

LETTER TO THE HVRA MEMBERSHIP from HVRA Chair Tim Grant
January 19, 2014

Greetings all,

I am writing to give you an update on the Central Tech dome/artificial turf proposal and where the HVRA board stands at this point.

There is a (City of Toronto) Committee of Adjustment hearing planned for this coming Wednesday, January 22, at City Hall at 4 pm. The hearing will determine whether to grant two variances to the City's zoning bylaws that have been sought by the Toronto District School Board. The second changes the use of the field from educational to "private." We invite all interested residents to attend.

On January 22 the Committee of Adjustment agreed to defer hearings on the requested variances for up to three months to allow time for community consultation.

A working group has been formed and had its first meeting on February 11. Despite the fact that community consultations are just underway, the TDSB has already brought the matter back to the Committee of Adjustment for a decision on February 19.

Once again HVRA will be asking the committee for a deferral so that community consultations can continue to work towards a win-win-win solution.

At that point, another community meeting will be held where all views can be heard. A flyer will be distributed inviting all residents to the meeting and summarizing what is being proposed.

Since there is no guarantee that we will have another deferral on Wednesday (Feb.19), we encourage you to attend the Committee of Adjustment meeting at City Hall (Committee Room 2) at 4:30 pm. Your attendance will make visible that there are many in our neighbourhood who wish to have their opinions heard.

Tim Grant, chair@harbordvillage.com

In case you are not aware, the proposal involves a private development to convert the grass field to artificial turf, upgrade the running track, and for five months per year, cover both with an inflatable dome. Labelled a "championship field," the dome will enclose the track and four soccer fields and be rented out to sports groups. In the warmer months, the field and track will be available for public use when it is not rented out. In return for the 20-year lease of school board land, the TDSB gains the use of the dome during school hours but receives no income from either the private development company (Razor Management) or the facility rentals.

HVRA's board discussed the proposal at great length at its monthly board meeting this past Tuesday night. In the end, we passed two motions, the second one unanimously. I'm happy to report that while we began our meeting as a divided board, we emerged with a consensus.

Here are the two motions, along with some brief comments:

1. BE IT RESOLVED that HVRA censure the TDSB and our school trustee for avoiding open and effective community consultation about the Central Tech field, for entering into an agreement with Razor Management prior to community consultation, for distributing a meeting flyer that did not describe the proposed changes, and for running a public meeting without a chair to give direction and to keep respectful order so that residents felt safe to express their views.

The TDSB's flyer for the January 9th meeting held at Central Tech mentioned only that it was to discuss "field improvements." As a result, the majority of the 6,000 residents in Harbord Village still have no idea that the field will be privatized, artificial turf and a winter dome will be installed, and local residents will be excluded from a public space that they have used for years (more on this last point below).

The January 9th meeting was informative and at times entertaining. After presentations by TDSB officials, the school principal and the private developer, the floor was turned over to anyone who wished to speak. It is fair to say that no one left the meeting without an understanding of how important an improved field is to Central Tech students, that there is a real shortage of sports fields in the downtown core, and that many sports organizations support the proposed dome/artificial turf project.

But as a genuine community consultation, the January 9th meeting was a failure. Without a chair, there was no one to say, "We've already heard that point three times," nor to dissuade youthful attendees from booing and heckling when points they disliked were mentioned. More to the point, there was no one to say, "Are there other concerns that we have not yet heard?"

While some community members got up to speak, many others indicated later that they felt intimidated and so refrained from doing so. The executive members of the residents' associations to the east and west of us, who attended the meeting, all chose not to speak when they saw the tone and format of the meeting.

At Tuesday's HVRA board meeting, we also took the following position on the Committee of Adjustment application itself:

2. BE IT RESOLVED that the HVRA ask that the Committee of Adjustment defer this item so that negotiations can take place between the TDSB, the City, and the community with a view to making a better sports field and stronger school for everyone concerned. Failing deferral, we oppose this project as currently configured.

There are several options for improving the track and playing field at Central Technical School. Before a 20-year deal is signed between the TDSB and a private developer, HVRA's board — along with the boards of the Huron-Sussex Residents' Association and the Palmerston Area Residents' Association — prefers to sit down with the TDSB and City officials to discuss the various possibilities.

The best option will be the one that serves the needs of the school, addresses the wider need for sports fields and running tracks in the downtown core, and minimizes the negative impacts of an improved field and track on the surrounding communities.

We communicated this strong preference to the TDSB and our local school trustee on Friday. It is the board's hope they will defer their Committee of Adjustment application, so that discussions can begin soon. If they do not defer, we will speak in opposition to the dome proposal at Wednesday's hearing.

If the Committee of Adjustment grants the variances, Razor Management can start construction and any opportunity for us to discuss and suggest alternatives will disappear. We think it is naïve to imagine that the TDSB or Razor Management will be open to negotiation once they have a green light.

What will make Wednesday's meeting more difficult is that Rob and Doug Ford have decided to champion the dome/turf project, attempting to divide and conquer us by claiming that this is an issue of "downtown residents vs. kids." We anticipate that the TDSB and various sports associations may pack the hearing room, much as they did at the January 9th meeting at Central Tech.

This is not a residents vs. kids issue. It is about the community taking its rightful place at the discussion table. We agree that the field needs updating and changes, but we firmly believe that the project has to work for the school, the TDSB, the City and, yes, for the community in which it sits.

The HVRA board has identified many outstanding issues with this facility. Many questions need to be answered and possible solutions explored. Among them:

The proposed enterprise — the rental of multiple sports fields to groups from across Toronto — will bring large numbers of cars and probably buses into a dense downtown neighbourhood. Harbord Village is already deficient in on-street parking and has no underused parking facilities. The school's parking lot on Borden Street is often full on week nights due to a popular night school program that draws 2000 students from around the city. The Green P lot, just north of the school and south of Bloor Street, is also fully occupied on many days and evenings by patrons of the businesses and restaurants on Bloor Street.

Central Tech's principal suggested during the January 9th meeting that one way to clear space in the school parking lot for dome visitors might be to end or reduce the night school program. As you likely know, Central Tech's night school program is a treasure appreciated by local residents and Torontonians throughout our city. Any thought of cancelling it to benefit a sports program shows how poorly the dome project has been thought through.

The increase in the number of cars coming into the neighbourhood will create traffic problems and jeopardize the safety of residents. At Monarch Park — which has a smaller dome built and run by the same company on school board land — residents have told us that many parents, anxious to get their kids to the dome on time for a game, speed through their neighbourhood to

drop off their kids or search for on-street parking. In the Harbord Village with our one-way streets, some of these visitors will end up going the wrong way, creating a very hazardous situation.

Replacing the grass field with artificial turf and severely limiting access by residents will remove the only green space in our community. Harbord Village has but two tiny parkettes — actually, two kids' playgrounds. Together they occupy about half an acre, which is less than 0.3 % of our total neighbourhood space.

In the absence of other park space, many residents freely use the field and track at the school, and have done so for decades.

The dome proposal involves privatizing the use of a public space that has been paid for by the public. The public will not have access to the field or track during the five months that the dome is erected unless they pay a fee. Razor Management is offering seniors one two-hour period per week when they can walk on the track for free.

Given its central location, we believe that in the warmer months, the Central Tech field will be used much more than Monarch Park. If Razor Management is successful in securing enough bookings of rental groups to cover all available hours, there will be no free access for any members of the public. By having no public access provisions built into their agreement with Razor Management, we think the TDSB has lost sight of the public interest.

We are deeply concerned that low-income neighbours will find the dome's rental rates to be unaffordable. These low-income families, including their children, will therefore be excluded from a public space some have used for years. Once the field is fully booked, there is no provision in place to prevent Razor Management from raising rates still higher.

Artificial turf fields are very hot in the summer. One U.S. study showed that when outside temperatures reach 34 C (94 F), plastic turf fields average 74 C (165 F). This differential will impose a significant additional air conditioning cost for nearby residents that have such equipment, and a significant health burden on those without air conditioners.

The crumb rubber that commonly lies under the top surface of artificial turf contains lead, arsenic, cadmium, chromium and other toxic chemicals, which will leach into soil over time. The rubber also contains phthalates, which are known to have adverse effects on the reproductive organs, lungs, kidneys and liver.

The proposed high-intensity lighting (i.e., 50 foot candles) will negatively affect those who live on the west side of Bathurst Street, immediately adjacent to the field. While the lights are designed to focus light onto the field, the height and intensity of the lights are such that light will spill and glare onto adjacent properties.

Monarch Park residents have told us that noise is a big problem. Sports teams are noisy while on the field and just as noisy when they are saying goodbye to their friends off the field. Overnight

tournaments on weekends are just beginning at Monarch Park, so we can expect them to occur at Central Tech too.

The dome proposed for Central Tech will be larger than the one at Monarch Park. This will enable it to be used for regional sports tournaments. Those tournaments will likely bring teams from far and wide who are less likely to be coming by transit.

There remain many questions and much uncertainty about the impact of this project. And we do not presume that all members of HVRA feel the same about the TDSB proposal.

I have had extensive phone conversations with three community leaders living close to Monarch Park Collegiate. All three reminded me that the time to address potential problems is before a project is allowed to proceed, not after. One year after the dome there opened, the parking and traffic problems there remain unresolved, in spite of numerous community consultations.

If the TDSB agrees to a deferral on or before Wednesday, and a working group is established to find a win-win-win solution, rest assured that there will be another community meeting where all views can be heard. A flyer will be distributed inviting all residents to the meeting and summarizing what is being proposed.

Since a deferral does not appear likely, we encourage you to come to City Hall at 4 pm on Wednesday, January 22 (go to the front desk for directions to the meeting room). It is likely that there will be restrictions on the number of people who can speak, but your attendance will make visible that there are many in our neighbourhood who wish to have their opinions heard.

Thanks for taking the time to read this very long email. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. I or another board member will try to respond to all emails.

Here's hoping we get the chance to create a solution that works for everyone.

All the best,
Tim Grant, chair@harbordvillage.com