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Chris Selley: This summer let's ignore Toronto's anti-fun bylaws



CHRIS SELLEY | June 23, 2016 | Last Updated: Jun 23 3:57 PM ET
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A scene of kite-flying fun that you won't see in Toronto's parks.

Postmedia file

Another summer is upon us, and Torontonians are still officially forbidden to partake in various activities that all civilized societies consider routine. Let's focus today on two: playing the national sport and flying kites.

As all properly raised Torontonians know, chapter 950-300 of the Toronto Municipal Code insists "no person shall play or take part in any game or sport upon a roadway" — so, no road hockey. This week, the public works committee considered a staff report recommending that it remain illegal, and sent it along to city council, which will have a chance next month to remedy the situation.

Yet I am of two minds on the matter. The law is certainly a giant ass. But it could easily be more idiotic: it could permit street hockey under various minutely defined circumstances, and thereby empower bylaw goons to enforce it.

Street hockey in Canada is living proof that some things don't need regulating: some community standards pass effortlessly down through generations, and neighbourhoods punish transgressors extra-judicially. Furthermore, that such a safe and beneficial activity could be illegal ought to help instill a healthy suspicion of authority in the young.

Which brings us to kites, city policy on which is considerably more ridiculous.

In 2010, officials banned kites at Milliken and Bluffers parks in response to the purported scourge of kite-fighting, which can leave sharp discarded line lying around to injure seagulls and gum up city lawnmowers.

Coun. Chin Lee “said it isn’t practical to try to enforce a ban on just kite fighting,” CBC reported at the time, “so the city has decided to go for a ban on kite flying in general.”

That’s quite ridiculous on its own: kite fighting looks very different than kite flying, and the offending materials can easily be detected. But at least, I thought, it was limited to two parks.

Not so. Journalist John Lorinc recently tweeted a photo from Sunnybrook Park, where a hilarious sign full of prohibitions essentially invites visitors to screw off whence they came and never return: “ball playing and Frisbee by permit only;” “cyclists must dismount on hills;” “use of fire pits by permit only;” “organized gatherings of more than 25 persons by permit only;” and, citing section 608-19 of the municipal code, “kites or model aircraft prohibited.”

“Most of Toronto’s parks are not fit for kite flying under the Municipal Code,” said parks spokesman Matthew Cutler.



A pair of road hockey outlaws.

Peter J. Thompson/NF



John Lorinc
@JohnLorinc

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#topoli Toronto the (still) good. Frisbee permits can be submitted on line for review pending approval.

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Indeed, Section 608-25 of the code stipulates we mustn't fly kites "within 25 metres of any tree, building, light pole or hydro or other utility pole," and leaves it up to us to figure it out.

The only places in Sunnybrook Park that might satisfy these conditions, said Cutler, are "permit-based sport fields."

I wandered around the park Wednesday, and various other kite-prohibited places in the Don Valley. There are plenty of places to fly a kite safely, whatever the law says — not least those sports fields, should they happen to be unoccupied.

But that's not the worst, most insulting part. The worst, most insulting part is that Section 608-19, cited on the sign to support the kite ban, doesn't even mention kites. It's about remote-controlled aircraft and rockets.

"You're right that it is inaccurate," said Cutler.

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So in essence, Sunnybrook Park is lying to visitors in hopes of convincing them not to fly kites, when municipal bylaws — should you be inclined to respect them — actually leave it up to you to decide. I ask you: what kind of city imposes prior restraint, under false pretences, on the flying of kites? Why not go one better and ban whimsy and childlike wonder outright?

Enough of this insanity. This summer, let us resolve to take our city back.

Let's organize picnics in parks and invite 26 people without getting a permit. Let's drink a glass of wine at those picnics and not hide the bottle. Let's play road hockey with purpose and fly kites wherever we think is reasonable. I won't pay your fines, but if The Man gets in your hair I will investigate and publicly mock as appropriate.

To paraphrase The Simpsons' Superintendent Chalmers, the rod up this city's butt has a rod up its butt. This summer, let's get it out of there.

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 **M Juelann VanderMark** · Humber College North Campus
True freedom for everyone would mean anarchy; we need laws to govern those that wander the earth in stupidity and cause the rest of us grief. If everyone lived the Golden Rule we wouldn't need lawsuit-protecting by-laws that restrict everyday activities, would we?

I've seen a man try to teach his young kid to fly a kite in Centennial Park right under the hydro lines --when there was plenty of space to practice where there was no interference; stupid actions like these are what bring about restrictions. Don't blame the voters, blame the idiots whose actions caused these laws to materialize on the books in the first place!

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You can't legislate common sense....i

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Wow.

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Billy Mitchell

I was trying to get a kite up in the air for my son the other day and I was having a devil of a time with it. My wife yelled out to me; "You need more tail". I told her to make up her mind because the night before she had told me to go fly a kite.

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Vernon Wise

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and that is why I do not live anywhere near a city or suburb, I can do all those thing right on my own property while completely naked.

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Here in Cambridge ON swimming in your backyard pool after dark is prohibited. Therefore I am forced to skinny dip during the day.

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Tommy Knockers

Unfortunately, Toronto's new Mayor has been exposed as a total bureaucrat... Ford may have led a dubious personal life but he had a lot of common sense, which is sorely lacking in the running of the city today.

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Tory ran on a platform of being like Ford without the drama. But he's been morphing into Miller. Still, like the twerp in Ottawa, he knows that the secret to success is to get into photo ops at every opportunity and leave the work to others.

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