

opinion



Community issues number one with GWAC

To the editor:

Re: "Controversy continues over community police in park," June 24.

As a director with the Grandview-Woodland Area Council (GWAC) I wish to thank David Carrigg for his reporting on the continuing controversy surrounding Grandview Park Community Policing Centre (CPC). I also wish to correct a statement made in his article.

The number one priority of the Grandview Woodland Area Council is not to close down the community policing centre. The issue of closing down the centre was merely raised and recorded as a possible goal at a recent grassroots forum on police harassment and brutality in the neighbourhood.

Indeed, the council has not yet considered what to do with the data that came out of that meeting. On

the contrary, the number one priority of the GWAC is further grassroots public discussion on issues relevant to the community including policing and police accountability, as well as harm reduction, transportation, privatization of water, tenants rights, workers rights, poverty, arts and community festivals, and so on.

In Carrigg's article, he states that the parks board held a community survey over a year ago that overwhelmingly favoured the move of the CPC office into the park. I personally question the merits of that survey. I am aware that their poll overlooked many but not all tenants in the community. As a renter in the community, I never received their survey. I was not involved with the Ad Hoc Committee on Grandview Park's smaller survey (they opposed the move into the park of the CPC

office and therefore challenged the parks board) but I did receive the Ad Hoc committee's survey information.

The recent GWAC policing meeting considered a host of issues around unwarranted police harassment and brutality. We felt that hosting a public discussion on the issue was relevant after having received several informal complaints about such behaviour. These folks are reluctant to file official complaints against the police. They are both skeptical and cynical about the complaints procedure. The attitude conveyed is that the process is flawed, so why waste your time with it when it is largely a futile endeavour?

CHRIS SHELLEY,
GRANDVIEW-WOODLAND
AREA COUNCIL

Controversy continues over community police in park

By David Carrigg
Staff writer

CLOSING A COMMUNITY POLICING CENTRE in Grandview Park is the number-one priority of the newly elected Grandview-Woodlands Area Council, a local residents' association.

Chris Shelley, a social activist and one of 11 new council members, said the policing centre—relocated to Grandview Park's old caretakers residence last May—opened the door to harassment of activists that hang out in the park. For example, he claims a community police officer at the centre forced an activist to give his name by threatening to ticket him for spitting on the ground.

The move to the park was intended to provide more space for the office, previously located in a cramped corner of Britannia ice rink, and a year-round community policing presence in the park, where open drug dealing was common and residents were often afraid to venture.

But Shelley denied there was rampant intravenous drug use in the park before the centre opened, saying the drug scene was limited to people smoking marijuana. Of 684 people surveyed in the area last September by the "Ad Hoc Committee for Grandview Park," he said, 70 per cent opposed the policing centre. A mail-in survey of 6,700 households later conducted by the parks board, however, found 88 per cent of respondents favoured the move. Advocates of the move said some people who signed the committee's survey thought they were opposing construction of a police station in the park.

Annette Garm, executive director of the Britannia Community Services Centre, said the community policing centre has been controversial since it moved to the park last year. "One group didn't want cops in the park because it prevented them from doing illegal acts or they thought it enhanced the concept of a police state," said Garm, whose community centre is the base for the council. "The other group were sick of condoms and needles turning up in park that also houses a child-care centre."

Eileen Mosca, spokeswoman for the policing centre, said the council refused an offer to have a police representative at a meeting last Monday that called on citizens to recount experiences of alleged police brutality. She said no complaints have been made against the two neighbourhood police officers based at the centre or any of its volunteers. "There are all these allegations and we have looked into it and found statistically there is no jump into the number of complaints by people of Grandview-Woodlands."

Noting community policing volunteers do not have the power to arrest, she said on a "typical" volunteer night last week, she helped track down a dog at large in the park, returned some stolen property and helped two squeegee kids who were assaulted report the incident to police.

Mosca said the area council would be better served passing its complaints to the Police Complaints Commission.

"That would do a lot more good than just talking about it and not reporting it to anybody," she said. "The Grandview-Woodlands Area Council has been around in various guises since the 1970s and who is on the board seems to dictate what they do. Most residents' associations deal with traffic and so on; this particular organization is dealing with philo-