

February 24, 2026

Comments Regarding North York at the Centre

My name is Heather Mitchell, a long-time resident of Willowdale Centre since the early 60's. Having attended school and worked in the North York Centre area I have witnessed the growth of this core area and agree that a well constructed plan for continued development is paramount.

My concerns are primarily focused on access to schools and their adjoining sport fields as the maps provided in the report show conflicting information.

The Recommended Option includes **Policy Direction #9** for Land Use of Community Services and Facilities which allows mixed use development on existing community services sites such as schools as long as the replacement development incorporates a new community facility of equivalent gross floor area. The recommended policy, however, does not address the integral **outdoor space** of existing community facilities such as Earl Haig Secondary School, Claude Watson School for the Arts, and McKee Ave Public School which are within the proposed new mixed use zones.

How will these outdoor spaces be preserved or replaced in the proposed mixed use zones?

Figure 4-6: Recommended Long-Term Parks and Open Spaces Map conflicts with previous maps (**Figure 4-4: Recommended Land Use Map**) (**Figure 4-1: Recommended Structure Map**) which appear to eliminate outdoor sport fields for schools, specifically along Doris, McKee and Empress Avenues.

Schools and school facilities are publicly owned assets which benefit the community at large, when community members come together, volunteer, build skills, access community programs, become physically active and build strong and healthy communities. In particular the playing fields afford opportunities for physical, social/emotional and mental health growth.

Please see below.

The following excerpt is from research printed in the Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada Vol 45, N° 7/8, July/August 2025 Research, Policy and Practice [Outdoor physical activity, mental health, life satisfaction, happiness and life stress among Canadian adolescents, HPCDP: Vol 45\(7/8\), July/August 2025 - Canada.ca](#)

Highlights

- *Adolescence is an age when mental health may decline. Many adolescents in Canada are also insufficiently physically active.*
- *Outdoor physical activity (OPA) may provide added health benefits compared to indoor physical activity, but adolescents are spending less time outdoors.*
- *Independent of indoor physical activity, OPA was associated with positive mental health, high life satisfaction and high happiness among adolescents.*
- *14 or more hours per week of OPA had the strongest associations with positive mental health, high life satisfaction and high happiness.*
- *There was a clear dose–response relationship between higher levels of OPA and life satisfaction and happiness.*

I will share a real-life experience when in my role as Principal at the Claude Watson School for the Arts I had a visit from a youthful resident from one of the high-rise condo towers adjacent to the school. He came to say “Thank You” because we had just installed an outdoor basketball court and he now had somewhere to play when he came home. The activity spaces in the condo were all internal, mostly fitness focused and dominated by adult tenants. Now he had somewhere to be involved in a recreational pursuit and was able to meet up with friends in a space that was comfortable.

We all need space to play both indoor and outdoor!

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Mitchell,
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Past Chair Toronto Sport Council
Retired School Principal, Claude Watson School for the Arts
North York Centre resident since 1961