

After the September Parks and Environment Committee meeting, the first one at which the PFR policy staff's bake oven policy was introduced, I e-mailed every member of your committee to see if a few of us experienced bake oven friends could visit you to explain the problems with the policy. We asked you for fifteen minutes, at a time that suited you. But sadly, in the months between then and now, we got no takers. Ward Eighteen Councillor Ana Bailao helped set up an oven policy briefing session on Nov.1 – in case a joint session would be more interesting to councillors. But none of the members of your committee came to our session, nor – as far as I know -- did any of your office staff.

I'm guessing that you ignored our invitation *not* because you thought we are a particularly dull group of people, but because none of you feels that you have time for one more thing. It seems to me that you are all too busy to be able to give us the attention that we think this small matter needs. And it is a small matter – probably likely to affect no more than a handful of neighbourhoods, in the foreseeable future.

The matter of public bake ovens is so small, in fact, that some of us think it doesn't need a policy at all. You have city staff already who would do a fine job of collaborating with community groups and other divisions to get a few more ovens built and work out the operating routines.

But instead of building on existing resources, in the case of ovens or many others matters, you councillors are swamped by a crazy proliferation of policies and visionary plans that suck up your time. I hope that councillors will soon direct city staff to cut back on writing more policies and visionary plans and turn their attention back to the daily details of good order in our public spaces.

Until this happens, the proposed bake oven policy in its present form has big problems. It's almost completely unchanged from the first version despite a number of attempts by oven friends and bakers to collaborate with the PFR policy staff. The staff's policy as written will (1) discourage more bake ovens from being built; (2) if a few ovens slip through the cracks and get built, the policy will make them stand unused most of the time and (3) the policy has some important contradictions with parts of your Council's other policies, such as the User Fee Policy. But so far we've not found a way to discuss these contradictions with you. I mean, a real discussion of the kind we sought over the past two months, not a five-minute opportunity to give a little speech, like this.

To see that municipal councillors don't have time to become familiar even with some basic policy contradictions is very frustrating. Of course, this kind of frustration extends far beyond Toronto – for example our group will be watching to see what happens at the Ontario Court of Justice at Osgoode Hall next Monday, when the Ottawa Friends of Lansdowne Park bring their “due diligence” case against the Ottawa City Council. Toronto councillors should be interested too.

A few of us oven users have worked out some proposed amendments to the staff's bake oven policy. The amendments would certainly help, but I'll be surprised if they address all the problems. Therefore the amendment that I put most stock in is one calling for a review of the policy's effects in one year's time. Let's see in November 2012, how the oven policy turns out to work in real life.