

Early park closings mar group's annual picnic

Early park closures put a damper on a picnic for an Ottawa organization serving people with disabilities, leaving them with no running water or bathroom facilities for their yearly festivities at Andrew Haydon Park.

For the past 10 years, Citizen Advocacy of Ottawa has held its picnic at the park, booking months in advance. When a staff member called the city last week to confirm, they were told city parks were officially closed for the year and there would be no washroom facilities, running water, or hydro.

"I was just furious when I found out," said Brian Tardif, executive director of Citizen Advocacy of Ottawa. "This obviously came about after we booked a section of the park. They never even informed us."

Mr. Tardif was told there would be portable toilets available in the park, but he soon discovered there was only one within a 10-minute walking distance. "It was totally unacceptable for public use," he said. Instead, the group's volunteers and staff shuttled people to and from local businesses.

City spokesman Michael Fitzpatrick confirmed Ottawa parks are now closed after Labour Day. However, he added the city will follow up with the organization to clarify the situation.

Mr. Tardif said the city's policy could rob their clients of a low-cost activity. "It is a public park," he said. "It is one of the few activities that people with disabilities can do, given their generally low incomes, and now it is in jeopardy. What does that say about our accessibility plan?"