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October 4, 2011
Salt Lake City, Utah

Dear Hamilton City Council,

Please accept this letter of emphatic support in my absence as the ongoing discussion continues regarding the Velodrome facility in Hamilton for the upcoming Pan American Games. I write to you from many points of view: as a high performance athlete, a former resident of Hamilton, Ontario, and an believer in the power of sport for health in Canada and around the world.

I've been an Olympic athlete in two different sports as many of you may know. First cycling and then speed skating. I've traveled the world because of both. I've seen the very best of situations for the athlete to thrive in and have seen nearly impossible environments to succeed in. Both have shown me that anything is possible when it comes to passion for sport and the beautiful ideals Olympic sport stands for at its very best. What makes it easier is when the athlete has a facility to train in at home.

As a young athlete, I relocated to the Hamilton/Dundas area to train with the coach I believed in. I was 18 years old and had to leave home to pursue my dreams. What I discovered was a part of Canada I didn't know. I found a community much like that of my hometown of Winnipeg. In that community I found support and encouragement to continue to strive. I also found the perfect place to train on the bike. At least in the non-snow season . . . Which brings me to the point of the indoor velodrome....

What better a place to make such a facility home than Hamilton. Not only would the velodrome provide a world-class facility for aspiring Olympians, it would also be a place for kids to learn the skills of a sport little known in Canada. The thrills of riding the banking and the lessons learned in developing athletic ability in young people are but a few of the elements the velodrome offers.

I have seen the track in action in many places in the world with kids who will never become high performance athletes. This matters little when programs are available to allow young people the environment to thrive in sport. Track cycling is one of the few sports that allow for both the team environment and the individual aspect of sport. Not all kids want to be nor are they meant to be on teams. What a place for a young person to thrive.

As a speed skater, I had to move to Calgary to pursue the goals I had on ice. Lucky for me that Canada had such a facility. While training there for ten years, I watched countless kids go through camps and club programs. But it's not just for kids. There are programs for all ages. My husband, who had never skated in his life, learned to speed skater in his 40's. A mother of three in his club group had bake sales to buy her own speed skates. It was a joy for me as an Olympic athlete to see so many taking such pleasure in a sport other than hockey.

This is but a small vision of the potential of the velodrome in Hamilton. Imagine a place that the rest of Canada can call the only indoor world class cycling track in the entire nation.

I am proud to add my name and my endorsement to the committee working so hard to make this dream a reality. I cannot imagine a better place than Hamilton.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clara Hughes', written in a cursive style.

Clara Hughes
6-time Olympic Medalist, speed skating and cycling
Officer of the Order of Canada
Member of the Order of Manitoba
Proud former resident of Hamilton, Ontario
Athlete Ambassador for Right to Play