

June 1st, 2022

Regarding the proposed severance of the grounds at Ancaster High School

To whom it may concern:

My name is Tim Harvey, and I'm the Head of the Physical Education Department at Orchard Park High School in Stoney Creek.

I'm writing to provide my adamant support that the grounds at Ancaster High remain exactly as they are.

Throughout my life, I've worn many hats that have tied me to the magnificent, and very much needed, grounds at Ancaster High. On those grounds, I have played organized sports as a child, I have participated in events there as an adult, and I run a very large tournament there as a teacher.

As a child, I loved attending games and practices there – it felt different than going to other venues. Most other fields are solitary. Surrounded by roads and houses. It felt almost isolated in a way. Separated from all other activities. It felt like the field, and my activity, was an afterthought. Not valued. The grounds at Ancaster High felt (and still feel) like someone cared. Like they put those fields there with a definite purpose in mind – to show value to community athletics. I loved going there, or even now as I drive past, and seeing many different sports and activities there...it really can serve as a great introduction for a child to see something they've never experienced before. It can be the motivation to try something new. The amount of space is also very much needed. As a kid, my friends and I would often go to our closest field to play something, but if we got there and there was already a group set up, or a league going on, we were out of luck and would have to go home and find something else to do. The space at Ancaster doesn't send anyone home. Even if there are some other groups and even a league game or two, there is more than enough space to accommodate multiple groups of people looking to be active. The space at Ancaster welcomes and encourages people of all ages to get out and be active in a safe environment.

I understand that space is valuable. But those grounds are much more valuable to the children, community, and city, as fields and green space.

As a physical education teacher, I know the significant impacts of physical activity on the mind and the body. Study after study has proven that physical activity can boost mood, improve mental health, improve academic results, and so many more. We have just spent two years living in a pandemic. Isolated. Indoors. Barred from seeing others. Children, for their mental and physical health, need to be outdoors, running and playing with other children. I have yet to see any study or research article show that taking away greenspace will benefit children, physically or emotionally. We should be encouraging more areas in the city to plan for such a space...not find ways to take it away.

Yes, those fields provide spaces for leagues and teams and structured activity. But just as important, is a space where children can be active, and play, in a non-structured environment. A place where they can be active and create. A place where they have the space to create any activity they want without being restrained by boundaries...houses, roads, and fences. Sure, there's a parkette up the street with some

equipment, but a grand space as large as the Ancaster High grounds provides necessary space to allow children to become, or stay, both physically and mentally healthy.

I know the argument perhaps is that there are fields right across Jerseyville Road that children can use for unscheduled play. And they are close. But at the same time they are so very far away. Many parents are totally comfortable with their children running down the street to play at the Ancaster fields, as there are sidewalks the whole way there, and the children don't have to cross a major road. To access the fields adjacent to Firestone arena, the children have to cross a major road, and make part of the trek on a shoulder with no sidewalk. This is a major barrier to the health and well being of children. Parents are much more apprehensive about allowing their children to cross Jerseyville. The field space at Ancaster High is not across a major road. It's accessible. It's safe. It is vital.

Destroying those fields at Ancaster – even just a portion of them – will undoubtedly hurt the youth of Ancaster. But those fields benefit more youth than those who just happen to live nearby.

Ancaster High School runs their annual triathlon there every year, and every May, since 2007, I organize and run a 32 team Ultimate Frisbee tournament on those grounds. The tournament brings in around fifteen teams from the Hamilton area, as well as teams from all over Southwestern Ontario. Over 600 athletes converge on the Ancaster High grounds for this tournament, and without the grounds exactly as they are, there will be no opportunity for this tournament to exist. There is absolutely nowhere else in the city that can house a tournament this size, so without these fields remaining as they are, it is one more in a long list of opportunities that we are denying our youth. Opportunities for our youth to be active. To improve their mental and physical health. To provide them the opportunity to include physical activity as part of their lifestyle.

The grounds at Ancaster High should be the model for other schools and community development projects...not torn apart to become just another subdivision.

Sincerely,

Tim Harvey
Orchard Park Secondary School
Department Head: Health and Physical Education
tharvey@hwdsb.on.ca