

June 9 – 2008 - Delegation to Council

Good evening Mayor Jackson, members of Council, staff and citizens of Burlington.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the issue of the strategic land acquisition bylaw .

I am here this evening on behalf of the Save General Brock Parkland Committee. This Committee was formed approximately 5 years ago when it was announced that the General Brock property was to be sold and thus, the largest area of school lands in the city's history at risk of being lost to development. We expect that the School Board may take steps to continue on this path, and thus the issue of the Strategic Land Acquisition Fund is quite relevant.,

While GB has been our focus and is a huge undertaking on its own, it has been through our research, and listening to people that we have come to learn about the devastating loss of parkland that has occurred in other parts of this city over this city over the years. It has opened our eyes wider to the extent of this issue and broadened our focus. (We have even considered changing our name to "Save Burlington Parklands" to more accurately reflect our broader vision and goals). Thus, the issue of parkland loss is NOT a special interest or neighbourhood issue. It is a city wide issue.

While certainly not the only green spaces lost to development, school parklands serve as an important example when looking at the resulting implications to a community and city.

Under the current city/school board negotiation process, when a school property is to be sold, typically a small area of parkland or a "parkette" is a result, This is not a successful outcome. Speak to those families, seniors, sports groups, and communities that witnessed & experienced first hand the devastating loss of their previously enjoyed parkland. They do not describe the results as "successful" at all.

The reality is when schools close and the land is sold for development, a significant hole is permanently left in the community and in the city. A hole that cannot be replaced.

When parkland is lost to development, there is no turning back. It is gone forever.

Here are some examples:

Elizabeth Gardens - 84% of original property gone

Fairfield - 85 % gone, Champlain, 86 %, Mountain Gardens -91%, WE Breckon - 82% , Wellington Square-100%, Strathcona - 100% , Glenwood - 71%, Laurie Smith 100%, Trinity Christian School - 100% gone....quite a few indeed.

And....there are 48 schools with a total of approx. 350 acres of valued green space in Burlington today. There has been no strategic plan to protect these lands...until now...hopefully. If there is no strategy, those percentages will simply continue and as our population climbs, the pressures on the remaining spaces will also climb.

Do the school boards and the Min Of Ed have a role to play in protecting these parklands?
Absolutely. In fact. the issue of school parkland loss is only growing in concern across this province

& Canada. The broader issue of school parkland loss should be addressed at a provincial level but only if municipalities work together to raise this issue as a priority with them.

Public lands should and must stay in public hands. Many of you have shared similar comments to this affect. It is OUR city afterall. Why should the taxpayer be on the hook for funding these properties over the years only to have to later pay millions of tax dollars to repurchase them and compete with developers to hold on to them? The public does not understand why the different levels of government are not working together to address this crisis?

We need something to be done about it. Once and for all. For the future well being of Burlington, I ask you now, will you our Mayor or a member of Council or ultimately all of you collectively agree to champion this city wide issue and take it to the province along with our support?

In the meantime, Burlington itself has a responsibility to allocate funds to protect the green space it can. The current balance in the fund is in excess of \$900,000. Imagine if this initiative was implemented years ago. It could have rescued some of those complete school parklands I referenced already. Now that would be "successful".

Before you today is an opportunity. A very important one with far reaching implications. I urge you to unanimously vote in support of the bylaw amendment to ensure the fund is used solely for the purpose of at risk green space acquisition. Don't compromise the ability of this fund to serve its purpose by arguing that you need it to be more "flexible" or to "support other strategic needs" etc. The amendment wording provides ample flexibility but more importantly it ensures Burlington parkland as a fighting chance.

The Strategic fund and bylaw can be a true commitment to the environment. Instead of focusing your arguments on opposing the ammended wording before you, won't you please, agree to work **together** on this. Be the first Council to really start taking action to protect our green spaces. Thank you.

Amy Schnurr