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## **Etobicoke Guardian**

### **Residents learn more about city's rec fee plan**

#### **Etobicoke residents want process to be fair, meeting hears**

January 17, 2008 by Kate Wilson

Etobicoke residents were given the opportunity to hear about Toronto's Everybody Gets to Play policy firsthand and comment on the proposed changes on Wednesday night at the Elmbank Community Centre.

"We are reaching out to the community to know how this should evolve," said Brenda Librecz, general manager of parks, forestry and recreation, to the assembled crowd.

After opening remarks from **Ward 1 (Etobicoke North) Councillor Suzan Hall** and a presentation by Librecz, residents broke off into smaller groups to discuss the proposed strategy that will see a number of changes to the existing recreation programs in the city.

In addition to introducing new free programming, including skill-based training for students in grades 4, 5, 8 and 9, the report recommends an increase in program fees which would raise the cost-recovery rate from 30 per cent to 50 per cent over seven years.

"I thought that the 30 per cent cost recovery was very low, so I was for increasing the cost and wanted to hear how they would do that," said Etobicoke resident Andrea Henning, who attended the meeting with husband Derek. "If they read our comments they'll make a difference."

The transition to a new financial assistance policy will also be introduced. The existing "priority centre policy", which provides free programming to everyone in identified areas, will be phased out over three years. In its place, an annual credit of \$360 for youth and children and \$150 for adults and seniors, to be used for fee-based programs, is proposed for 2008.

Those who fall into the low income cut-off will immediately qualify for the subsidy. However, concerns were raised about those who just miss the cut-off.

"It has been cause for some concern and we heard it tonight and from council, but we didn't hear people say to us don't do it," Librecz said. "They said we want it to be equitable, but we would like to see what that looks like in that transition from before to after. The working poor who are just slightly above (low income cut-off), they can't get that subsidy, so they have to have opportunities."

Librecz said details of the transition will become more explicit on Feb. 21, when staff reports back to the community development and recreation committee.

Local resident Diana Linton is a volunteer at the community centre who uses the recreation programs regularly.

"I have to do some more research, but it seems like they're making it more equitable across the board for the whole megacity and that's important," she said. "You don't want to waste money, so if they can use it more efficiently, that's always a good thing."

Linton said improved marketing of the city's recreation programs would help more people get involved and she would have liked to have seen more members of the community at the meeting.

"I didn't see many local parents," she said. "I saw more staff or city employees so that was unfortunate."

Councillor Hall sat in on discussions among local residents and said that she, along with others at her table, would like to evaluate the policy after it has been in place for a full year.

"This (report), from what I have gotten from talking to people, is an attempt to make things much more equitable," she said. "If that is the aim then I think it's a good aim so let's see how it works out."

The Etobicoke meeting was one of four community consultation meetings to take place across the city this week.

Deputations from any interested city residents can be made during Jan. 23 and Feb. 21 meetings of the community development and recreation committee.

Toronto Council will make a final decision about the report on March 3.