



South Hill residents want parks, not parking lots

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Fraser street parking lots will go from disgusting to delightful if one local resident has her way.

Cheryl Sampson, the self-described "rabble-rouser of the area," lives on 49th Avenue, and doesn't like passing dirty lots when she heads to Fraser Street to shop. She is leading an effort to clean up a strip of parking lots between 42nd and 49th Avenues, just west of Fraser Street..

Sampson heads up an informal group known as the South Hill Neighbours. Together with four other women in the area, she coordinates community projects, and organizes meetings. The group's goal this time is to plant gardens, add benches, and build a mosaic path through the neglected parking lots, turning them into a greenway.

"We want to [encourage people to] get together and enjoy each other's company," she said.

Sampson has already planted some gardens in the area with her husband, Bill, but this new project is larger in scope. The group is seeking a \$10,000 matching grant from the parks board, and to raise an equal amount of money from local residents.

Sampson has also worked with the fledgling Fraser Street Business Improvement Association (FSBIA) in an effort to clean up the neighbourhood and the street itself.

Despite the fact that the FSBIA has not been welcomed by all local merchants – some of whom object to the fees the FSBIA will collect – Sampson is a staunch supporter. When the conflict over fees arose last spring, she sent notices to about 1,000 residents, and within 24 hours had 50 people meeting in her home.

"Residents and the BIA need to work together, and hopefully things will get done," Sampson said. "This is such a unique area. It's so multicultural, but it's so dirty."

K. Tony Gill, president of the Fraser Street BIA agrees.

"It's smelly in the summer, dirty in the winter. A lot from the past has fallen by the wayside."

Gill appreciates the efforts Sampson is making to bring the community together. "In a town everybody knows everybody," he said. "In a city, you might not know your neighbours so well."

Sampson's community efforts extend beyond her current beautification project. She organized a neighbourhood Block Watch program 10 years ago. She has been involved in a number of efforts to keep the neighbourhood safe, organizing meetings to combat theft and drug problems, and working with community police.

She said everyone needs to make a personal investment in the welfare of the community they live in. "We have to make a difference," she said. "Or we might as well give up and move away."