

STATEMENT TO THE ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL BY GARY CARR 2-20-2010

Mr. Mayor, Members of Council. My name is Gary Carr and I rise in support of the resoration of the playinf fields at ou middle school specifically Francis Hammond.

The children are Hammond Middle School are playing in mud. (If they can play outside at all then its dirt)

My issue is the field at Hammond (not the artifical turf, the lights or parking at Brenman Park althought I have serious philosophical and pracital reservations about all three).

We shouldn't have "Park" fields and "School" fields, but only "Community" fields.

Who exactly will the field at Ben Brenman Park serve? Residents of Cameron Station are going to awaken to a dramatically different community, wwith a field they don't use then sending their children to a school that dose not have one.

They criterion for selection was flawed. How about these criterion for selection.

1. Which field is in the worse condition?
2. Which field serves the most children?
3. Which field has waited the longest?

Informed the every every possible stakeholder has been included in the process beginning in 2006. The world has changed since then. A Black man is President and we almost had the next Great Depression.

Any system that produces the result that 1200+ school children are unable to play outside is flawed. If it last for a decade it's double flawed. The criterion use is flawed.

The answer? A single CIP for playing fields (Not separate ones for the schools and City)

20 million project budget deficit for the next several years

No synthetic turf conversion until 2017 in projected budget

No Money in the school budget with student enrollment bursting at the seams

The student at Hammond MS will have graduated from college before the field is fixed

The field at Ben Brenman is functional now and is in use. Would be barely used or not at all during school day. Could be vastly improved with minor changes

The field at Hammond is nonfunctional and cannot be improved without significant regrading.

Would like to see you endorse the Park and Recreation Commission vote endorsing Ben Brenman Park.

No disrespect intended to the Director, Managers or Commission Member but they work for you. As a voter you work for me. And on behalf of two thirds of the entire middle school student population (and for the historical record), before we spend a million plus dollars on a project that will likely condemn thousands of children to many more years of dismal field condition. They (We) deserve a motion, a

second, discussion and a vote.

## Statement to the Alexandria City School Board by Gary J. Carr, February 18, 2010

*"I ran and ran and ran every day, and I acquired this sense of determination, this sense of spirit that I would never, never give up, no matter what else happened."* Wilma Rudolph (1940-1994)

Madame Chair and members of the School Board. My name is Gary Carr. I am known to most of you as a persistent and vocal advocate of restoring running tracks, and repairing the deteriorated fields, at Francis Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools. There are two ways to be alone. You can be alone and be wrong, and you can be alone and be right. If I am alone and wrong you need to tell me. But, if I am alone and right you need to do whatever you can do to help me. I will introduce for the record my Open Letter to the city's leadership on the state of affairs regarding the field at Ben Brenman Park and Hammond Middle schools. Even if you don't agree with every premise or point, at least it's a conversation starter.

I would like to make a few clarifications for the record. I have this uncomfortable premonition that I will awaken in the Fall to find a fenced in, synthetic surfaced and fully lighted field at Ben Brenman Park. And while this cloistered edifice sits idle during the school day, the children at Hammond are left with a barely usable patch of dirt, and the city and school leaders then say that there is not enough money to fix it for years to come. This outcome may not be as far fetched as it seems, and if it come to pass, it should be known that this outcome was conscious decision of this city's leadership.

So, with that in mind let me make a few comments for the record.

I support the conversion of both fields, at Brenman and Hammond, but if the choice comes to one or the other, Hammond without question should be first. Better none than not doing Hammond.

In reality, there are no school fields or park fields. In Alexandria, where open space is such a premium, the fields have to be viewed as a community resource. But they are treated as separate Park fields and School fields, and this practice should end. With that in mind, a list should be developed by a joint task force comprised of ACPS and Park and Recreation representatives. It should state my mutual agreement, (or majority vote )which field are prioritized for repair. This recommendation should be endorsed by the School Board and City Council. That way if anybody has a problem with it, duly elected officials are accountable. They can modify the list if they feel it is warranted. Responsibilities for repair and maintenance, scheduling and other joint concerns could also be clearly established and enumerated. That would solve that.

{The Synthetic Field report does a great job of identify the fields in the city, and justifying the need for conversion to synthetic surface, what I have taken issue with is how the next field for conversion was selected, and that here is no master list of field repair and conversion *endorsed by elected officials*.}

This leads to a second point, lighting of our athletic fields. I am well aware that lighting of are public fields represents a "third rail" in this city. Our schools are located in neighborhoods that are both affluent and influential. No one living near the fields wants the poles, the night light, the traffic, or the noise. To this I say, "they are school and should be the focus of activity in this or any community." But, because of this, the the path of least resistance is sought, which has left our high school as the only one in the Metro area without lights, and will make illuminating any field improvements at Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools problematic. It has us lighting our parks, which should go dark, while our schools are dark, when they should have lights. To this I say, put this issue on the ballot. Let us have a referendum on whether there should be light a T.C Williams, Hammond, G.W., Brenman or any other field. Let the people decide. {The T.C. Titans Football, which was having a decent season, when daylight savings time began lost hours of valuable practice time. They lost their last game. Whether it was a direct cause and effect, it certainly put them at a competitive disadvantage.}

I have heard it said that there is no "demand" for running tracks, for lights, or specific field improvements. What is left unsaid, is there a "need". Politician respond to demands, but leaders responds to needs. I will continue to say, like the beat of a drum- *If we build them, they will run.*

## **Open Letter to the Leadership of Alexandria on the Field at Ben Brenman Park**

Mr. Mayor, Members of Council, Mr. School Superintendent, Members of the Board and other elected and appointed officials. My name is Gary Carr, and I am known to most of you as a persistent and vocal advocate of restoring running tracks, and repairing the deteriorated fields, at Francis Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools.

My immediate focus has been the Francis Hammond Middle Schools, attended by over 1,200 students. The field at Hammond has been identified *as in the worse physical condition of any in the city*, (if not the entire metropolitan region). While the field at Hammond is in dismal condition, and would numerically serve more children than any other field improvement, the Park and Recreation Commission recently voted unanimously to first repair and convert the Ben Brenman Park field to an artificial surface. In the current economic conditions, this probably condemns the students at Hammond to many more years of a flooded and muddy field, totally useless for recreational or educational use. It is in fact both unhealthy and unsafe. The field area is a primary student assembly site in the event of an emergency that requires evacuation of the school. A site that floods with as little as a half inch of rain is unsuitable for this purpose. This potentially hazardous situation has been allowed to persist for over a decade. Hammond's field should have the highest priority in field renovation.

A study was recently conducted to determine which of the city's fields should be repaired next. The *2009 Synthetic Field Conversion Study* reached the conclusion that Ben Brenman Park should be the next field for upgrading. I challenge the methodology used in this study. Aside from the fact that children were not considered, *or even mentioned*, in any of the Criteria for Conversion used for the selection, a factor was used that is biased toward selection of Brenman Park. I am specifically referring to *Criteria 5. Location- How close to existing field*, which in a City the size of Alexandria is not consequential, and should not be a decisive factor. Of the two fields previously converted, and nominally closer to Hammond than Brenman Park- at Ft. Ward and Minnie Howard- neither serve *any* of our middle school students (In fact, one field is leased to a private school during the school day). Regardless, Francis Hammond was within *one hundredth of a percent* in the study, an insignificant difference. The preference should be given to the greatest number of children served, which should be determinative. If the Park and Recreation Commission is unwilling to work in concert with the School Board to develop our playing fields in such a manner that they benefit the most children in Alexandria, it begs the question of why the fields at the schools were included in the report in the first place. This study, and the decision to proceed with Brenman Park Field was never evaluated and endorsed at a regular City Council meeting, or *any* public forum after its acceptance by the Park and Recreation Commission. Additionally, to my knowledge, they have not solicited input from the School Board, or the Superintendent.

Secondly, the parking issue was not fully vetted. Parking at Ben Brenman Park will be inadequate, and is an invitation to gridlock. While it was acknowledged at Park and Recreation Commission Public Hearing that parking would be an problem (See attachment), the decision to proceed was made anyway. Lighting of the fields was also not fully considered. Field lights at Brenman Park will alter both the landscape and character of this sanctuary, and should be considered carefully. The City has spent an enormous amount of money and effort to create the serene ambiance that defines Ben Brenman Park, including street lanterns. This field lighting proposal may mean that much of the money was wasted.

The Park and Recreation Commission makes it clear in the minutes of their November meeting, and in a subsequent memo, that they consider their action *final* before construction commences on Brenman Park, and that “no further action by the Council or Planning Commission is needed”. I could not disagree more. It is the City Council who should give that final say on proceeding a project which will effect the lives of so many, both in the near and long term. The unresolved parking and lighting issues should be addressed at a public forum *before* ground is broken on the field. They are advancing with deliberative haste, which may prevent a prudent review. It leaves the impression that this process is being accelerated, without a full opportunity for further public comment on unresolved questions. Once ground is broken on construction, many of these issues will become irreversible.

In a January 21, 2010 memorandum, the Parks and Recreation Commission received an update on design and construction of the field at Ben Brenman Park (See attachment). They are proceeding with construction on the field without further public comment. The planning includes electrical engineering for lights at the field *and adjacent baseball field and play area* (which may exceed their statutory authority, and scope of the previous public hearings). The intent appears to begin construction without any other examination of this action. The Special Use Permit (SUP) hearing being scheduled for Brenman field is for the lighting issue only, and is months away, probably after construction has already begun on the field. The implication is to advance the field without any further comments on its merits, other priority fields, or the related parking and lighting issues. The contention that these actions do “not require any further action” by the City's leadership, violates the spirit, if not the letter, of openness in public space development. It is the fiduciary responsibility of the City Council to review this report, and to endorse, amend, or reject this million-dollar expenditure on the construction and repair of our fields. These are the people ultimately accountable to the voters. An unelected body should not be able to make a decision of such consequence without the oversight and consent of our representatives.

Respectfully, Gary J. Carr

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Respectfully, Gary J. Carr



Gary Carr &lt;garyphoto.com@gmail.com&gt;

## The Field at Ben Brenman

2 messages

James.Spengler@alexandriava.gov &lt;James.Spengler@alexandriava.gov&gt;

Wed, Feb 17, 2010 at  
5:21 PM

To: gary@garyphoto.com

Cc: Rose.Boyd@alexandriava.gov, jnoritake@nka-arch.com

Mr Carr your email to Mayor and Council was referred to me for response. I would first like to let you know that you always have the opportunity to contact me by email or phone to receive full and complete information about any project carried out by this department. Additionally, meetings of the Park and Recreation Commission are open to the public and you are welcome to attend to hear information first hand.

You should realize that there is extensive coordination between the City Schools and City Departments. Monthly there is a city/schools meeting attended by the Mayor, School Board President, representatives of both governing bodies, the School Superintendent and City Manager. Staff from both organizations also attend. There is also a monthly city/schools meeting for staff that is attended by many departments in the city. RPCA and school staff meet on an as needed basis to discuss and coordinate the various projects we have in common such as athletic fields, maintenance, and new school facilities. The number of meetings average about 2 a month. The field report and recommendations have been discussed at all these meetings and over many years since it is a concern held in common. Additionally, the CIP process in the city involves staff from both organization discussing projects intended for implementation over the next 10 years. Athletic fields are part of the discussion and reviewed both by the city and ACPS.

The field study you reference has been conducted twice in addition to an Athletic Field Master Plan. The issue of athletic field conversion and the next field issue has been under public discussion since 2006. It was presented at numerous public meetings and received extensive public comment. The community, specifically the athletic field user groups helped shape the criteria used to rank existing facilities and field requirements. Additionally, the Park and Recreation Commission has held several public meetings, open to all, since 2006 to receive comments on the field matrix study. Most recently, a public work session was held with City Council on the subject of athletic fields.

Based on the previous and current study, City Council approved funding between the 2009 and 2010 CIP to do the field conversion at Ben Brenman. The information from the recent study was used by ACPS to place Hammond conversion in the school's CIP. We furnished ACPS data on the conversion cost and lighting. Please realize that city fields are carried in the city CIP and school fields in the school CIP. The Minnie Howard field is on city property. School fields were specifically placed in the current study so the organizations could do joint planning.

A specific part of planning for Ben Brenman, also discussed at each public meeting, is the issue of parking. Staff has conducted a parking study and identified an additional 30 net spaces in the park. We will also require staggered start times for games to minimize overlap and begin assigning parking locations for home and visitor teams. All of these items together are sufficient to meet athletic field parking. Athletic field conversion does not put more patrons in the park on an hourly basis - the additional use is accommodated through a longer day.

Once funding is approved in the CIP, for field conversion, the only additional requirement is an SUP if lighting is proposed. The public SUP hearing is on the lighting.

Jim Spengler, Director  
Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities



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**Fri, Feb 19, 2010 at 3:44 AM**

Reply-To: [gary@garyphoto.com](mailto:gary@garyphoto.com)

To: [James.Spengler@alexandriava.gov](mailto:James.Spengler@alexandriava.gov)

Cc: [Rose.Boyd@alexandriava.gov](mailto:Rose.Boyd@alexandriava.gov), [jnoritake@nka-arch.com](mailto:jnoritake@nka-arch.com)

Mr Spengler,

Thank you for your response to my letter. I would like to make a few comments in reply. I have attended and spoken at Park and Recreation Commission meetings numerous times, and over many years.

I appreciate the fact that "extensive" meetings have been held that include City leaders and staff, the budget process, and that athletic fields are included in this discussion. My base contention is this, any process that produces a result where 1200 students at a public school are unable to play on a field adjacent to it because it is such poor condition flawed. If this situation persist for over 10 years, effecting thousand of young lives, perhaps the process should be reexamined.

It is the exact factor, that CIP dollars for this field are by the city, and CIP dollars for that field are the responsibility of the schools that has let to the current conundrum. This discussion, and review of the field needs, has lead to the result that the city will build a playing field (with lights) to the highest standard, while a couple of miles away, a field at a public middle school is in such poor condition it is virtually unusable. I hope you appreciate the contradictions implied in that statement.

Our playing fields are not "city" issue or "school" issues, they are community issues. Maybe that is the fundamental flaw of this whole discussion. We are treating this a two separate issues, when it is one. It leads me to conclude that all playing fields in this City should come under a single administration (and CIP) for design, construction, and maintenance. Your Department is the obvious choice. This will alleviate this burdensome task for the schools, allowing them to get to the core responsibility of educating our children. Then the only coordination needed would be on scheduling use of the fields. Just a thought.

The specific issues on lighting and parking at Ben Brenman Park will unfold through the regular process. My comments on that subject were for consideration in the overall scheme of its development.

What I cannot accept, and won't be silent about, is the woeful condition of the field at Hammond Middle School. It can be rationalized and explained in any way possible, the fact remains that in we are subjecting the children there to a environment that is detrimental to their future well being. Repairing the field at Hammond should have the highest priority.

Thank you again for your response. Look forward to meeting you, and the day when this is no longer an issue.

Respectfully,

Gary J. Carr

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