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Shubie fans take up pen for park 900-signature petition opposes invasive Dartmouth interchange

By [AMY PUGSLEY FRASER](#) / City Hall
Reporter

Hundreds of Shubie Park lovers are keen to put the brakes on a proposed interchange for Highway 118 that infringes on their green space.

"People love Shubie Park," Rhonda Totten said Monday afternoon.

"It's our gem in the middle of the city and I don't think it should be disturbed in any way, shape or form."

The Dartmouth resident is a member of a new group called Save Our Shubie (SOS) that held its inaugural meeting on New Year's Eve.

Since then, a handful of members have collected more than 900 signatures for a petition calling upon the provincial government to rethink an overpass it plans to start building this spring.

The overpass - which will take two construction summers to complete - is a connector to a business park slated to open in October 2006 between Highways 111 and 118.

The province held open houses last month and highlighted two design options for the interchange.

One of the plans would include a big retaining wall along the highway that would not be inside the park but would be visible to parkgoers.

The other plan features a natural rocky slope that would encroach on Shubie Park, necessitating a realignment of one walking trail.

A third plan, drafted by the independent Shubenacadie Canal Commission, features a



ERIC WYNNE/Staff

Rhonda Totten and her dog Jessica-Marie pose near the Fairbanks Centre in Shubie Park on Monday. Mrs. Totten is spearheading a protest and petition against development of an interchange that threatens the serenity of parts of the popular Dartmouth park.

slope that would hide the wall from sight within the park.

Save Our Shubie members would like the province to go back to the drawing board altogether, Mrs. Totten says.

"It seems like a done deal," she said.

"But we're the taxpayers here and, assuming that the price tag of the interchange is very, very high, we're paying for it and I think that we need to have some say as to how it's done."

While they've collected signatures for their petition, SOS members are surprised to learn that many people who live around the park are not familiar with any of the plans put forward for the interchange.

"So many of these people are not aware and they walk Shubie Park with their children and their dogs all the time," Mrs. Totten said.

The councillor for the area says the province hasn't done enough to get the word out.

"I asked (Transportation and Public Works) Minister Ron Russell to hold additional open houses," Coun. Andrew Younger (East Dartmouth-The Lakes) said Monday.

"The province has refused. They've indicated that they feel they have met or exceeded their public consultation requirements for an interchange."

As a result, the councillor - along with Coun. Jim Smith from the neighbouring Albro Lake-Harbourview district - will host an open house next week.

"I honestly believe the province should be doing this," Mr. Younger said.

"At the end of the day, we're (the municipality) picking up the slack."

He has put up signs, sent out hundreds of e-mails and phoned dozens of people. In addition, the councillor's office budget will pay for the open house, advertising space, and the cost of printing hundreds of information packages.

It's all for the residents, Mr. Younger says.

"The province has said they are building an interchange, so, given that they won't stop it, I'm going to hold them to the wall to make sure that they listen to the public and understand the importance of Shubie Park."

"I would love there not to be an interchange, but unfortunately . . . this is a provincial project and the province is building it."

Joan Massey, New Democrat MLA for Dartmouth East, was on holiday until today and couldn't be reached for comment.

Linda Laffin, spokeswoman for the Transportation and Public Works Department, was also not available.

Protecting park space is important, Mrs. Totten says.

"Hurricane Juan is a good example of how people were so dismayed about the loss of natural habitat and so much of it is gone with those weather systems that we suffered here.

"We want to protect our parklands."

An open house about the interchange will be held Jan. 12 from 6 to 8 p.m. in the Fairbanks Centre, 54 Locks Road.

Further information is available from the councillors' support office at 490-4050.

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