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Statement to Alexandria City Council 1-23-2010 by Gary J. Carr

Mr. Mayor, Mr. Mananger, Members of Council, my name is Gary Carr. Happy New Year to you all an thank you again for your service. I rise in an ongoing effort to get us to pay it forward, and restore the running tracks and repair the fields at Francis Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools. While I can't talk to Martin Luther King, Jr., he talks to me. And in the proximity to his commemoration of his birth, his words on public service, ~~perse~~ persistence ~~and~~ drive my spirit. ~~A~~ while I am willing to work and wait on the final disposition of the field at George Washington, the field at Hammond can and should be fixed now.

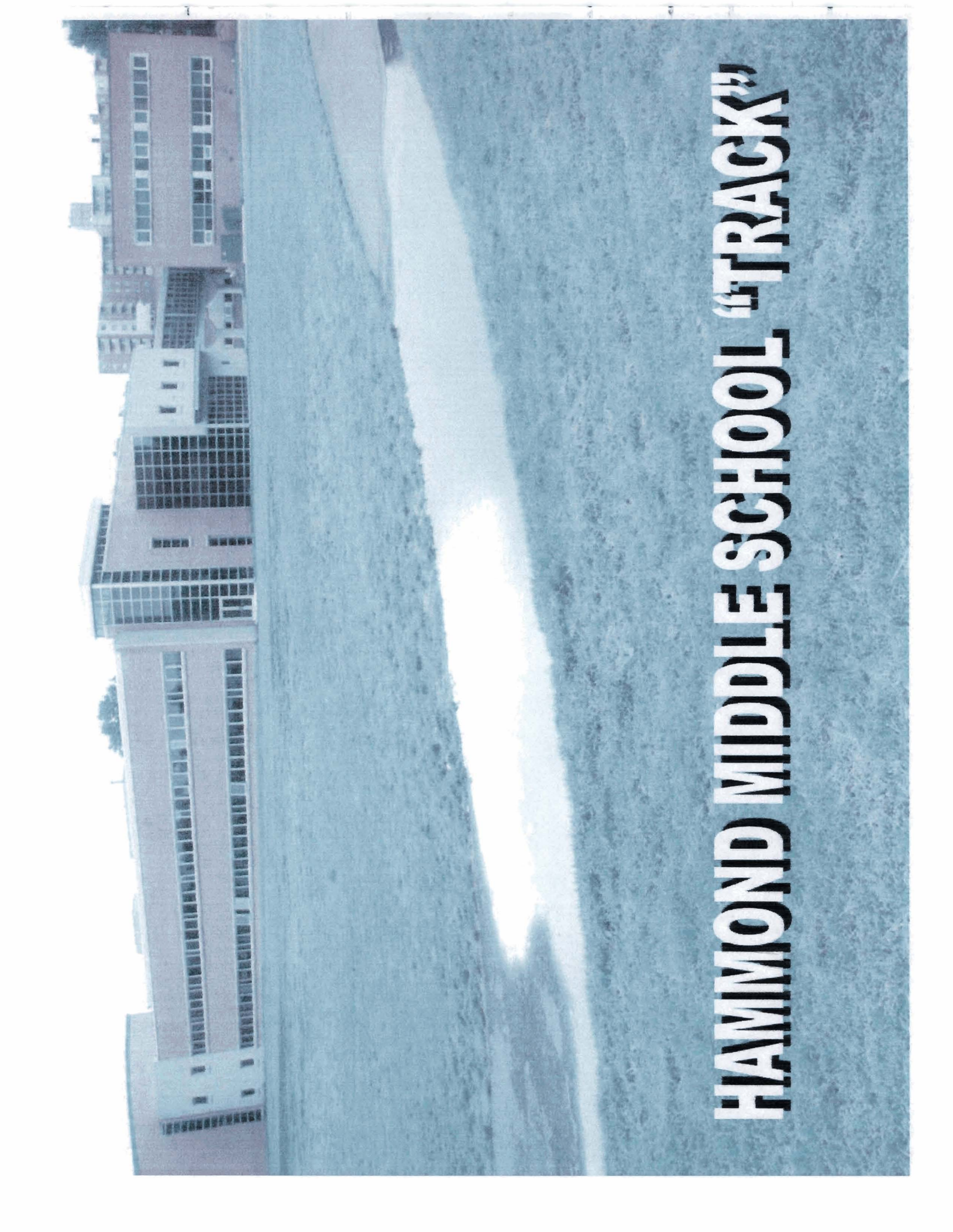
The decision is imminent about the placement of a new field. Will the funds be used to repair a field at a park or a school? The reccommendation may be for a park, but it is the school the represents the greatest need and opportunity. If this opportunity is lost, given the current climate, the children at Hammond will be condemned to many years of a virtually useless muddy and flooded field.

Hammond Middle School has joined the National Football League's "PLAY 60" Movement encouraging children to play actively for 60 minutes every day in order to combat the epidemic of childhood obesity. Perhaps the irony is not lost to you, as it wasn't to me, the fact that Hammond Middle School field is unsuitable to "Play 60" seconds, no-less sixty minutes. It is, in the kindest use of the word, "suboptimal". While this is not the first effort to get children active, and undoubtedly won't be the last, but it misses a fundamental requirement. The facilities for play need to of such quality to be attractive and interesting for participation. The place they go to exercise should be somewhere they would want to go *whether they are active or not*. I has to be, in the timeless word of youth vernacular, "cool". .

And therein lies the quandary. We have made exercise unattractive, uncool and ironically unavailable. Even when we build these fields of activity, and them promptly fence them in and lock them up. We say must have a permit to play, eliminating that time-honored activity of our youth, the "pickup game". We should allow for free-use, unless someone shows up with a permit, and then give way. The concurrent advocacy adding tracks to our fields is rooted in not only year-round use but also that all can participate. To top it off all can be done without reducing the field inventory one iota!

The subtext to the athletic field discussion is lights. Illuminating fields in this City are a near intractable problem. The fields are always in someone's back yard, in~~ev~~itable a vocal constituent. To this delimma I offer a possible solution. A ballot referendum. Let us decide as a community whether there should be lights at high school, at our middle schools and parks. It is too important an issue to leave to just a few. Put lighting on our field~~s~~ up to a vote.

In closing, when fix fields start with the worse, that's why we should fix Hammond first! In the end, when it is all said in done- If we build them, they will run.

An aerial photograph of Hammond Middle School, a large, multi-story brick building with numerous windows. The school is situated on a large, flat, grassy field. A road or path runs along the right side of the field. The overall scene is captured from a high angle, showing the layout of the school and its immediate surroundings.

HAMMOND MIDDLE SCHOOL "TRACK"

HAMMOND MIDDLE SCHOOL "FIELD"

