

Jack Downing Park reopens after revitalization project



Written By BRIAN LOCKHART

After several years, Jack Downing Park in downtown Shelburne was starting to show its age.

A revitalization project took place to improve the park, enlarge the area to allow for more people, and to make the park accessible and safe. A new gazebo was constructed and funded by associates at KTH Manufacturing.

The park was re-opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Wednesday, Nov. 2.

The park is named after John Robert "Jack" Downing, a local resident who advocated that the Town purchase the vacant land where the park is in 1998. He raised around \$34,000 to purchase the land and an additional \$59,000 for park development.

The parkland was a gas station at one time, before becoming a vacant property.

A wooden statue of William Jelly, the founding father of Shelburne, was also on site but was removed due to deterioration from the elements causing safety issues. The statue is being repaired, and once completed it will again be installed in the park.

Improvements to the park include a stable ground surface suitable for canes, crutches, and wheels of mobility devices, an open space for scooters and wheelchairs, and textured and coloured concrete for the visually impaired.

There is also a new sensory garden, although planting in that area is not yet completed due to the time of year, but it is expected to come alive in the spring when town crews complete the project.

"The community consultation for the redevelopment of this park was quite extensive," said Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills during the dedication ceremony. "It started in 2019 with the community improvement plan and a separate consultation process that was specifically put out for this park earlier this year."

Mayor Mills added, "Some of the key recommendations coming out of those consultations, were to redevelop the park in a way that improves accessibility, provides dedicated special event space, and creates a space that can be used by, and supports our downtown businesses.

"For an example of how many people this park can now accommodate was evident on September 30, with the Orange Shirt Day and

the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Staff estimate that we had over 80 people in attendance for that event, and in the past, this park in its previous configuration could only accommodate 30 people. The accessible gazebo was made possible through the generous donation of KTH associates. We have a plaque that recognizes their \$30,000 contribution.?