



# TORONTO MICHAEL WALKER

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**TO:** **Sheila Ward, Chair, Toronto District School Board**  
**Josh Matlow, Trustee, Ward 11, Toronto District School Board**  
**Gerri Gershon, Trustee, Ward 13, Toronto District School Board**  
**Sheila Penny, Executive Superintendent, Facilities, Tor. District School Board**  
**Rauda Dickinson, Superintendent of Education, Toronto District School Board**  
**Varla Abrams, Principal, Northern Secondary School**

**FROM:** **Councillor Michael Walker, St. Paul's**

**DATE:** **February 15, 2007**

**SUBJECT:** **"Field of Dreams" Proposal – Community Meeting – February 1, 2007**

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I am writing to convey the outcome of a recent community meeting Councillor Cliff Jenkins and I held regarding the "Field of Dreams" proposal for rehabilitating the playing field at Northern Secondary School.

The meeting was held at Greenwood College School (Mt. Pleasant Road/Davisville Avenue) on Thursday, February 1, 2007 in response to growing concerns in the community about several aspects of the project, most particularly, the installation of an air-supported dome over a portion of the field during winter.

Notice of the meeting was delivered to the local neighbourhood and posted online. Formal invitations to attend the meeting were extended to the local School Trustees and the appropriate senior staff of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). The North Toronto Soccer Club, Stop Dome Residents Group, the Sherwood Park and Roehampton Ratepayers' Associations and local residents attended the meeting. Toronto District School Board Trustees and staff did not attend this meeting.

There continues to be a high-level of interest in the community with respect to this proposal as evidenced by approximately 200 residents in attendance at the meeting, many of whom commented that they were pleased to finally have an opportunity to discuss the issue in a public forum.

The meeting began with statements from representatives of the two key stakeholder groups (Mr. Doug Blair for the North Toronto Soccer Club and Mr. Gary Sills for Stop Dome) followed by remarks from staff representing various departments at City Hall (Mr. Tim Burkholder, City Planning; Mr. Stephen Benjamin, Transportation; and, Officers Margaret Belton and Tracey Gillam, Parking Enforcement, Toronto Police Service).

Mr. Doug Blair provided an overview of the Field of Dreams project and spoke briefly about the Soccer Club's history in the community and how it came to be involved in making this proposal at Northern.

He pointed out that currently, the turf at Northern Secondary is in such poor condition that the field is often unusable. He also stated that more than 1/3 of all TDSB playing fields in the North Toronto area are closed for repairs.

Mr. Blair did not address concerns relative to the potential impacts of the proposal on the surrounding community but emphasized two major benefits the 'Field of Dreams' proposal would provide to the School Board, students, and soccer club members:

- 1) installation of a brand new playing field at minimal cost to the TDSB.
- 2) access to a top quality, year-round soccer facility in the community.

Mr. Gary Sills described how the community's frustration over the lack of public consultation and the "done deal" attitude expressed early on by some of the Field of Dreams proponents led to the formation of the Stop Dome group.

Mr. Sills summarized the residents' three major areas of concern as follows:

- 1) Impacts related to the installation of an air-supported dome
- 2) Reduced neighbourhood safety and security as a result of more traffic and increased demand for on-street parking
- 3) TDSB's lack of public consultation and transparency over the past 15 months since the proposal was first brought forward.

Mr. Sills indicated that local residents recognize the deficiencies of the current facility and strongly support the concept of upgrading the playing field to meet the needs of the school, its students and the local community.

However, he argued that the current proposal, which includes the installation of a three-storey air-supported dome over part of the field during the winter, is predicated primarily on meeting the needs of the North Toronto Soccer Club, who acknowledge that the dome component is essential to making their proposal financially viable.

Mr. Sills urged the TDSB to go back to the drawing board and design a proposal to improve the playing field, without a dome, that addresses the needs of the school and the athletic program without compromising student and community access by granting exclusive use of the field to a third party during non-school hours.

Mr. Tim Burkholder explained that the City's Building Department would not be involved in this matter unless the Toronto District School Board voted to approve the 'Field of Dreams' project and brought forward a building permit application. At that point, the building department would evaluate what other permissions, if any, might be required under the Planning Act, the Official Plan and/or the Zoning By-law.

Mr. Stephen Benjamin of Transportation Services referred to a study conducted by Transportation Services to review the possibility of providing additional parking opportunities on streets (Rawlinson Avenue, Fairfield Road, Roehampton Avenue, Broadway Avenue) in the vicinity of Northern Secondary School.

The results of the study indicated that there is an opportunity to gain 6 additional parking spaces on Rawlinson Avenue, if the current single-sided on-street parking was switched from the east side to the west of the street, subject to approval by residents living on that section of the street.

Beyond that, the study found that there were no further locations where parking could be implemented on the sides of the roadways where parking is currently permitted. Mr. Benjamin also noted that due to the 8.5 metre width that exists on the above-noted roadways, there would be no opportunity to gain parking spaces where parking is currently prohibited. Mr. Benjamin also suggested that the TDSB should fully investigate any opportunities for public parking on their own property.

Officer Peggy Belton of the Toronto Police Parking Enforcement Unit described the area around Northern Secondary School (NSS) as being beset by inordinately high volumes of traffic and congestion on local streets and a severe shortage of on-street parking spaces. She stated that an intensified use of the site, such as is envisioned in the 'Field of Dreams' proposal, would further exacerbate the current problems.

Many residents voiced their views on the proposal. It was clear that everyone in attendance agreed that Northern Secondary School's playing field needs to be repaired and regularly maintained to a better standard. It was also clear that the vast majority of residents in attendance opposed the installation of an air-supported dome on the site.

The following is a quick summary of additional comments and questions by the audience which were not previously covered by the speakers:

- the safety and environmental sustainability of artificial turf versus natural turf should be investigated fully by the TDSB with the help of a landscape architect
- did TDSB and/or NTSC investigate other sites for this proposal?
- retaining-wall flanking Rawlinson Avenue needs repair and funding should be earmarked for that first
- the proposal should be tailored to suit the neighbourhood and not the other way around (as with this proposal)
- area is already too densely developed and it cannot handle any intensified use
- loss of greenspace is a problem
- lack of community access to the playing field is a problem now
- what is contained in the 10-page draft Memorandum of Understanding that NTSC submitted to TDSB in June 2006?

This proposal is not in its infancy but has been considered by the TDSB for 15 months now. Many neighbourhood residents conveyed disappointment with the TDSB's past and current process because it continues to leave them in limbo as to whether this is a genuine proposal, whether the consultation and decision-making process actually includes them, and whether there is any other feasible plan to renew and maintain the playing field.

I do not believe it is appropriate to continue to leave the parties in limbo – the neighbourhood residents, the North Toronto Soccer Club, and most of all the students who have been eagerly awaiting any improvement whatsoever to the condition of the playing field. It is time for the TDSB to confront this issue head-on out of respect for all those involved.

Based on the comments made by residents in attendance, letters and emails I have received from the community and concerns expressed by city staff, it is my assessment that the 'Field of Dreams' proposal will have significant negative impacts on the local neighbourhood.

Clearly, the dome component is a make or break issue in the community. It is also clear however, that the School's interest is in improving the playing field not in constructing a dome.

While I recognize that the final decision on this proposal lies with the TDSB and I, as a City Councillor, do not have a vote in that decision, based on the sentiments expressed at our public meeting, the "Field of Dreams" proposal should not proceed. The TDSB should begin a new process in consultation with both the school community and the local residents, to improve the playing field. When doing so, we advise you to consider the comments made by one local resident toward the end of the meeting which we found to be very insightful. He suggested that in order to properly evaluate and comment on any proposal, the neighbourhood residents must first be presented with:

- 1) a clear definition of the proposal including a vetted financial plan.
- 2) full and timely answers to resident questions on the proposal.
- 3) a properly documented evaluation of alternate plans to the proposal.

Please be advised that if the 'Field of Dreams' proposal does not proceed, if the TDSB wishes, I will request City Council to redirect the same \$130,000 contribution to the TDSB for another initiative to renew the playing field at Northern Secondary, conditional upon a proper public consultation and support from the community.

If you have questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Walker  
Councillor – St. Paul's

Cc// Councillor Cliff Jenkins