

# **Gibby's Field Report**

**As of February 10, 2001**

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For the Gibby's Field Group

[ From the Gibby's Field website: <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/gibbys> ]

Abstract: Gibby's Field is located at 1456, 1458 and 1462 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue East. It is the last remnant of the historical China Creek river system not yet developed. The City of Vancouver owns it after reverting to the City in the 1930's in lieu of unpaid back taxes. Gibby's Field is located in Cedar Cottage and falls under the Kensington Cedar Cottage CityPlan. With the support of City planners and the CityPlan Committee, the City has agreed to a temporary moratorium on further residential development until the community has completed its community visioning process. A large group of interested residents, scientists, parents, educators and children is working to develop that vision. To date the vision includes: restoring native plant habitat; rehabilitating some portion of water and riparian edge habitat; documenting the rich history of the area through public art and historical surveys; creating a pedestrian alternative to Knight Street. The Gibby's Field Group supports pursuing park status for the property.

## **The History of Gibby's Field**

Gibby's Field is the point of confluence of two tributaries of China Creek. It was a large creek, able to support steelhead trout and diverse species of fish, amphibians and waterfowl until the recent past.

Nearby, at the intersection of what is now Knight and Kingsway, the original Cedar Cottage brewery stood with its water source being this tributary of China Creek. It is from this brewery that Cedar Cottage got its name in the late 1800's.

Gibby's Field draws its name from Gibson's Farm, an orchard and working farm that extended from what is now 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue, past 19<sup>th</sup> and through to 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue. "Flett Road", now 18th bisected it.

Up until the 1950's, residents recall this portion of the China Creek tributary as still fish sustaining. During the years that followed, the water quality of the creek deteriorated terribly and a massive sewer trunk line was laid to divert the creek underground. Gibson's farm and the adjacent "Gully" were developed into Tye Elementary and the 18<sup>th</sup> Ave cul de sac in the late 1950's.

## **Development Status**

It is extremely rare that such a property remains undeveloped in Vancouver and yet still falls outside of Park jurisdiction. The reasons for this seem to be that the property was considered "unbuildable" until a recent geo-technical report commissioned by the City's Real Estate department gave RS1 development the go-ahead under certain terms.

The main concerns are:

- 1) the persistent high levels of water flow which continue to run through the property in spite of diversion,
- 2) the steep contours along all four edges of the property,
- 3) 15' severance for sewer trunk line access.

Rough estimates of the costs needed to prepare the property for market (additional sewer lines, fill etc) are well over \$100,000. With the necessary "upgrades", as level lots they could have fetched up to \$600,000 under previous ideal market conditions, but the current value (as of February 2001) is felt to be lower. The lots are zoned RS 1.

Under the Kensington Cedar Cottage CityPlan, sections 24.5 etc, the preservation of such a property is a City Council supported priority. The Gibby's Field Group presented to the CityPlan committee in December 2000. The CityPlan committee voted to request a moratorium on further development on this property. The City <page break 2-3> planner supported this. A letter expressing this was sent by KCC CityPlan Chair Ann Roberts, to Council requesting a moratorium. On January 10, 2001 Bruce Maitland agreed to place a moratorium on further residential development of the property until the Community had completed its community vision, stating that the property had unique features and that the CityPlan and planner had supported it.

## **Community Vision**

The naturally occurring features of Gibby's Field give a strong indication of its possible use as a public space:

- Persistent water flow, draining into an existing culvert.

- Steep contours on all four sides, provide clear boundaries between private neighbouring space and park boundaries.
- Alternative to Knight Street, pedestrian pass-through.
- High exposure to multiple users — and not simply adjacent neighbours.

As there are many children in the area, with two public schools, one preschool and one private school in close proximity, the property suggests a rugged, unmanicured space, favored by children.

The community vision of Gibby’s Field developed over three meetings. Small group work revealed remarkable consistency between all groups. There were four common factors:

1. Mark the history of the neighbourhood — possibly through a community art project and/or through oral histories gathered by local students and historians.
2. Restore and create bird and butterfly habitat through the use of low-maintenance, native plants.
3. Create some water habitat and riparian edge habitat by restoring some of the creek flow, within confines of neighbourhood safety concerns.
4. Create a pedestrian alternative to Knight Street while maintaining the rugged contours of the property.

Further research indicates that we were on the right track. According to a recent publication from White Hutchinson : “People, and especially children, consistently prefer natural landscapes to built environments. Natural outdoor environments reduce stress and are pleasing to adults. Children’s play outdoors is higher quality than indoor play—the sensory experiences are different, and different standards of play apply. Children can do things outdoors that would be frowned on indoors. They can run, shout, be messy and also experience, interact with and manipulate <page break 3-4> the environment. Naturalized outdoor play areas are the ideal environment for children’s play, and they cost less to build and maintain than indoor areas”

“Things children like in their outdoor environments include:

- water
- vegetation, including trees, bushes, flowers and long grasses,
- animals, creatures in ponds, and other living things
- sand, best if it can be mixed with water
- natural color, diversity and change
- places and features to sit in, on, under, lean against, and provide shelter and shade
- different levels, nooks, crannies- places that offer privacy and views
- structures, equipment and materials that can be changed, actually or in their imaginations, including plentiful loose parts.”

**Source:  
White Hutchinson**

### **Acquisition by the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation**

On February 7<sup>th</sup> [2001] the Gibby’s Field Group met with Mark Vulliamy, manager of park planning and research.

Mark Vulliamy gave a brief summary of how the Parks Board acquires properties:

1) through donations of land; 2) through unusual combinations of circumstances (i.e. landfill turned parkland — Everett Crowley park etc.) 3) through purchases.

The Parks Board gets their mandate (and budget) for the Capital Plan through municipal plebiscites. Typically, a Capital Plan allocates 15% to park acquisition, or roughly 3.5 million dollars per three-year plan.

The City has a goal of attaining and maintaining the ratio of 2.75 acres of parkland per 1000 people. In four neighbourhoods, there is a serious park deficiency, (a lot less than the goal of 2.75 ac/1000). They include Mount Pleasant and Grandview Woodlands but, unfortunately, Gibby's Field is located a few hundred feet to the east of the park deficient neighbourhood, separated only by the Knight Street corridor.

The annual allocation of roughly 1.2 million dollars is to be spent in a prioritized manner, on properties, which meet one, two or all of the following:

1) in a park deficient neighbourhood; 2) increase access to waterfront; 3) unique features.  
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The third criteria is applicable to Gibby's Field because it has, according to Mark:

- 1) an obvious historical stream, which has never been built on;
- 2) topography — steep slopes which give it clear boundaries;
- 3) pedestrian advantages in diverting pedestrian traffic from Knight Street.

Mark noted that it is extremely rare for a property in such a neighbourhood, with such a zoning not to be built on and stated that very few such properties exist.

Mark agreed that it is very interesting and that it should be brought to the attention of Parks Commissioners and City Councilors as they must approve all acquisitions with a 50%+1 vote. To be removed from park designation would require 2/3 vote of both Parks Board and City Council.

The next step is now underway — informing individual Park Commissioners and City Councilors of the community interest in preserving and restoring Gibby's Field.

As well, research is underway on possible partnerships in restoring Gibby's Field, should the Parks Board agree to purchase the land and City Council support this acquisition.

