



Submission to the City of Yellowknife

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

to the Yellowknife Community Plan



Tin Can Hill
Conservation
Committee



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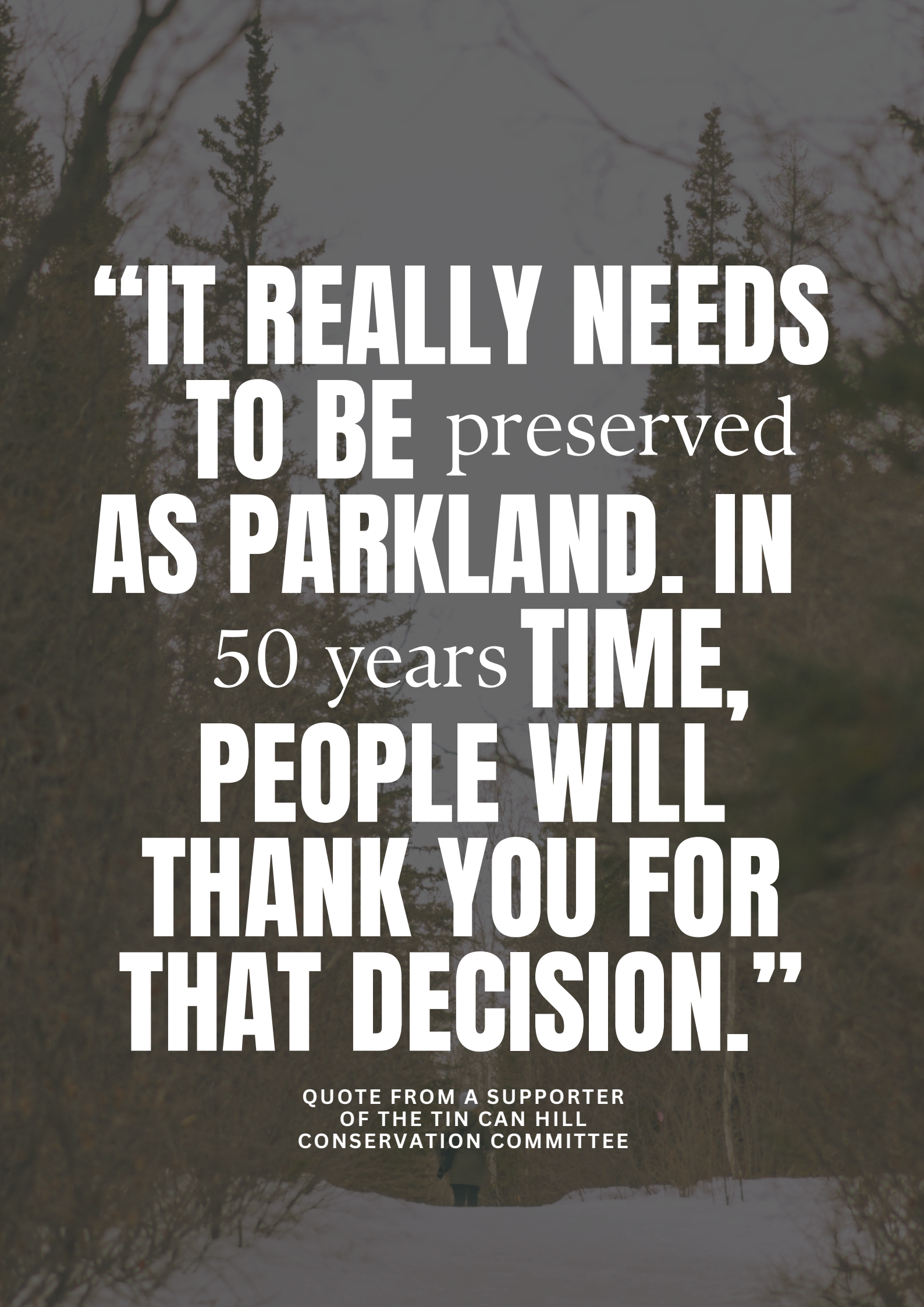
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**“IT REALLY NEEDS
TO BE preserved
AS PARKLAND. IN
50 years TIME,
PEOPLE WILL
THANK YOU FOR
THAT DECISION.”**

QUOTE FROM A SUPPORTER
OF THE TIN CAN HILL
CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, Tin Can Hill has repeatedly been brought forward by the City of Yellowknife (the City) and by private developers as a prospective location for housing and other developments (Annex A). Each time, citizens objected and made it clear that in their opinion the best use of Tin Can Hill is as undeveloped natural parkland. We have reviewed the City of Yellowknife Community Plan (the Plan), we have taken the opportunity to address this issue and bring forward a plan for longer-term certainty about land use on Tin Can Hill.

This submission is put forward by the Tin Can Hill Conservation Committee (TCHCC or the Committee). The Committee was formed in 2022 in response to plans to develop a polytechnic university campus on Tin Can Hill. The TCHCC's goal is to attain legislated, permanent protection of Tin Can Hill as a natural space, free from development and available for the respectful enjoyment of all citizens.

This submission proposes amendments to the Plan that will clarify and strengthen protection policies, objectives, and directives for all of Tin Can Hill and the adjacent Rat Lake.



CONTEXT

01

SCOPE OF AREA BEING ADDRESSED

This submission addresses all of Tin Can Hill, Rat Lake, and adjacent shorelines (the Area) (Figure 1, page 9).

02

CURRENT USE OF THE AREA

Since 2022, the TCHCC has undertaken various forms of public engagement regarding Tin Can Hill, including on-site polling of visitors and engagement at public events (e.g. Ramble and Ride, tables at the Yellowknife Co-op and the Yellowknife Farmers Market, the Spring Trade Show, and Earth Week). Citizens reported that **they engaged in a range of activities** in this area, including

- hiking/walking/running
- biking (summer and winter)
- dog walking
- skating
- skiing
- hockey
- snowmobiling
- geocaching
- photography
- birdwatching/nature viewing

Our engagement has also highlighted the Area's **significant mental health benefits** for residents. Often respondents identified how valuable it is to their overall health and well-being to have easy access to this quiet, natural space. Many times, access to Tin Can Hill was reported to enhance mental health.

Finally, respondents emphasized that Tin Can Hill is the only area left in the City proper where the public has **hiking access to Great Slave Lake**, and where one can enjoy beautiful vistas of the lake.

The TCHCC conducted on-site counts of Area use on randomly-chosen dates in March 2024 as follows:

- Wednesday March 26 (4 to 9 pm); 104 discrete visitors
- Saturday March 23 (10 am to 7 pm): 230 discrete visitors

Many visitors stated that they visited the Area multiple times per week. A rough extrapolation suggests that the area gets a minimum of **1,000 visits in a given week, or over 50,000 visits per year**.

CONTEXT

03

STRENGTH OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PERMANENT PROTECTION

Since 2022, the TCHCC has sponsored a petition regarding protection of Tin Can Hill^[1]. The petition was available for signature at www.change.org and a print version of the petition was available for signature at the events described above. After scrubbing the data to remove duplicates, bots, and non-Yellowknife residents, the petition has garnered 1,024 unique signatures (as of April 26, 2025). Over 5% of the adult (15 years and older^[2]) population of Yellowknife has signed this petition, which demonstrates significant support for retention of the current undeveloped status of the Area.

04

CURRENT LAND TENURE OF TIN CAN HILL AND RAT LAKE

Approximately half of Tin Can Hill is owned by the City of Yellowknife. A recent Level 2 Environmental Site Assessment^[3] concluded that the site was not suitable for residential or day care use without special site preparation activities (e.g. bulk soil removal, capping large areas with clean fill) taking place, which would significantly elevate development costs.

The rest of Tin Can Hill and Rat Lake (except the parking areas at the top of School Draw Avenue and at the Con Road end of Rat Lake, which are owned by the City) are currently under lease to Miramar (Figure 2). It is our understanding from personal communication with Miramar's management that these parcels have been remediated to a level that is not suitable for residential development but that would be acceptable for recreational use.

Terra Gold has an option, good until 21 November 2027, to acquire all of the Miramar lease, including Tin Can Hill and Rat Lake. If they do not, when the GNWT deems it satisfactorily remediated, the land reverts to the GNWT.

[1] [Petition · Protect Tin Can Hill Recreation Area From Development in Yellowknife - Canada · Change.org](#)

[2] [NWT Bureau of Statistics | Population - Estimates by Community](#)

[3] [appendix b - pgra tin can hill final 0.pdf; appendix c - roa tin can hill final 0.pdf](#)

CONTEXT

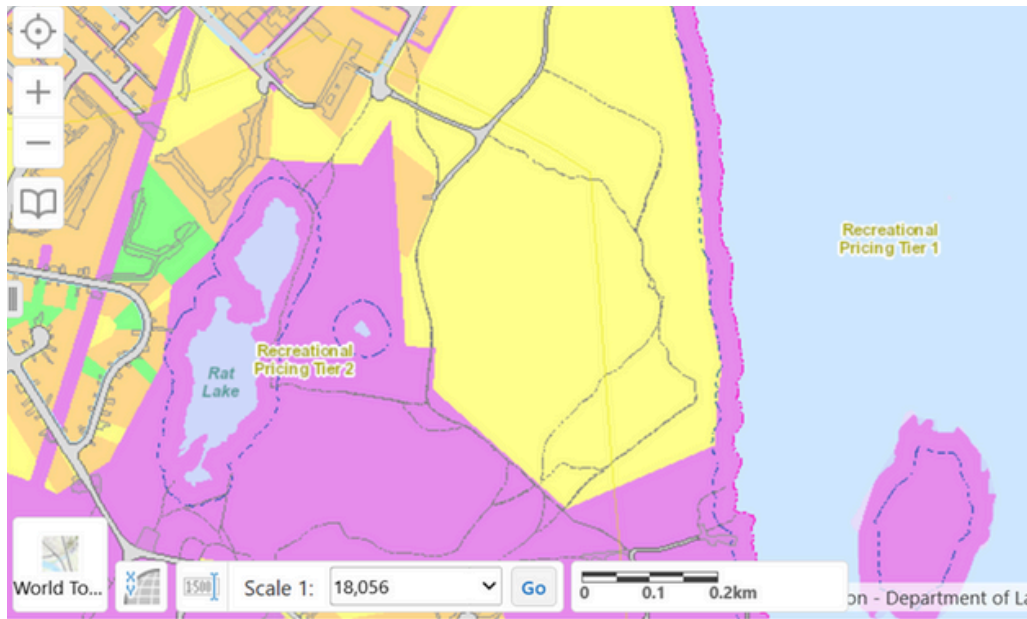


Figure 2. Screenshot from ATLAS. Land tenure in the Tin Can Hill/Rat Lake area. YELLOW is city-owned land; PURPLE is territorial land under lease to Miramar Con Mine Ltd.

05

CURRENT ZONING OF THE AREA

The Area is split across planning zones in the Plan. The City-owned portion of Tin Can Hill is part of the Central Residential zone. Rat Lake and the other part of Tin Can Hill are within the Con Redevelopment Area.

Because the Area is used, as a unified whole, by residents for outdoor recreation purposes, this configuration is not practical from a land use management perspective.

It is worth noting here that other jurisdictions across Canada have specifically described their green spaces as a particular type of infrastructure to be able to ascribe a value in dollars to the natural landscape within a city. A case example is The Saskatoon Green Networks' natural infrastructure project^[4], which provides people and wildlife with access to continuous, high-quality green spaces and natural areas in the city.

[4] [Reference Green Network | Saskatoon.ca](https://www.saskatoon.ca/green-network)

Here is an excerpt from the Green Network Website:

Part of the City's work includes quantifying the economic benefits associated with an enhanced Green Network. For example: Natural infrastructure like grasslands, forests, and wetlands are conservatively estimated to provide over \$48 million in services to the City of Saskatoon each year through storm water management, the provision of clean drinking water, quality of life through access to natural spaces, recreation, carbon sequestration, and more (Natural Capital Asset Valuation 2020)

CONTEXT

05

Saskatoon has taken a novel “equal status” approach to land management that balances the demands for growth and development with the shared need to create and maintain natural spaces for humans and wildlife within the city.

In the City of Yellowknife’s Smart Growth Development Plan (2010) there are several references to the value of Tin Can Hill as recreational parkland. The Plan mentions the fact that reserving Tin Can Hill for recreation and nature would encourage the City to focus on downtown intensification and the use of Brown Field sites, specifically in the Con Mine Area.

Planning policies and objectives for the Area are not clear, and they sometimes seem to conflict with each other. Although the Plan notes in numerous places how important Tin Can Hill is to citizens as an undeveloped natural area, actual zoning and planning objectives do not reflect this. The Plan says that the City-owned portion of Tin Can Hill will continue to be preserved as green space until it is needed for development. When it is developed, substantial portions would be maintained for trails and outdoor recreation. There is no yardstick to measure what constitutes a ‘substantial’ portion.

The other half of Tin Can Hill and Rat Lake are not addressed specifically in the Plan. Instead, the Plan notes that much of the Con Redevelopment zone will continue to be too contaminated for housing and will (should the City get the land transferred to it) be used for other purposes like outdoor recreation facilities (e.g. soccer fields)). It is not clear if Tin Can Hill and Rat Lake are viewed by the city as suitable for outdoor recreational purposes (and in any case, the TCHCC vision does not include structured permanent recreation facilities like soccer fields, arenas, etc.). The City plans to develop uncontaminated portions of the Con Redevelopment Area that are adjacent to existing roads, water/sewer for housing. Clarification is needed as to what areas are considered uncontaminated and development candidates.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

to the Yellowknife Community Plan

1. Creation of the Tin Can Hill/Rat Lake Regional Park

We propose that a new zone be created within the Plan - that of a Regional Park (Figure 1). The Area would be unified into this single zone. The purpose would be to provide strong and unambivalent protection to the Area as undeveloped natural parkland intended for outdoor recreation that requires little or no infrastructure.

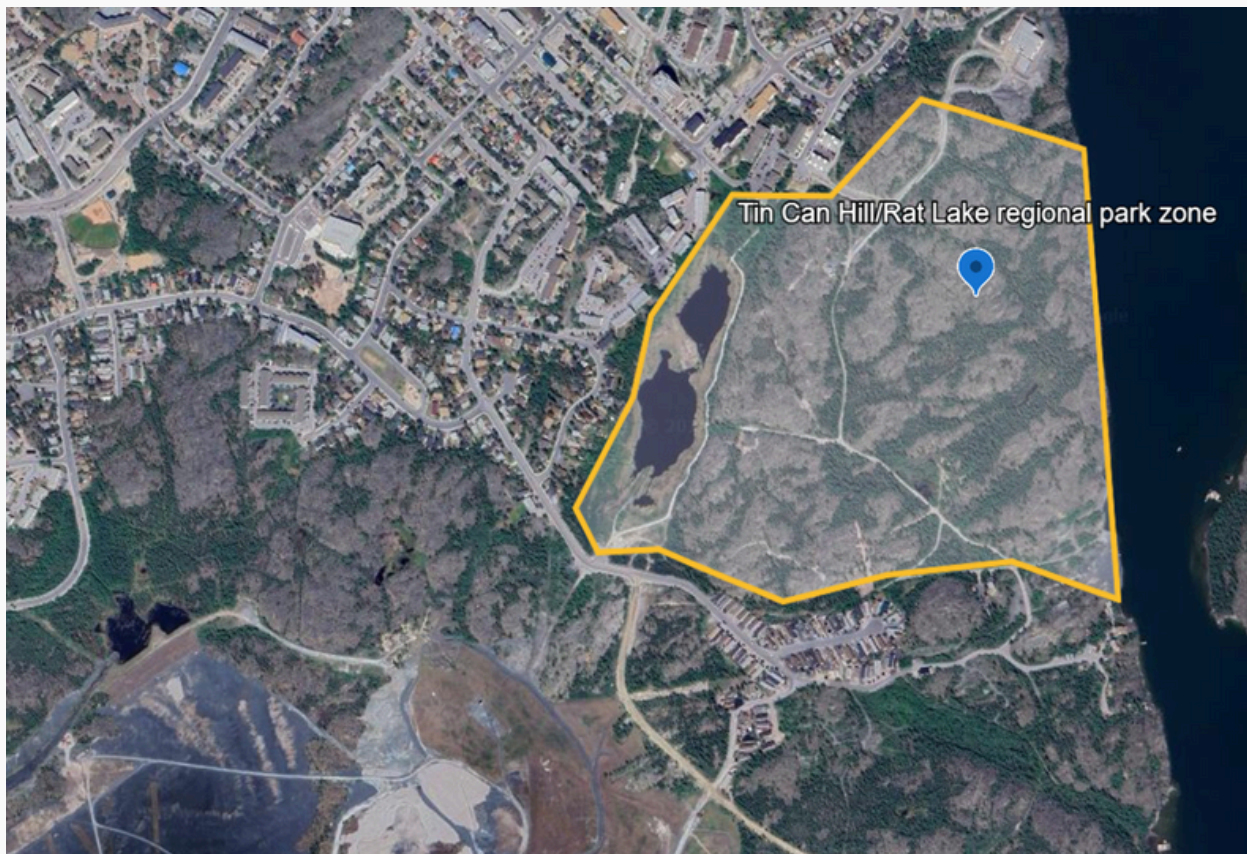


Figure 1. Study area and approximate boundary of proposed Tin Can Hill/Rat Lake Regional Park.



PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

to the Yellowknife Community Plan

2. Clarified and strengthened policy objectives for the Area

The new zoning should be accompanied by clear policy objectives for the Area, such as to:

- i. protect the area as undeveloped, natural parkland;
- ii. enhance the quality of life of residents and visitors by providing outdoor recreation space and opportunities to experience undiminished nature;
- iii. set aside a large, quiet, natural outdoor space that provides mental health benefits for residents;
- iv. promote ecological health by protecting and enhancing important natural landscapes within the City of Yellowknife; and
- v. prohibit development beyond limited infrastructure that may be required to enhance visitor experience (e.g. signage) or to protect the environment (e.g. boardwalks in sensitive habitats, garbage containers).

The TCHCC recognizes that for the time being, these actions will need to be considered as aspirational for the parts of the Area that are not owned by the City. However, we note that the current Plan contains numerous aspirational designations and policies, and so the approach above coheres with current Plan practice.

When land tenure of these lands is resolved, the City, relevant First Nations, the GNWT, and Gold Terra (as applicable) should consider arrangements to enable the Tin Can Hill/Rat Lake Regional Park zone to be protected under legislation as a Territorial Park, and a cooperative management agreement among the City, relevant First Nations, and the GNWT, as appropriate, should be developed.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

to the Yellowknife Community Plan

3. Other Considerations

The TCHCC has heard from City Administration and Council that suitable land for housing development is in very short supply and that this is the basis for the City's hesitation to be more assertive about setting aside Tin Can Hill as a long-term protected undeveloped natural parkland. We ask the City to consider the following points:

i. One cannot 'undo' development. Once a space is developed for housing, it is nearly impossible to go back to natural green space. Tin Can Hill is the last green space of significant size in this city that is within walking distance of many residents. City densification is good... but only to a point and in certain locations such as the downtown area. People need space to breathe and those spaces make a city attractive to residents, prospective residents, and tourists.

The City's 2010 Smart Growth Plan and Natural Preservation Strategy^[5] stresses that preservation of natural areas within the City is not only a critical Smart Growth objective, but is also 'inherently wrapped up with how lands are selected for development'. One strategy that the Plan identifies is to ensure that 'quantity, distribution and continuity targets are maintained throughout the city and by District'. Preservation of Tin Can Hill and Rat Lake is clearly in line with this strategy.

ii. We suggest that Urban System's 2024 projection of a 9.6% population increase in the City by 2035 may be impacted by emerging trends in the territory, in Canada, and internationally. Impending mine closures, very recent cuts to Canada's immigration levels, and potential economic stagnation from US tariffs could all decrease the need for new residential development in Yellowknife^{[6],[7]}.

[5] [Yellowknife Natural Area Preservation Strategy](#).

[6] [N.W.T. could lose hundreds of jobs and residents when the mines close, economist warns | CBC News](#)

[7] [Microsoft Word - DOCS-#761945-v1-](#)

[GOVERNANCE AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE AGENDA APRIL 8 2024.doc](#)

iii. The Plan identifies numerous parcels of land within the City boundary that could be available for housing, if they were transferred from the GNWT. Other land parcels that are currently unavailable because they are under lease or land withdrawal could, in the near future, return to the GNWT and thus potentially be available for transfer to the City^[8]. The TCHCC calls on city and territorial governments to expedite transfer of land parcels that are currently available, and of other land parcels if/when they come back under GNWT jurisdiction.

iv. The Plan also notes numerous vacant and underused lots held by private interests that could host new housing. The TCHCC supports the City to provide or increase incentives to private owners of vacant/underused lots to make those spaces available for new housing.

[8] V5 First Reading, p. 26.

Annex A

HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT CONTROVERSIES REGARDING TIN CAN HILL.^[9]

Between 1985 and 1989, the City of Yellowknife first actively studied Tin Can Hill as an area to expand the City's residential suburbs. One plan called for 410 single housing lots and five major apartment blocks. Ecology North presented in opposition to the plan. A canvassing of 165 homes in the immediate area revealed a 50/50 split opinion on the issue, while another statistic suggested that 4,000 people used the hill year-round for recreational purposes. Public forums drew huge crowds with a variety of perspectives.

A Tin Can Hill Association was formed in 1989 to advocate for balanced needs in the area. They presented a proposal for fewer houses in favour of more greenspace, which the City pushed back against. Ultimately, these plans did not proceed. In 1989, Con Mine asked the City to hold off on using Tin Can Hill for residential development as it might interfere with the mine's long term exploration plans. Instead, the City switched its focus to growth in the Frame Lake South and Range Lake North subdivisions. No significant mine exploration or development was ever conducted at Tin Can Hill.

In 2004, the City revised its General Plan and proposed putting Tin Can Hill residential zoning back on the agenda. City Councillors Mark Heyck and Kevin O'Reilly led a campaign to zone the area as greenspace. A newspaper telephone poll, when asking if the Hill should be preserved as parkland, demonstrated that 95% of callers (out of 205) were in favour of keeping it green.

Some of the phone messages were:

"Please don't let them pave it over and look like Niven Lake" ... "Even New York City has Central Park" ... "It really needs to be preserved as parkland. In 50 years time people will thank you for that decision" ... "Once wild space is gone, it's gone forever" ... "It's a beautiful spot and how much more development do we need?" ... "Tin Can Hill is a very special area to a lot of people" ... "I wonder how many times Yellowknifers can be asked this question? Is the City just waiting until we keep getting more and more people here who just don't care?" ... "Honey I shrunk the green space! That's what Yellowknife City council is saying. Sadly our quality of life is shrinking with it."

[9] Tin Can Hill Conservation Committee. May, 2023. Tin Can Hill - Historical Notes.

In November 2004, City Council voted 5-3 in favour of putting Tin Can Hill residential development in the General Plan; yet there was no immediate need to open these lands. Citizen use of Tin Can Hill continued uninterrupted for the next few years although there was a continual disconnect between residents and City administration on the value of the area. A 2007 report on the ecological resources of Yellowknife was panned by both residents and City Council members because of its methods of ranking well-trodden, close-to-town areas - like Tin Can Hill - as a lower value, compared to higher ranking areas outside of City limits. Ultimately, the report was not of any benefit to greenspaces within City limits that were more likely to be developed.

The question of including Tin Can Hill development in the City's General Plan was revived in 2008-2009. Supporters cited concerns about urban sprawl far from the City core and the cost of living. Detractors suggested downtown densification would be a more efficient option to address Yellowknife's housing problems. Yet another media poll (606 respondents) showed 54% against development, 39% in favour of limited development, and 7% in favour of full development. City Councillor Mark Heyck again led the charge for preservation, saying: "Any resident, free of charge, can find peace and serenity on top of Tin Can Hill." A compromise was reached in September 2009: a motion to rezone Tin Can Hill from "growth management" to "parks and recreation" was put on hold, but City Council also read a motion to remove reference to residential development from the General Plan, and to await the results of larger planning schemes for the City - effectively kicking the proverbial "can" down the road for a future City Council and administration.

Meanwhile, residential development on the periphery of the Hill was approved, leading in 2009-2010 to the construction of the Coppersky Condo complex at the end of School Draw Avenue. In 2012, land was set aside at the foot of the Hill for another condo project, which was finally completed in 2022.



Federal requirements for Yellowknife to have a new water treatment plant led to the first carving off of Tin Can Hill for development. In 2011, construction began on the water treatment facility on the shore of Yellowknife Bay, at the very northern tip of Tin Can Hill and adjacent to the original water pumphouse on 48th street/School Draw Avenue. The new facility cut into only a small portion of the area, and yet the visual impact on Tin Can Hill was immense. A new access road was created, necessitating - according to engineers - a shallower-grade road blasted through a large ridge from School Draw Avenue, rather than using the existing road off 48th street. “I understand a new water treatment plant is needed, but what they are doing and the amount of destruction of the landscape is horrible” said one local resident.



To some observers, it appeared that the City had intentionally engineered this road to allow for future development on Tin Can Hill. “The new road will be a perfect entry point for future development and surely the City has considered this” wrote a newspaper editorial. The release of the draft 2010 General Plan then revealed that Tin Can Hill was, once again, recommended for new developments, sparking another wave of debate. “The excuse of the water plant and a road through the middle is a dishonest way to take the first step to opening it for exploitation, not to mention a huge waste of my and others tax dollars,” wrote one resident. “Like always, it’s an uphill battle to achieve good healthy outcomes for the community.”

In January 2012, Tin Can Hill was successfully rezoned from “Growth Management” to “Parks and Recreation” by a pro-preservation City Council. Mayor Gord Van Tighem was pragmatic about the achievement: “If people want to one day decide to develop it and make a big push to do it, it would probably come back on the agenda. But for now, it is a park.” In addition to this zoning protection, Tin Can Hill was designated as one of only three “off-leash dog parks, and the City installed trash cans and permitted a boardwalk to be constructed over a marshy section of trail. Contributing further to area infrastructure, a bench to commemorate retired Catholic priest Rene Fumoleau was installed by Yellowknife citizens on the trail overlooking Yellowknife Bay, following his death in 2019.

Tin Can Hill remained an actively trodden greenspace without worry for the next ten years. Then, in 2022, a proposal for a new Aurora College campus and residence was brought before a Yellowknife City Council nearing the end of its term of office. The Government of the Northwest Territories was looking to build a new polytechnic university to replace its downtown college facility and had narrowed its focus on Tin Can Hill as one of the best options in Yellowknife. The northern portion of the hill overlooking Yellowknife Bay was intended for a campus with several additional amorphous circles identified for “future expansion”. City Council was asked to consider a rezoning of all of the city-owned portion of Tin Can Hill for this proposed use.

As expected, the proposal provoked high emotions from all sides yet again. In late 2022, a Tin Can Hill Conservation Committee was formed to provide a unified message to both levels of government - City and Territorial - that Tin Can Hill should be permanently protected as a natural space for the respectful enjoyment of all.

Poor economic outlooks put the polytechnic university campus development on an indefinite ‘hold’, and in March 2025 the City voted to terminate its Memorandum of Understanding with the GNWT and Aurora College regarding the Tin Can Hill campus.





Tin Can Hill Conservation Committee

