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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: The fervor over Fiddle Park

Many times in the past weeks I have heard people say two things: ?There are plans to renovate Fiddle Park next year?? and ?Well, what can you do??

To address the first comment, there are indeed significant changes afoot for Fiddle Park in Shelburne in 2025. Plans include a 600-seat concrete amphitheatre, the planting of trees and creation of walking trails, a state of the art playground, splash pad and skating pathway, just to name a few.

It will also include the removal of the very well-used trailer sanitation dump station and the cessation of events in the park for 2025.

The disruption to otherwise well-attended events in Fiddle Park is of course due to the construction which will take the better part of the year. Some events, such as Pickin' in the Park, have been investing in the park over the course of their decade-long event, most recently donating $40,000 towards the new cement floor installed this year.

Unfortunately, this event will need to leave Fiddle Park indefinitely as trailer camping will not be possible once the walking path systems and trees are in place.

Other popular events, like our Haunt In The Park, will look a little different next year but we are assured that we can return to the Fiddle Park pavilion in 2026. We sincerely hope that's the case as there is no other place Haunt In The Park should be!

The choices of what will be included in the new Fiddle Park are based on a survey conducted in 2021 which garnered 481 responses from Shelburne's then population of 8,994, which equates to approximately 5.35 per cent of the town.

This was a time when people were still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic, struggling to keep their jobs, figuring out how to manage finances, living through stressful times in relationships and suffering from mental health issues after the upheaval of lockdowns and quarantines.

It is understandable that such a small percentage answered the survey about what the future of Fiddle Park should include.

It seemed distant and insubstantial.

Then there was a secondary survey in 2022 for people to choose between three concept plans that were proposed, based on the aforementioned survey results. In this survey, 113 participants provided feedback. And based on this, Concept 1 was chosen as 42 per cent of the 113 participants voted for it over the other 2 options provided. All this information can be found on the Town of Shelburne website, under Town Hall, Plans Studies and Reports, Parks Master Plan, and then Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Now we come to the ?Well, what can you do?? commentary.

So many people I spoke to had strong opinions on the course of events at Fiddle Park but were marked with a level of sustained apathy and discouragement.

Thinking that there is nothing you can do is simply not true.

The staff at the Shelburne Town Hall are there for you, the community. As are the councillors and mayor. They are doing their best with the information that is provided them. In the end, a very small percentage of the town is effectively deciding what will happen in the parks such as Fiddle Park.

And yes, the master plan has been accepted, but there is still a very small window in which you can be heard as the final draft of the

Fiddle Park plan, Phase 1 development, has not yet been written in stone.

The cost for the skating path is higher than anticipated so the plan will need to be revised, and the window in which to have your voice heard is closing. So reach out to your council members and let them know how you feel about the plan, and its price tag of over $9 million. Let town staff have the opportunity to help you have your voice heard by calling and having yourself added to the council agenda and speaking to council directly.

Change for Fiddle Park is inevitable and should be welcomed. However, it should also be reflective of the majority of the citizens and what would serve them best. Whether that should be walking trails, better lighting, seating and shade trees, a trailer dump station that perhaps generates revenue, a playground, flexible event space, an open area for a sportsfield, a parking lot with enough open overflow parking to accommodate larger events, and/or signage to help out of town guests find the park better? there are many ideas and concepts that could work for a town as diverse and community-driven as Shelburne.

Let's make sure the investment in our largest park reflects that.

Carola Little, Shelburne