



June 8, 2009,

Good evening Mayor Jackson and members of council,

I am contacting you on behalf of Burlington Green to address the issue of the strategic land acquisition fund.

On April 18th 2007, Council approved the provision of a strategic land acquisition fund as part of its 2007 current budget. In June 2007, Council approved Burlington's Strategic Plan. Future Focus Seven would reduce the availability of the fund referred to in the budget to state that it should address an area environmentally sensitive green spaces and other opportunities for securing access to and increasing of parkland and open space.

At a public meeting on the budget, when one of Burlington Green's members asked what funding was in the budget to support the environment, the response was that it depended on the strategic and acquisition fund for an "strategic green space". It was not referred to as "an 'artery' fund".

Future Focus Seven is the document the citizens of Burlington refer to when they want to find out what the city's strategic plan is, what its Vision and what its Mission and it is a document which can be used to measure your progress and accountability, at the end of this term of office. I believe that most citizens of Burlington would be disappointed if the bylaw will leave the reference to a risk or environmentally sensitive green spaces etc out. Without this wording a portion of this fund could be used for a strategic acquisition of something like a parking lot.

While this city has no problem spending \$6 million on the performing arts Center when you talk about spending spending 7.3 million for buying Hedro parks and recreation etc, fact or you decide at the last Council meeting that spending \$545 thousand is too much for a fund to save as land and other resources as outlined in the Future Focus Seven.

At the last council meeting, Councilor Benisek asked an amendment which would change the label to more fully reflect the role that the fund would play in the Future Focus Seven.

Most importantly, the amendment's clarity of and process reflected the fund.

Burlington Green hopes you will show a transparent leadership and accountability to support the amendment to create this fund so that it can be environmentally sensitive green spaces.

BURLINGTON GREEN CALL TO ACTION!

Dear Member of BurlingtonGreen,

On Monday, June 9 at 7:00 pm at City Hall Council chambers, Burlington Council will be voting on an important bylaw associated with at risk green space/parkland protection.

Currently, it appears that four of the seven Council members will NOT be supporting the critical amendment to the bylaw which would ensure the city's Strategic Land Acquisition Fund be solely dedicated for the purpose of acquiring at risk green space. Instead, without the amendment, up to half of the funds can be used for whatever council deems "strategic"...such as the acquisition of a parking lot or building. (the four Councillors voting against the fund solely for green space are Councillor Thoem, Councillor Craven, Councillor Taylor and Councillor D'Amelio)

WE NEED YOUR HELP! Just by attending this meeting, not only will you learn more about this important issue, but your presence may "speak" volumes to our elected officials AND to the public viewing on Cogeco. We need to let our leaders know that the environment is a priority and that citizens are willing to volunteer their time to attend a meeting to demonstrate this. Note: an empty room can say alot too.

Below are two items that provide some further insight into this issue.

BurlingtonGreen thanks you in advance for your support!

The first is a letter from BurlingtonGreen Chair Kurt Koster sent into the Burlington Post in response to an earlier published article.

RE: May 28: Councillors, residents at odds over purpose of \$945-K municipal fund

It was with interest that I read your article about the city's Strategic Land Acquisition Fund. We believe that our City's leaders must vote to ensure this fund is dedicated specifically for at risk green space for this city.

We, at BurlingtonGreen, are surprised and disappointed that the purpose of the fund has now come into question. The City's strategic plan includes a number of key objectives to support the goals to build a more sustainable city. The initiative in Future Focus Seven para 3.1.B clearly refers to "at risk or environmentally sensitive green spaces". Shifting the use of this fund to include strategic lands for any purpose is a step backward for the environment.

In an nation wide survey of per capita spending on Parks and Recreation across 20 cities in Canada, Burlington was 3rd from the bottom. Burlington's parkland standards (target number of hectares of parkland per 1000 people) is 2.5. The average goal of over half the cities surveyed was 2.79. Why are Burlington's standards so low? The environmental benefits of urban green space is well documented as is the established research of the various health, economic and social benefits.

If Burlington is serious about its commitment to the environment, city staff should be recommending a strategic fund dedicated to at risk green space and our Councillors should unanimously vote to support it.

--

Kurt Koster, Chair

BurlingtonGreen.org
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Nation wide survey report available at: <http://www.evergreen.ca/en/cg/cg-parkland.pdf>

Councillors, residents at odds over purpose of \$945-K municipal fund

By Jason Misner

News

May 28, 2008

City councillors and a local group trying to preserve parkland at the site of the former General Brock school are at odds over the purpose of a municipal fund established to acquire strategic lands in Burlington.

Some say the fund -- approved last year, which currently has a balance of \$945,000 -- is supposed to be used to acquire all strategic lands at risk in Burlington. Others insist the purpose is specifically to save at-risk green space or parkland.

The polar opposite viewpoints came to a head at a city council meeting last week during debate of a staff-recommended bylaw that would determine "the accumulation of funds for the purpose of acquiring strategic lands".

Councillor Jack Dennison -- whose ward includes General Brock lands -- wanted the bylaw to specifically reference the goal of "securing access and protection of parkland and open space."

His motion lost.

Dennison disputed staff's position the General Brock committee was notified about the bylaw.

Councillor John Taylor disagreed with Dennison's motion, saying it is an outright change to the point of the fund.

The fund was to "finance the acquisition of strategic land" and that "it did not say all the stuff Councillor Dennison added. Councillor Dennison's amendment is a change," Taylor said.

In a later interview, City Clerk Kim Phillips said, while there seems to be a "variety of opinions", she understood the fund's purpose was to include the purchase of any strategic land at risk.

That said, a bylaw has to be created for the municipality to know how the fund would be specifically applied, she said. That's why the strategic land acquisition fund bylaw was before council last week.

At the meeting, Dennison requested that the strategic land fund bylaw be subject for a separate vote on a motion to waive notice. His request was granted by Mayor Cam Jackson. Requiring a two-thirds majority vote -- in Burlington council's case, five of seven votes -- the motion to waive notice determines if public comment will be permitted to further debate an issue. Since the motion to waive notice lost, the bylaw could not be passed and would come back to the next city council meeting on Monday, June 9 for more public debate. At that meeting, delegates will have an opportunity to speak to the issue for no longer than five minutes each.

Dennison repeated after the meeting that he believes the land-buying fund was to be used for greenspace purchases.

"...when we passed it back at budget in 2007, it was clearly for at-risk strategic land -- greenspace, parkland. All the discussion was at-risk green space."

When asked why there is confusion about the fund's intent, he said he didn't know.

Mayor Jackson agreed that the fund's purpose to protect greenspace is contained in the city's current strategic plan.

According to a May 7 staff report examining the fund bylaw, a goal of the strategic plan, under Managed Growth, Initiative 3.1 b, is to "develop a strategic land acquisition strategy..."

"The establishment of this reserve fund allows senior staff to move forward on the strategic goal to manage growth and move forward with Burlington's strategic plan....," wrote Treasurer Steve Zorbas.

Members of the Save General Brock Committee say they are upset with politicians who say the acquisition fund is for saving all lands at risk of development.

The committee, a citizen's advisory panel to city council, was set up to address residents' fear that park lands might be sold to developers when the original General Brock high school was closed four years ago. During last year's budget approval process, the committee was vocal about creating a fund that would help preserve green space.

The Halton District School Board owns the 10.4-hectare (26-acre) former General Brock property, which is estimated to be worth \$11 million. No public decision has been made about its future, according to senior city staff.

General Brock Park committee chair Ken Woodruff and the group's communications representative, Amy Schnurr, say the fund's purpose was to protect at-risk green space. They expressed concern money could be used to buy buildings and then there will be no cash in the fund when at-risk parkland becomes available.

"We think the fund should have been to preserve greenspace; it certainly was the original intent," Woodruff said, adding the committee voiced its concerns to the city over the wording of the bylaw. "Greenspace is at risk in Burlington."

Added Schnurr, "For the average citizen, they would be considered misled. We're no further ahead."

But Councillor Rick Craven told the Post the fund can include greenspace but should not be limited solely to its purchase. He said some politicians made the preservation of greenspace an election issue in the 2006 campaign and are using the bylaw for politics.

"Nobody is fooling anybody. We all know and appreciate that some of the candidates in the last election made promises to the folks representing the General Brock lands. I can't help the fact they made those political promises," he said. "We have to look out for the best interests of the entire city."

