

City removes block on Save Skaha Park Society

By Penticton Western News

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Along with announcing new appointments to the Agricultural Advisory and Penticton Creek restoration committees, Mayor Andrew Jakubeit announced Gary Denton would be filling the tourism seat on the committee charged with developing a parks and recreation master plan.

Denton, an outspoken opponent of plans to lease part of Skaha Lake Park and until recently, a director of the Save Skaha Park Society, said the city deliberately sought them out a few weeks ago.

"It was their initiative to say that there is a vacancy on the board, that (city) staff has concluded that representation of our group, the Save Skaha Park society, would be a beneficial thing to the park-planning process."

This is an about face for the city, which had previously denied the applications of Dr. Gerry Karr and other members of the society, as was pointed out in Dec. 2015 through a *Western News* investigation.

In February, Jakubeit was admonished by the B.C. Civil Liberties Association for his remarks that by suing the city, SSP members had negated their chance to be represented on the parks master plan committee.

Jakubeit said the difference was that Denton had agreed to give up his position on the SSP executive so there would not be a conflict of interest. Jakubeit contends that a director of a society has an onus to put that group's interest first.

"He was happy to do that. It was more of a mutual or informal willingness on his part to do that," said Jakubeit.

Denton agreed that he had voluntarily stepped down so there would not be a perception that was sitting on the master plan committee in the primary role as a director of Save Skaha Park.

"I don't change my values when I resign as a director," said Denton. "I am very clear about where I stand in relation to Skaha Park, but that is a subordinate role when I am serving on this committee."

Jakubeit said Denton's experience as a former general manager of the Apex Ski Resort and owner of the ski shop, as well as having served two terms on city council from 1996 to 2002 and him a good choice for the tourism seat. Denton said being a member of the Save Skaha Park Society was also key.

"They were looking for an opportunity to have a representative of this point of view of Skaha Park," said Denton, who made it clear that while he continues to oppose commercialization in Skaha Park, he won't be pushing that single issue on the committee. Rather, he is concerned about the larger issue of commercialization in all parks.

"I have lived here most of my life and this conflict of commercialization of parks continues to come up, decade after decade," said Denton who would like to see the committee to find a process to answer what he calls a "chronic issue" of what commercial activities are appropriate in what parks.

"We need to define commercial use and then have a discussion about where those uses are appropriate and where they aren't," he said. He would also like to see a mechanism that binds the use of the land going forward.

"I understand there is going to be considerable public engagement, and that is the other part that really encouraged me about this," said Denton, who listed a number of proposals for commercializing parkland over the years, including a proposal for what is now Okanagan Lake Park thanks to community activists.

"There is a long history of this coming up, and it is not unique to Penticton," said Denton. "Looking forward, I find it quite encouraging that council has recognized that Save Skaha Park is a legitimate voice of a large number of people."

Note that building mountain biking trails in the wilderness is tantamount to "commercialization" of parkland. - cjk