



September 13, 2016

To Mayor Eisenberger, Members of Council  
City Hall  
71 Main Street  
Hamilton, Ontario  
L8P 4Y5

At a Wever Core Community Café held on January 2014, Marnie Cluckie and Rome D'Angelo presented the plans for the renovations to the Norman Pinky Lewis Recreation Centre - ones that had been on hold since 2004 – and that the feasibility study was complete, the due diligence in progress, Council approval of the feasibility study and authority to enter into negotiations with HWDSB was anticipated Q2, 2014, the RFP for Prime Consultant preparation was anticipated issuance Q3, 2014, and the design was anticipated to commence Q3/Q4, 2014.

Our community accepted this, though back in 2009 we were told there would be “shovel ready plans” by the end of the year. Our community was also told that in 2004. And again in 2012. We hoped, this time, there would not be a “Westmount roof collapse” or “other community need” that would push off the much needed renovations that have been anticipated again. We watched as time and again Pinky was not eligible for Federal or Provincial grants due to not having “shovel-ready” plans.

On September 12, 2016 at the Emergency and Community Services report, Item 7.1, the Use, Renovation and Replacement Study for Hamilton and Indoor Use facilities said that:  
“The refurbishment and expansion of Norman Pinky Lewis Recreation Centre was recommended when the attached school closed (R.24). A multi-purpose facility was recommended with a gymnasium, indoor pool tanks, seniors’ space, and other features. While the attached school has since closed, the large capital expansion at this centre was **cancelled**. Currently, gym expansion is proposed for 2020 or beyond. “

This is the first we had heard that the expansion had been cancelled, and we respectfully ask – by who and when? Why, in the interim has Dalewood repairs been completed and Laurier, Riverdale and Ancaster Aquatic Centre (which received a \$900k renovation in 2009, and another \$200k to fix leaks in the wall in 2011, based on “staff interpretation of the criteria” for the Ontario 150 grant). The report noted a write-in need for a facility in West Hamilton, and their telephone (landline) survey noted a need for more senior’s facilities, and based on the last available data from the 2006 census they concurred. No one asked about the data or methodology from Monteith Brown!

The 2008 report, also by Monteith Brown, said that Norman Pinky Lewis could be surplus should a new facility be built. We were assured repeatedly that our community would not be forgotten and that Pinky would be renovated and we would again have gymnasiums, and that the building of the new facility at Jimmy Thompson (The Bernie Morelli Seniors Centre) would not impact the project for Pinky.

Why is this so important, you ask? **We are a code-red identified neighbourhood. The Gibson Landsdale Community Planning team, which we are a partner to, has included in their Council-endorsed plan that includes the Renovation of Pinky Lewis is vital to the health of our neighbourhood in their action plan.**

In the 1990s, Norman Pinky Lewis Recreation Centre offered little in the way in of paid programs for the simple reason that the community could not afford to register for them. Instead this facility sought outside rentals to fill the spaces for the gymnasium and the pool and offer programs to clientele from outside the immediate community. The rental programs ran smoothly with few issues for the regular

staff to deal with and essentially left the staff with no responsibility for dealing with the challenging at-risk youth who populated the community and who desperately needed a safe and structured environment to play and develop functional social skills. If a program was offered despite extremely low enrolment, the lack of appropriate social skills and conflict resolution skills of the youth of this community often resulted in a quick and lengthy suspension from the facility. There seemed not to be any clear recognition that the youth in this community needed clear modeling and teaching of pro-social behaviour and lots of opportunities and second chances to practice and develop them. The staff lacked a basic understanding that at-risk youth need on-going and intensive coaching to develop appropriate social skills and conflict resolution skills. There seemed to be an expectation that the patrons of this centre would all come equipped with this skill set developed as they do in many other areas of the city.

Our recreation centre began a unique program in 2000 partnering with the City, Police and School board to run a free After School Kids program, driven in a large by Officer Cathy Wever and Principal Lori Kyle. Drop-In classes were added and a computer lab, however the barriers came from the City as the program was “not how things had always been done”. The new staff team at Pinky in 2001 continued to move the initiative forward by modeling, teaching and encouraging changes in social behaviours instead of suspending students using the facility for misbehaviour. It was so successful, attendance to the facility grew exponentially, and minor crimes and likelihood of youth joining gangs, using drugs and teen pregnancy rates dropped. Rates of secondary school completion and even post-secondary program enrollment soared – **many of these children were previously told those dreams were not for them.**

Since the closure of the gyms in 2011, the program has had challenges with being able to serve the children and youth due to the capacity of the recreation centre. Many are turned away, and the recreation centre which was once the hub of the community is unable to serve the needs of the community due to this diminished capacity. The real success stories of those students from the first decade and impact have reversed. The Wever Core runs the After School Program largely on grants from the United Way, Royal and Hamilton Community Foundation, which was meant to be an interim solution. The immensely popular Hamilton Basketball Association league program is now completely gone, due to the gyms at the new school being available with extremely limited hours and low priority given to City-run programs.

Our community desperately deserves to have answered – why is our facility not a priority? Why have renovations and repairs been deferred for 12 years? And finally – who cancelled the project and under what authority? We have silently waited, being told “it will be done”. We can no longer be silent, and ask Council to hear our neighbourhood.

Sincerely,

The Gibson-Landsdale Neighbourhood Association