

November 21, 2007 - email

Good evening Mayor Jackson and Councilors of Burlington,

I was in attendance for part of tonight's Community & Corporate Services Committee Meeting and listened to the various public, staff and council comments regarding the Cumberland Park issue.

I discovered there to be a number of similarities with this issue and the process to that of the efforts to strive to preserve the parklands at General Brock.

While there are many complexities involved in each and it is never easy to produce a solution that everyone will agree on, I found myself reflecting on what could be considered to be a common sense solution that involves both Cumberland and General Brock.

It will not be new to you Jack, as The Save General Brock Parklands Committee raised the option before, but I believe it needs to be shared with all of you..... ..before it is too late.

As you read on, you may think to yourself – “this could never work”, “we are too far along in the process”, or perhaps “we could never get the parties to agree to this” .... BUT, please, I respectfully ask that you think about this with vision and an open mind. If you truly want to support the development of a sustainable city and one that has not forgotten about working together to find innovative solutions to some of the greatest challenges, I hope you will at least consider the following idea.

Oversimplified of course but this is my understanding:

- Assumption requires improved sports fields to support their needs.
- For over 20 years students have walked down the street dependant on the playfields (track, football and baseball) at General Brock.
- The HCDSB has expressed a strong interest in the past to relocate Assumption and possibly the addition of a new elementary school to the General Brock location.
- The Save General Brock Parklands Committee received input from the Assumption community in 2006 that they would embrace the school relocation including a letter of support from the head of phys-ed department (see attached)
- Unfortunately, the ship had sailed in regards to section 13 of the Education Act whereby when the HDSB declared GB surplus, they were required to first offer the property to any other interested educational institutions in Ontario – as the HCDSB had not confirmed their accommodation plans yet combined with Ministry policy delays – they had to take a pass at this rare opportunity.
- While the HCDSB has since constructed their needed high school elsewhere, they have not discounted the need for another elementary school in south Burlington and have expressed an interest in GB.
- The HDSB has not yet determined their final needs for the GB property but the latest public announcement indicated that they plan to make use of the building itself for administrative purposes for the next few years but will likely be taking steps for severance

application process to “dispose” of the majority of the property (green space and playfields)

- The community and city wide users want to hold onto these parklands for now and for future generations.
- Section 13 of the Education Act reads that if 3 years and 90 days have passed since a property was first declared surplus, the process of disposition must begin again. Thus, the GB parklands could be made available again to the HCDSB or any other interested educational institution before going to the open market (valued at \$11 million)– a great opportunity is now potentially upon us indeed.

### **Solution to consider:**

**Halton’s Education Boards work together with the City to identify this common ground, recognize individual needs, explore opportunities to share resources and .....“swap” properties!**

- The HDSB could relocate their administrative office needs to Assumption.
- Cumberland Park could remain as is and continue to accommodate the needs of the community and the various sports user groups that depend on it AND have the added bonus of nearby access to sports fields down the street at GB.
- HCDSB could relocate Assumption students and possibly their new elementary school to GB and have the playfields they require (and that they have already been using for many years but now as part of their own school yard)

Clearly not this simple and yes a very complex issue and sure lots more work but....

- Could this not be a better use of tax supported dollars overall?
- Could this not be considered a better overall solution for the students of St. Paul’s and Assumption (for example, if St. Paul’s was deemed surplus in future, the children could be relocated just down the street and would not have to be transported by bus elsewhere in the city)
- The most amount of green space could be preserved: the valued parklands at Cumberland and the valued parklands at General Brock. As Burlington’s population increases, our need for places to play does as well and yet the challenge will be greater. Let’s hold onto these lands before they are gone forever.
- Educational Public lands would be kept in educational public hands at both locations.
- This innovative solution could serve as a guiding principle for any future city wide school closures – working together to share resources to find solutions to benefit the people and the environment.

Burlington can do it! Look at surrounding Boards of education such as Toronto where they are finding new and better ways to address the issue of school closures and loss of valued green space. From the Toronto Catholic District School Board’s “Submission to Ontario Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs Pre-Budget Consultation” dated Feb 1, 2007:

- *One thing learned from past experience with school closures and the sale of school property is that taxpayers generally view school property as belonging to the public and as a community asset.*
- *.....the two English boards have been working together to come up with a plan to use existing capital assets (school properties) to generate significant revenues while keeping their use and ownership in public hands for future growth.....This can work, not only in Toronto, but across the province. It's a win-win for the province, for municipalities and for school boards and, of course, the public:*
  - *It helps the province by supplementing sources of capital funding for schools – thus saving the province money;*
  - *It gives municipalities an opportunity to provide green space and services to the community at little cost to the City; and*
  - *It gives the school boards the opportunity to optimize the value of their property now; and ensure the property will be available, in the future, to educate our children.*

As a parent and someone who is committed to doing my part to strive to leave the planet in better shape than it is now, I offer you this letter and I thank you for your time.

Amy Schnurr