



... Memo

CC 25-09-1

To: The Chair and Members of Community and Corporate Services Committee

From: Mayor Cam Jackson

Cc: Scott Stewart, General Manager Community Services
Kim Phillips, Acting General Manager Corporate Services

Date: June 11, 2009

Re: BurlingtonGreen: Resolution Regarding Ontario Regulation 444/98
(Disposition of Surplus Real Property)

Chair Goldring and Members of Community and Corporate Services Committee,

As Members of Committee are aware, BurlingtonGreen has been working with its community partners investigating possible legislative remedies giving local school boards the opportunity to consider more flexible approaches and innovative solutions to the disposition of surplus school sites. BurlingtonGreen has made a formal request to my office to sponsor a resolution for Committee's consideration (attached letter dated June 5,2009).

As Committee knows, a large majority of existing public green space or active or passive parkland associated with surplus schools sites and owned by local school boards have been in use by the public for decades and have become significant elements of the immediate and in many cases the broader community's system of publicly accessible parkland, open space and trails.

At the present time, local school boards are severely constrained in their consideration of innovative, community oriented and future focused opportunities for the disposal of surplus properties by Ontario Regulation 444/98 (Disposition of Surplus Real Property) and in particular the regulation's requirement that an "offer must be for sale, lease or other disposition of the property at fair market value".

Municipalities do not have the capital resources available to purchase surplus lands at 'fair market value' in accordance with Regulation 444/98 and as such, valuable green space is lost to the community as school boards seek to meet the requirements of the regulation. However, through negotiation, creative planning and re-development strategies, municipalities are able to work with the local school boards and the community to develop mutually acceptable solutions to preserve green space for future generations to enjoy. Cumberland Park is a recent example of an innovative redevelopment approach of potential surplus school lands in Burlington and one which earned praise from the Provincial Minister of Education for the "thoughtful and cooperative efforts in arriving at an arrangement that appears to be of benefit not only to the students of the HCDSB but to the general community in the City of Burlington."

Moreover, the Provincial Government's Places to Grow Act encourages municipalities, conservation authorities, non-governmental organizations and other interested parties to develop a system of publicly accessible parkland, open space and trails within a planning framework that occurs in a rational

and strategic way. Places to Grow encourages municipalities to establish urban open space systems within built-up areas, including rooftop gardens, communal courtyards and public parks.

It is clear therefore, that the sale of existing, public green space or active or passive parkland associated with surplus school sites by local school boards solely and fully for commercial redevelopment is fundamentally contrary to the intent, purpose and spirit of The Places to Grow Act.

Finally, the City of Burlington's Strategic Plan (Future Focus 7) supports the principles outlined in The Places To Grow Act and where "City and community services, programs, parks and facilities contribute directly to the exceptional quality of life enjoyed by Burlington citizens" (Goal 2). Moreover, Future Focus 7 lists the expansion of opportunities for residents to experience and enjoy Burlington's many parks and natural areas as a key strategic action (Section 2.1) and more particularly, encourages the city to work closely with Halton Region, Conservation Halton and other partners to develop a long term strategy to protect, enhance and expand natural areas and parklands. (Section 2.1B).

Burlington Green has worked to develop a resolution for Committee's consideration reflects the above noted principles. It is a community-sponsored and community-driven request for Community and Corporate Services Committee and ultimately Council to support their efforts to seek changes to Regulation 444/98. The following resolution encourages the Provincial Government and the Ministry of Education specifically to amend Reg. 444/98 to allow local school boards and municipalities to work together to seek innovative, community-oriented and future focused opportunities for the disposal of surplus properties.

The following resolution is therefore presented for Committee's consideration:

- WHEREAS Ontario's Places to Grow Act recognizes that in order to accommodate future population growth, support economic prosperity and achieve a high quality of life for all Ontarians, planning must occur in a rational and strategic way and;
- WHEREAS the Government of Ontario recognizes within the Places to Grow Act that an integrated and coordinated approach to making decisions about growth across all levels of government will contribute to maximizing the value of public investments and;
- WHEREAS a key purpose of the Places to Grow Act is to enable decisions about growth to be made in ways that sustain a robust economy, build strong communities and promote a healthy environment and a culture of conservation and;
- WHEREAS the Government of Ontario's Places to Grow Act encourages municipalities, conservation authorities, non-governmental organizations and other interested parties to develop a system of publicly accessible parkland, open space and trails including shoreline areas, within the Greater Golden Horseshoe and;
- WHEREAS the Places to Grow Act encourages municipalities to establish an urban open space system within built-up areas, which may include rooftop gardens, communal courtyards and public parks and;
- WHEREAS the sale of existing, public green space or active or passive parkland associated with surplus school sites by local school boards solely and fully for commercial redevelopment is fundamentally contrary to the intent, purpose and spirit of the Places to Grow Act for the Greater Golden Horseshoe as identified above and;

WHEREAS a large majority of existing public green space or active or passive parkland associated with surplus schools sites and owned by local school boards have been in use by the public for decades and have become significant elements of that community's system of publicly accessible parkland, open space and trails and;

WHEREAS local school boards are constrained their consideration of innovative, community oriented and future focused opportunities for the disposal of surplus properties necessary to meet the purpose, intent and spirit of the Places to Grow Act because of Ontario Regulation 444/98 (Disposition of Surplus Real Property) and in particular the Government's requirement that an "offer must be for sale, lease or other disposition of the property at fair market value";

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED,

THAT the Government of Ontario immediately amend Ontario Regulation 444/98 (Disposition of Surplus Real Property) to require meaningful consideration of innovative, community oriented and future focused opportunities for the disposal of surplus properties necessary to meet the purpose, intent and spirit of the Places to Grow Act by supporting a municipality's system of publicly accessible parkland, open space and trails and further;

THAT the Government of Ontario and the Ministry of Education direct local school boards to explore innovative, community oriented and future focused opportunities for the disposal of surplus properties with local municipalities on a 'first right of refusal basis' in order to meet the purpose, intent and spirit of the Places to Grow Act by supporting a municipality's system of publicly accessible parkland, open space and trails and further;

THAT the Government of Ontario and the Ministry of Education introduce sufficient flexibility in the Ontario Regulation 444/98 (Disposition of Surplus Real Property) requirement for local school boards to sell, lease or otherwise dispose of property at fair market value for the purposes of those projects that meet the purpose, intent and spirit of the Places to Grow Act by supporting a municipality's system of publicly accessible parkland, open space and trails.

All of which is respectfully submitted and it is recommended:

THAT the Council of the Corporation of the City of Burlington endorse the resolution presented in the Mayor's Memo on behalf of Burlington Green to Community and Corporate Services Committee on June 24, 2009 and further;

THAT this resolution be circulated to the Premier of Ontario, the Ontario Minister of Education, Burlington MPP's, GTA Mayors, the Chair and Members of the Halton District School Board and the Halton Catholic District School Board and to the Chair and Board of Directors of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.



Cam Jackson
Mayor

October 6, 2008

Ms. Amy Schnurr,
Director of Communications
General Brock Park Committee
3281 Myers Lane,
Burlington, ON
L7N 1K6

Mr. Peter Hume, President
Association of Municipalities of Ontario
200 University Avenue, Suite 801
Toronto, ON
M5H 3C6

Dear Peter,

We would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with us on September 26th

We appreciate your support in recognizing the significant implications of parkland loss resulting from school closures and hope that you will be able to raise this as a key issue with the AMO Board. Schools are closing at an alarming rate across the province not only resulting in the loss of community school buildings but also the loss of valuable school green spaces & playfields. These school parklands serve as the heart of the communities, connecting residents, supporting opportunities for healthy lifestyles and of course they respect the need to preserve our green environments, particularly within our urban municipalities.

You asked for a review of the key items of our meeting discussion and they are provided as follows:

To date, over 300 schools have closed across Ontario and this year alone 52 schools have been deemed for closure, affecting 17 different municipalities. Additionally, there are 117 schools currently under review with "Accommodation Review Committees". For example, Thames Valley School Board has had 4 schools closed from 2000 to 2005, and this year are faced with 11 additional schools deemed closed or recommended for closure and there are an additional 33 under ARC review! This scenario is currently being played out across Ontario.

In April 2008, a Working Group Report by the General Asset & Program Planning Committee of the Toronto Public School Board recommended closure of 100 elementary schools due to declining enrolment. This is taking place at the same time "Places to Grow" is mandating growth and intensification of the 905 & 416 areas. As City planners explore opportunities for intensification, it is critical that school parklands be included in the process and again, that an effective strategy be in place to secure these community parklands from the increasing pressures of infill

development. For example, The Region of Halton is expected to grow from 440,000 to 780,000 by 2021 and at the same time is experiencing losses in school parkland with 10 closures to date in Burlington, and 4 closures expected this year in Oakville. Quoting the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, "Schools are more than bricks and mortar, schools contribute to the student, the school system, the local economy and **the community**, and these contributions must be considered."

There is an abundance of research to support the social, economic, health and environmental benefits of municipal green space, parkland within walking distance and playing fields for children and adults. School sites play a vital role in the provision of these community assets. In many neighbourhoods, the school parklands serve as the only green space or facility for community activities and recreation. It is critical that the framework and support be put in place to ensure these parklands are preserved if we are really going to create a sustainable future for Ontario.

When schools are closed, municipalities are put in the position of having to purchase the sites in order to hold onto valued green space that the city's residents have come to enjoy and depend on for many years. However, they face two, often insurmountable obstacles. Legislation (ON444/98) clearly states a sale must be at "fair market value". With the alarming escalation of school closures within the last few years, purchasing these sites can be a daunting and impossible feat for even the best-planned municipalities.

Additionally, other educational institutions are only given a 90 day period in which to act and make an offer to purchase these sites. This short timeline acts as a deterrent for other school boards and government institutions wanting to review their own accommodation plans and allows little time for municipalities to explore other uses for the sites. The "People for Education Annual Report" states, "Current provincial policy hinders rather than helps integration of services in schools. It does not support cooperation across Ministries or levels of government, or between school boards and their municipalities."

It should also be noted that municipalities are expected to pay fair market value at the same time schools are being given preferential treatment (no property taxes are collected and no compensation is paid to the municipalities for the administration on the collection of school taxes). Residents do not distinguish between municipal parkland and school parkland and they should not be expected to repurchase these sites at different levels of government. Taxpayers should only be expected to pay once and "Public Lands should remain in Public Hands".

As the AMO, we look to you to represent the interests of residents and municipalities of Ontario and hope you will recognize the issue of school closures and the loss of valued municipally used parkland as an important one and become instrumental in bringing recommendations to the province on this matter. We believe the broader interest of municipal residents would be better served if the lands on which schools are located were transferred to the jurisdiction of the municipalities so that they can be secured in perpetuity.

We would like to put forth some specific recommendations for AMO consideration:

1. A review of and change to the Legislation 444/98 that currently only allows a 90 day period for another School Board, University, College or Municipality to make an offer on the site. A broader timeline would allow for the school sites to remain as educational lands with other educational institutions being given more time to review their own future accommodation plans, or allow municipalities to explore innovative options to reuse the school facilities and surrounding green space.
2. A review of the current "fair market value" stipulation that limits the ability of acquisition by municipalities. Amending this would certainly more accurately reflect the rights and interest of taxpayers who are being asked to repurchase these sites. As stated above, ultimately a complete transfer of educational lands (not buildings) to the municipalities would best support a sustainable future with preserved green space. Alternatively, the legislation could be amended to include a more affordable acquisition plan for municipalities. For example, lands deemed surplus by the school boards could be acquired by the municipality at 15% to 25% of the market value with a phased in payment plan. In doing so, our cities would have a more reasonable chance to secure these properties for their current and future citizens. (The Ministry of Education must recognize the true "origin" & "ownership" of these lands when considering the suggested amendments to the disposition process. Many of these properties were simply transferred to the school boards at no cost, donated or far below market rates in the first place)
3. Municipalities should be allowed to rezone school sites from single family residential to a higher density rate for school buildings and parking with a lower rate for the surrounding green space. This would provide a more reasonable opportunity for municipalities to retain valued green space, while at the same help the school boards secure funding. This recommendation would also help to honour the original "footprint" of the site, keeping development where the former school building was situated while preserving the valued green space.

Declining enrolment is not only the biggest crisis facing school boards today, it is becoming a crisis for municipalities as well. Municipalities never anticipated the closure and loss of these sites when planning for the future of their communities. Each municipality shares common ground when it comes to the challenges of current legislation and their struggle to hold onto valued green space. However, each is currently facing this issue separately and each community is acting alone. We believe it would be in the best interest of all Ontario residents if a united voice could raise this important issue with the Province of Ontario. They need to recognize that declining enrolment is not just leading to the loss of our schools but to a greater loss of our parkland, green space and play fields. Once this land is developed, it is gone forever.

We are hoping you will consider the information provided and agree to champion this important issue on behalf of the interests of the current and future generations of Ontario. By working together, we can create a more sustainable future.

Best Regards,

Amy Schnurr
Director of Communications
Save General Brock Park Committee
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amyschnurr@sympatico.ca



Save General Brock Parklands Committee
3505 Spruce Ave., Burlington ON, L7N 1K4 (905 639-2262)

February 5, 2009

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne,
Minister of Education,
Mowat Block, 900 Bay Street,
Toronto, ON
M7A 1L2

Dear Ms. Wynne,

Re: Legislation Change

Neighbourhoods in communities all around the Province are losing invaluable parkland and greenspace as schools close and school lands are sold off. Provincial legislation that allows this to happen must be changed.

This loss of greenspace and sports fields is devastating to these established communities. In older areas, the schoolyards are often the only significant parkland/greenspace in the area. Their loss cuts out the heart of the community. Countless children lose playing fields, seniors lose safe areas to walk, moms can no longer take their children to the park.

We find it a contradiction that the Ministry of Education's policies support healthy lifestyles, community partnerships and environmental education and stewardship while at the same time the Ministry's current school disposition legislation prevents municipalities from maintaining valued green space and playing fields — resources that are an integral part of the health and well being of the community. This legislation is also at odds with the Ministry's stated goal of "... supporting schools as centres of communities: reducing the number of school closures, and improving community use of schools."
(From What We Do: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/whatwedo.html>)

The loss of this parkland will become more critical as redevelopment occurs in older areas, under the Places To Grow legislation, and populations intensify. As well, the Province is encouraging municipalities to develop more sustainably. These things cannot be accomplished without a loss of quality of life to Ontario's citizens unless The Ministry of Education's school disposition legislation is changed.

Our community of Burlington has suffered a terrible loss of parklands and greenspace from school closures. Ten school closures have resulted in the loss of over 40 acres of community land and with a projected 50,000 more people moving into the city over the next 5 years, it is more critical than ever before that the multiple levels of government work together to ensure our remaining "pockets of green" are protected.

We are now facing the most significant loss of all with irrevocable implications. The Halton District School Board, with no public consultation or review, has voted to sever and sell the estimated 20 acres of community soccer fields, baseball diamonds, parkland and irreplaceable greenspace at General Brock Park (Gary Allen), the largest school site in the history of our City. Under Legislation 444/98, Burlington citizens have no option to save these lands but to re-purchase these once publicly owned lands at "fair market value" — an unsupportable burden of tens of millions of dollars.

We are requesting the Ministry of Education make changes to Legislation 444/98 to:

1. Eliminate the "fair market value" stipulation that limits the ability of Burlington and other communities to acquire the land and unfairly penalizes taxpayers who paid for the land originally, only to see it transferred to a regional school board at nominal cost.
2. Allow municipalities to rezone school sites to more accurately reflect their required and traditional use: school sites and adjacent parking lots zoned as institutional and the surrounding green space supported, maintained and enjoyed by the taxpayer, designated as parkland zoning.
3. Extend the current 90-day period for another school board, university, college or municipality to make an offer on a site. A longer period would allow sufficient time for educational institutions to adequately review how the site might fit **future plans** and allow municipalities to explore innovative options to maintain the parklands for the community.

Until recently, communities have fought these losses individually but we are now connecting with each other across the Province, sharing strategies and working together to preserve our communities' parklands.

We have many ideas on how to protect these valuable greenspaces for the community's use. We are requesting a meeting with you to discuss this issue. By working together we believe we can find a solution that provides school boards with viable options while preserving community parkland. Minister Wynne, we look forward to hearing from you about a convenient meeting date.

Respectfully,

Ken Woodruff
Chair, Save General Brock Parklands Committee

Copy:
Premier of Ontario
Deputy Minister of Education
All Ministers of Ontario
Mayor Cam Jackson
Burlington City Councillors
Wayne Joudrie, Director of Education, Halton District School Board
Halton District School Board Trustees
Halton Catholic District School Board Trustees
All Halton Region Mayors

Pulling school parks off the endangered list

By **MARIANNE MEED WARD**

Last Updated: 28th June 2009, 3:50am

Ontario parklands attached to schools are one step closer to protection from development, thanks to the efforts of a group of Burlington residents. There's a long road ahead, but they've initiated a step in the right direction that could bring changes across the province.

With help from the BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association and Mayor Cam Jackson, these folks spearheaded a resolution asking Queen's Park to make changes to regulation 444/98, which governs school land disposal. Last week, Burlington's Community and Corporate Services committee unanimously voted in favour of the resolution.

Amy Schnurr of BurlingtonGreen is pleased, so far.

"We hope other municipalities will agree to support the resolution so a clear and strong message can be sent to the province — school disposition regulations must change if Burlington and beyond are to truly realize a sustainable future."

The regulation requires school boards to dispose of school lands at "fair market value."

But municipalities usually can't afford fair market value, so the land is typically snatched up by developers and paved over with houses. It hurts all the more given that cities often purchased the land initially, transferred it to school boards at a nominal cost, and paid for the upkeep.

BurlingtonGreen's resolution asks the province to introduce flexibility to allow schools boards and municipalities to come up with community-driven solutions, and to instruct school boards to give cities a "right of first refusal" in land disposal.

Among the creative ideas being floated are to sever school lands, allow development only on the portion where a school building sits and rezone the property to allow higher-density development. That makes the parcel more valuable to developers thereby allowing school boards to recoup costs and the city to preserve attached parks. Win-win.

But the clock is ticking. Burlington alone has lost 10 schools and 86% of their associated land to development.

Currently on the chopping block is a 26-acre parcel of land attached to the old General Brock High School. The building is now used as an adult education centre. The surrounding parks are used by residents across the city, and include three soccer fields, two baseball diamonds and a running track.

Local residents formed the Save General Brock Committee six years ago after learning the Halton District Public School Board was planning to sell the site. A few months back the final nail went in the coffin -- or so it seemed: Halton school trustees, with the exception of one Burlington trustee, voted behind closed doors to sell eight school properties, including General Brock.

Regulation 444/98 virtually guarantees the entire site will be developed for housing, since

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only developers can afford fair market value -- estimated at \$10 million. General Brock, zoned low-density, could fit 110 single family homes, making it an attractive parcel indeed.

To add insult to injury, the disposal of the property would greatly impact Burlington residents who use the park, but the proceeds could go to building new schools anywhere in Halton -- an all-pain, no-gain scenario that asks Burlington residents to absorb a loss with no compensating benefit.

Over the years of fighting to preserve General Brock, committee members realized disappearing school parklands isn't just a Burlington issue. It's an Ontario issue, particularly in growing municipalities where schools in lower-density, established neighbourhoods are sold, with the proceeds funding construction of schools in new, higher-density subdivisions on the edges of towns.

It's also an environmental issue of greenspace preservation, thus the enlistment of BurlingtonGreen's help.

FIX IT

Though the issue crosses three levels of government, ultimately the province created the problem and must fix it.

The pressure to develop school lands for housing comes from the provincial Places to Grow Act, which promotes development within city boundaries to protect outlying greenspace. However, the legislation also encourages municipalities to establish parks within built-up areas, which can't happen if school land is sold for development.

It's a Catch-22 BurlingtonGreen is using to argue for changes to the rules.

The sale of school parkland for commercial redevelopment is "fundamentally contrary" to Places to Grow, the group argues.

From here, the resolution goes to all GTA mayors, the Halton public and Catholic school boards, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to seek their endorsement.

It could well be this groundswell of support that prompts provincial changes to preserve urban school parklands for future generations -- all from a small group of Burlington residents who believed they could.

MARIANNE MEEDWARD@SUNMEDIA.CA

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Resolution No. 2009-0129

Moved by: Mayor R. Bonnette

Seconded by: Councillor J. Fogal

WHEREAS Ontario's Planning Legislation including the Provincial Policy Statement, the Places to Grow Act etc. recognizes that in order to accommodate future population growth, support economic prosperity and achieve a high quality of life for all Ontarians, planning must occur in a rational and strategic way;

AND WHEREAS the Government of Ontario recognizes within its Planning Legislation including the Provincial Policy Statement and the Places to Grow Act etc. that an integrated and coordinated approach to making decisions about growth across all levels of government will contribute to maximizing the value of public investments;

AND WHEREAS a key purpose of Ontario's Planning Legislation including the Provincial Policy Statement and the Places to Grow Act etc. is to enable decisions about growth to be made in ways that sustain a robust economy, build strong communities and promote a healthy environment and a culture of conservation;

AND WHEREAS Ontario's Planning Legislation including the Provincial Policy Statement and the Places to Grow Act etc. encourages municipalities, conservation authorities, non government organizations and other interested parties to develop a system of publicly accessible parkland, open space, trails, and recreation areas within the Greater Golden Horseshoe;

AND WHEREAS Ontario's Planning Legislation including the Provincial Policy Statement and the Places to Grow Act etc. encourages municipalities to establish an urban open space system within built-up areas, which may include rooftop gardens, communal courtyards, public parks and recreational areas;- 15 - June 29, 2009

AND WHEREAS the sale of existing public green space or active or passive parkland associated with school sites declared surplus, in whole or in part, by local school boards solely for redevelopment fundamentally undermines the intent, purpose and spirit of Ontario's Planning Legislation including the Provincial Policy Statement and the Places to Grow Act etc. as identified above;

AND WHEREAS much of a municipality's existing public green space or active or passive parkland associated with present and future school sites and owned, or to be owned, by local school boards have been in use by the public for decades and or will become significant elements of that community's system of publicly accessible parkland, open space, trails, and recreation areas and have been the subject of formal joint use/reciprocal use agreements between school boards and

municipalities;

AND WHEREAS local school boards indicate they are constrained in their consideration of innovative, community oriented, or future focused opportunities for the disposal of surplus property necessary to meet the purpose, intent and spirit of the Provincial Planning Legislation including the Provincial Policy Statement and the Places to Grow Act etc. because of Ontario Regulation 444/98 (Disposition of Surplus Real Property) and in particular the Provincial Government's requirement that an "offer must be for sale, lease or otherwise dispose of the property at fair market value;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT The Government of Ontario immediately amend Ontario Regulation 444/98 (Disposition of Surplus Real Property) to require meaningful consideration of innovative, community oriented and/or future focused opportunities for the disposal of surplus properties intended to meet the purpose, intent and spirit of Provincial Planning Legislation including the Provincial Policy Statement and the Places to Grow Act etc. by supporting a municipality's system of publicly accessible parkland, open space, trails, and recreational areas;

AND FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT The Government of Ontario and the Ministry of Education direct local school boards to explore innovative, community oriented and/or future focused opportunities for the disposal of surplus properties with local municipalities on a 'first right of refusal basis' in order to meet the purpose, intent and spirit of Provincial Planning Legislation including the Provincial Policy Statement and the Places to Grow Act etc. by supporting a municipality's system of publicly accessible parkland, open space, trails and recreational areas;

AND FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT The Government of Ontario and the Ministry of Education introduce sufficient flexibility in the Ontario Regulation 444/98 (Disposition of Surplus Real Property) requirement for local school boards to sell, lease or otherwise dispose of property at fair market value by permitting the sale, lease or other disposal at significantly less than fair market value based on highest or best development use to enable those projects to meet the purpose, intent and spirit of Provincial Planning Legislation including the Provincial Policy Statement and the Places to Grow Act etc. by supporting a municipality's system of publicly accessible parkland, open space, trails and recreational areas.

AND FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT a copy of this Resolution be forwarded to The Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario, The Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Minister of Education, all local municipalities in Halton, AMO, and local MPP Ted Arnott, for consideration, endorsement and implementation.

CARRIED