

Good morning, I am the volunteer park steward coordinator at Howitt Park and am writing to urge you to continue the Park Stewards Program.

I have been running community stewardship events in Howitt Park on and off for twenty years—since 2005. The Park Stewards program and the association with the Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition make organizing and running these events vastly easier and more pleasurable than when I did this on my own. Even more importantly, we can do so much more with the Park Stewards Program than we could before!

In the years before the Park Stewards program existed, neighbour volunteers would come together in Howitt Park and remove litter and then have a community picnic. We partnered with Trees for Guelph a few times to plant trees, we partnered with OPIRG once or twice to do larger plantings, and, in the early days, we tried to tackle the garlic mustard. With the help of the City and the Park Stewards program, we are now able to plant around 100 native trees, shrubs, and plants at each of our events (twice a year). We get between 40 and 50 volunteers out each time and, with the twice-a-year schedule supported by the Park Stewards program, we are starting to get a number of returning volunteers. This is not only wonderful for community building, but it's great to have a group of quite skilled planters to do the work.

So that's the nuts and bolts. **Here's why I think this matters so much:**

In a world where people are bombarded with news about climate change and its astonishingly destructive and terrifying effects, and where solutions feel abstract, planting trees is a simple, joyful, and practical thing to do.

It's positive: it's good for carbon sequestration and good for the human and other-than-human community. It feels good: it's happy work done while talking and laughing with neighbours, and it feels like it is time spent making a difference in our world. That positive feeling lingers well past the 3-hour planting event. Walking through the park and seeing all those baby trees with their white protective wraps offers park goers a little glimmer of positivity and hope for the future: People cared enough to come out and work together to plant those trees for our shared future. That is a beautiful thing! Giving people across our city meaningful, practical, social, positive, and joyful ways to combat climate change is worth so much more than the cost of this program.

Please reverse the decision and continue this important program.

Thank you for reading my letter.

Jen Mason, PhD, Howitt Park Stewards