin Grove Recreation Staff stupid, bad, or both?**

Feb.23 from lead campfire Recreation staff to Parks Supervisor, “1. Please be advised that there will be a barrel fire at Campbell Park today from 6-11 pm in the same site as the fire held last Friday, Feb 16. 2. Please be advised that today there will be a cooking fire program (birthday party) at the approved fire pit near the ice rink at Dufferin Grove Park from 3 to 5 pm.”

Feb.26, from Parks Supervisor to lead campfire Recreation staff and Recreation Supervisor re the Campbell Park youth tourney campfire: “The location that you indicated for Campbell Park is not the agreed location....We had also agreed that you and or your staff would notify Parks and Parks Bylaw of fire events in advance. As this event, the Shinny Tournament, was scheduled weeks in advance there was no reason that this event could not have been booked in the appropriate manner.... ***At this point given that you and your staff are not clear as to the location I am not inclined to give approval for any additional fires at Campbell.***”

Feb.26 from Parks Supervisor to lead campfire Recreation staff, re the Dufferin Rink birthday party: “This is not how this is supposed to work. The notification is to come in advance of the event and the event is to be booked in CLASS. This email was sent after the event had already begun.”

Feb.27 from Jutta Mason to Councillor’s Assistant: “***I find the tone of the Parks Supervisor’s e-mail quite shocking. It's as though the Rec staff were trying to get away with something stupid.*** In actual fact, the staff were doing all that extra work to make the Campbell 2nd Annual Youth Shinny Tournament the wonderful success that it was. I heard that the Parks Supervisor came there with a camera during the tourney (but not speaking to any staff). Astonishing.

Their campfire was totally safe and competent. The idea here is to MAKE THINGS WORK for youth. How can we encourage Parks to get back on that project?”

Feb.27 from Parks Supervisor to lead Dufferin Grove Recreation staff: “There are a number of issues. One is that ***in spite of knowledge of an event well in advance Recreation has failed to***

*request the appropriate permit.* The second is that events such as birthdays are hardly spontaneous. Sending emails after the event starts or after normal working hours is not appropriate notice for Parks or Parks Bylaw.”

Feb.27 from Jutta Mason to Councillor Adam Giambrone: “Another amazing e-mail from the Parks Supervisor. This was a party for a kid whose mother was one of the group of three who got the sand pit into the park, back in 1993. She has been having a rink birthday party for her son each year for six years now. There was always a campfire, which they always shared with all rink users. This year the mother heard the campfires were cancelled, so they didn't make any arrangements ahead. When they got there, the group were thrilled to hear that temporary permission has been restored. So the staff sent an e-mail and lit the campfire. Everyone was happy, including the other rink users who joined in.

Except for the Parks Supervisor, he's not happy. The rink staff do their best to make the park a great place for families, people come from all over the city, and the Park Supervisor shakes his finger and uses phrases like "failed to request the appropriate permit." ***I thought this is NOT a permit but a recreation program?***

This is a dreadful situation. Please, let's have a campfire site meeting, with Councillor Giambrone, the Parks Director, the Recreation Director, the General Manager if necessary, to change the orientation from fault-finding to MAKING THINGS WORK!”

Feb.27 Councillor's Assistant to Parks Supervisor: “*...It would be helpful if all staff could adopt a more collaborative attitude, rather than an adversarial one,* since it is essential that both Parks and Rec staff are able to work together to program successful events. ...Please let me know as soon as possible what actions are being taken to sort this out and to make sure the event on Sunday can go ahead with all the proper approvals in place, in terms of both CLASS and the location.

I also understand that another meeting is being set up to discuss the big picture policy issues and the overall procedures. My schedule is quite flexible and I would be happy to attend. Please let me know when and where.”

## **Chapter 21. Time to bail out**

Feb.28 Lead Dufferin Grove Recreation Staff to Parks Supervisor: “A visit to Campbell Rink proved that the location proposed by Parks is too far. So ***Recreation would like to decline having a campfire at the location the Parks Supervisor refers to.*** The site by the basket ball area was identified as a health and safety hazard for staff in a recreation driven program. (The gates by the campfire would have to be left open during shinny games). The other possible location is by the wading pool and is simply too far from our point of view, and with respect to community input.

Feb.28 Jutta Mason to Councillor's Assistant: The lead Dufferin Grove Recreation staff tells me that the Parks Supervisor's current fire protocol version is not acceptable to Recreation. I would like to read it and comment, but ***apparently the Parks Supervisor says the protocol must not be revealed to me or other campfire users until Recreation has agreed.***

***It appears to me that Parks is determined to put the protocol in place without community consultation.*** They have killed the Campbell Rink youth campfire program already. It think it is very disrespectful to keep this discussion behind closed doors any longer (five weeks have passed since all this trouble began).”

## **Chapter 22. A visit with the risk analyst**

Feb.28, meeting with a City of Toronto senior risk management analyst and the Councillor's Assistant. Reason for the visit: Parks Supervisor had written to campfire friend Mary-Margaret Jones: “***There was no permit for 2006. There was no approval of sites with the Fire***

*Department. This resulted in no indemnification for the City in the event of any incident or injury.”*

**Risk management information:**

1. Indemnification (insurance coverage). The Risk Management Analyst verified that *the City has no outside insurance coverage for any claims under \$5 million*, independent of whether Fire Service approves park campfire locations. Insurers are leery about municipal insurance, so they require a \$5 million deductible for third-party liability claims. The City has its own insurance kitty, for claims under that amount. Each division is internally charged a premium by the city, partly based on how many claims are made against that division. Parks and Recreation don't produce many claims, so the proportion they have to pay into the City's insurance kitty is not high.

90% of all third-party liability claims against the city are resolved for less than \$15,000. However, the city's documentation of those claims is not very detailed. The Risk Management Analyst said that they intend to change this, so that it will in future be easier for staff to get details of claims or lawsuits, to learn from them.

The Province's information and privacy commissioner made a judgment against the City in 2005, saying that they can't keep their insurance and claims details secret. City risk management staff had argued that if more people knew that they could get money from the city, more people would sue. But in fact that didn't happen after the newspaper coverage. So more information continues to be released. *The Councillor's office can ask for a detailed report of third-party claims relating to parks*, and Risk management staff can try to get that for them.

*So the Parks Supervisor's idea – that there would be no insurance coverage for the city in case someone sued for “incident or injury” caused by a park campfire – misses the mark.* Under \$5 million, there's no external insurance coverage whether the fire department approved the fire sites or not.

2. Use of volunteers: In his meetings with Recreation staff, the Parks Supervisor made the argument that only City staff could look after a campfire program, no volunteers. Or if there was a volunteer, s/he would only be “covered” by the City's Commercial General Liability insurance policy if s/he was “a person that performs activities under the *direct supervision and control of City staff* and does not receive pay for those services.” [from a different Risk Management Analyst for the city.] So the Parks Supervisor decided that staff must stay right beside the campfire at all times.

As the Senior Risk Management Analyst had already explained, in the event of a mishap, claims under \$5 million would not be paid out by the insurance company anyway, since the City's third-party liability insurance policy has a \$5 million deductible. But the Analyst also said that the definition of what “direct supervision” means is a common-sense one.

Direct supervision of volunteers *does not necessarily mean* staff being physically on site with their eyes trained on the volunteer. (Rather, it refers to the same kind of common sense implied when law talks of the “reasonable person”). The Senior Risk Management Analyst pointed to the **“Occupiers Liability Act”** as a good source of information for a definition of reasonable care and reasonable behaviour. In the case of volunteer adults looking after a small campfire, staff would not likely have to remain on site.

To set city policy, the City ought to consult cases – and detailed information about cases of damage is shortly going to become more easily available from the Risk Management office. In the meantime, in thirteen years campfires at Dufferin Grove Park, there have been no injuries. *In the real world beyond imagined scenarios, there is compelling evidence of reasonable people taking reasonable care.*

### **Chapter 23. Day-to-day bureaucracy**

March 8 from Jutta to Parks Supervisor: "I have just dashed home from the farmers' market at the request of rec staff. They are lighting the regular market campfire/cooking fire to make hot chocolate. It's unclear whether this program is in CLASS as a weekly event or you wish to be notified every time. But our park e-mail is down and the staff can't go up to Wallace or McCormick to write to you from there. The fire will be lit at 6.25 and I am writing to you at 6.21."

March 9 from the lead Dufferin Grove Recreation staff to the Parks Supervisor and Parks, Forestry and Recreation By-Law enforcement: "There will be a campfire with Councillor Joe Mihevc this afternoon from 4:30 till 6pm. Then we may have a campfire from 6pm till 8pm for Friday night supper patrons."

March 9 from By-law Enforcement to the lead Dufferin Grove Recreation staff :

"Thank you for your e-mail, staff will investigate and look into your complaint."

March 9 from Mayssan Shuja to By-Law enforcement: "There is no complaint being made....We as on-site recreation staff were directed to email this address to further notify of campfires when they happen. Hope this clarifies"

### **Chapter 24. Providing a process, ensuring compliance, testing the pilot, creating a permitting classification, reviewing a protocol, recalling the work team, ensuring that messaging is understood**

March 9 from Councillor's Assistant to Jutta, a "briefing note" from the Parks Manager and the Parks Supervisor (dated March 1)

#### **Issue:**

Establish a protocol to enable fire programs (cooking, warming, special event fires) to take place in City parks for the enjoyment of the community, while ensuring that such fires comply with Toronto Fire Services and Parks Forestry & Recreation regulations, to protect the City of Toronto, staff, volunteers and members of the public in the areas of fire safety, legal liability and bylaw compliance.

The expected result was a protocol that would: - ensure the community was able to continue enjoying the fire programs - provide direction for Recreation staff that they were now leading the fire programs in compliance with Fire Services - *provide a process whereby Recreation staff were consulting with Fire Services and Parks staff, complying with the protocol and receiving approval for their fire programs in a timely and effective manner - ensure city staff, volunteers and members of the public were safe within the City's legal liability umbrella.....*

#### **Key Points:**

- all members of the work team and senior PFR staff support the added value the fire programs bring to the community especially as it relates to youth
- to ensure minimal disruption to the existing fire programs, particularly at Dufferin Grove, **Parks and Fire Services approved a "pilot" to test the new sites and conditions** while ensuring the community enjoyed their fire programs
- existing information that recreation staff working with the fire programs compiled was used as the basis for the protocol. These staff also took a lead role in writing and commenting on the protocol
- discrepancies still exist in relation to the areas that were deemed to be acceptable to all parties (including Fire Services) at the site meetings, and the areas and conditions that were used, most recently at Campbell Park.
- ***It is recommended, Permit section create a permitting classification that will address the various fire programs*** and then remove the blanket permit program from CLASS.
- While community consultation on PFR programs and protocols is encouraged and supported it must be recognized that legislative and other similar requirements of city employees are

information for the public and not topics that may be revised at individual community meetings to reflect the varied interests or perspectives found within neighbourhoods.....

.....Parks staff are not able to approve sites that have not been approved by Fire Services

- Parks and Recreation staff will recall the work team, including Fire Services, to further review sites that will meet Fire Services approval and be acceptable to Parks and Recreation staff involved with programming and permit approvals

- Jutta Mason as representative of Friends of Dufferin Grove, will be invited to review the existing protocol and participate in the upcoming site meetings to ensure the messaging from Fire Services is understood as a required piece of the protocol.

### **Chapter 25. Which legislation?**

March 10 from Jutta to the Parks Manager Your Parks briefing note cautions: "*legislative and other similar requirements of city employees are information for the public and not topics that may be revised....to reflect the varied interests or perspectives found within neighbourhoods.*"

So it becomes very important to know what the legislation on cooking fires is.

From your briefing note:

"It was identified that fire programs operated through the Recreation Branch in conjunction with Friends of Dufferin Grove had been taking place on a regular basis in City parks within ward 18 without approval from Toronto Fire Services....**Parks staff are not able to approve sites that have not been approved by Fire Services.**"

But the legislation we've seen is different:

from the **Toronto Fire Services Fire Prevention Division** web site:  
Open air burning shall not be permitted unless approved, **OR** unless such burning consists of a small, confined fire, supervised at all times, and used to cook food on a grill or a barbecue.

From the **Ontario Fire Code** w ONTARIO FIRE CODE 2.6.3.4.  
"Open Air Burning shall not be permitted unless approved, **OR** unless such burning consists of a small, confined fire, supervised at all times, and used to cook food on a grill or a barbecue".

***City of Toronto Parks By-law § 608-10:***  
Open air burning is not permitted within the City of Toronto except with approval by the Toronto Fire Services Fire Prevention Division.  
Open air burning shall not be permitted unless approved, **OR** unless such burning consists of a small, confined fire, supervised at all times, and used to cook food on a grill or a barbecue.

**District Fire Chief Kim Dobson, South Command Fire Prevention**, gives it a different spin, writing to Councillor Adam Giambrone, Jan.30 2007  
"The Toronto Fire Services has prohibited all open fires in the city unless approved, (**except** if the fire is contained in a barbecue, supervised and used for cooking)."

**PLEASE CLARIFY:** The Ontario Fire Code and the City Municipal Code exemptions specify a barbecue or a grill. For many years, park cooking fires have used a grill. Fire Chief Dobson seems

to have taken out "grill" from his description of what kind of fire does not need fire services approval. But you see that all the other citations include a "small, contained fire, and used to cook food on a grill or a barbecue" in their exemption (from fires requiring Fire Services approval). **So our understanding is that it's up to Parks, Forestry and Recreation to give permission for any small, contained park cooking fire program using a grill, simply as the owner of the property. Fire Services are not involved.**

Could you ask Fire Services and *let us know whether this analysis is wrong*, and if so, why? We need this information prior to any participation in cooking fire site meetings, so that we can come prepared knowing the legislation.

#### **EPILOGUE:**

As of the middle of March, much is still in question. This handbook has a spiral binding, which can be undone in order to add more pages, as new elements are added to the story. But for now, two final quotes:

From park friend Georgie Donais: "*I would like to stress that a park's existence is for the pleasure and enrichment of the citizens who use and cherish it. It is not just another place of employment that the city must manage, and citizens are not liabilities who get in the way of administrative efficiencies. Successful collaboration will pay the city back many times in healthier, happier citizens who love and support their communities. That is truly an opportunity worth taking.*"

From the CELOS 2007 Municipal Outdoor Rink Report:

All new policy development affecting Torontonians should include

- a) **detailed, public documentation of reasons for a new policy being considered**
- b) **thorough consultation with user group(s) affected**
- c) **detailed, public documentation of the results of the new policy**

To be continued!

# A campfire handbook for parks

by Jutta Mason

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