

THE STORY ABOUT THE DIMINISHING PARKLANDS IN BURLINGTON AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Burlington has been losing its parklands at an alarming rate over the last 30 years due to school closures and the land being sold to developers. In the last 9 school closures, over 86% of their lands have gone to development, a loss of over 40 acres. (*1) In their place a few parkettes remain, with a couple of park benches instead of the acres of playfields and green spaces they replaced.

Burlington has already got a low ratio of green space per 1000 people by Canadian standards. (2.5 ha/1000 vs the Canadian median of 6.1) (*2) (*3) And Burlington is already short of playing fields. Adult soccer teams are forced to practice in neighbouring cities. (*4) The population of Halton is set to double in the next 25 years (*5), which will not improve this situation.

Also, Halton already has the 4th largest Ecological Footprint in Canada. At 8.76 ha it is 4 times greater than it should be. (*6) The single most important action to reduce our Ecological Footprint is to cut energy consumption. Yet the Halton District School Board has been declaring schools surplus and removing their green spaces from Burlington and Halton at an accelerating pace, forcing people and their children to get into their cars to go to their parks.

Many of the school lands being declared surplus and being sold for millions originally came to the Board at a nominal cost. The City of Burlington originally transferred the lands at General Brock H.S. to the Board for approximately \$3500.00 to build a vocational school in the 1960's. (*7) Acton paid \$5000.00 for the lands at McKenzie-Smith Bennett school in 1958, when it ran the local school board until it was absorbed into the Halton District School Board. (*8) Both cities have borne the cost of maintaining these lands since they were transferred. Yet the Halton District School Board, on January 7 and behind closed doors, voted to sell both these parcels of land, along with 6 other parcels across the Halton region. They want market value for them and will pocket 100% of the proceeds. The taxpayers of Burlington and Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville (where these parcels of land were declared surplus) cannot afford to compete with developers to repurchase these lands at market value.

The school boards in Ontario are being pressured by the government at Queen's Park to help fund new school projects. Currently the Halton District School Board needs \$14 Million to renovate Georgetown's district high school. (*9) The Ministry of Education's legislation currently requires that school boards get fair market value for the lands they sell and only 90 days to find another institution such as another school board, college, university or municipality to make an offer for them. (*10) As a result school lands across the province of Ontario are being lost to developers and the citizens in their communities are losing their parklands.

People are finally just beginning to realize what is happening to their communities and the implications of it. They are finally just beginning to realize that the government of

Ontario is causing the school boards to enrich themselves at the cost of their communities' parklands, yet this government is not taking the responsibility for the results. Kathleen Wynne, Minister of Education for the province, recently said in an interview that she defended the funding rules. "We have to let school boards recoup the value of the land so they can provide enhanced service," said Wynne. "The green space issue is really one that needs to be resolved collaboratively at the municipal and school board level," she added, and then she encouraged municipalities to consider green space protection into their long-term planning. (*11)

FOOTNOTES:

1.School name	size of property (ha)	park left	% lost
Elizabeth Gardens	2.51	0.41	84%
Fairfield	0.97	0.16	84%
Champlain	2.02	0.30	75%
Mountainside	2.02	0.20	90%
WE Breckon	2.83	0.60	79%
Wellington Square	1.88	zero	100%
Strathcona	1.66	zero	100%
Glenwood	3.73	1.07	71%
<u>Lawrie Smith</u>	<u>2.11</u>	<u>zero</u>	<u>100%</u>
TOTAL	19.73	2.74	86%

2. C. O'Hara-Griffin. City of Burlington Report Number PR 61/05. Burlington: November 21, 2005. page 5
3. Evergreen. Green Space Acquisition and Stewardship in Canada's Urban Municipalities. Results of a Nation-wide Survey. Published by Evergreen, 2004. page 7
4. Sarah Merritt-Kellogg. President of Burlington Women's Soccer League. Interview. Saturday, January 31, 2009
5. Gary Carr, Regional Chair. Chair's Corner. www.halton.ca/council/chairs_corner/2007_sept.24
6. Jeffrey Wilson and Mark Anielski. Ecological Footprints of Canadian Municipalities and Regions. Cms.burlington.ca.Assets91.aspx.. September 2004. page 17
- 7 Ministry of Consumer and Business Services. .Land Registry Office #20. Parcel Register. Page 1
8. Jim Wilkes. "Trustees' plan to sell sports field has Halton Hills mayor 'mad as hell' " The Toronto Star. February, 2, 2009 <http://www.thestar.com?News?GTA/article/581352>
9. ibid.

10. Ontario Regulation 444/98 of the Education Act (re: Disposition of Surplus Real Property). www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_reg_980444_e.htm

11. Marianne Meed Ward. "Parkland disappearing as schools closed". The Toronto Sun. January 25, 2009.
http://www.torontosun.com/comment/columnists/marianne_meedward/2009/01/25/81391