

Statement to Alexandria City Council 10-17-2009

by Gary J. Carr

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Mr. Mayor, Mr. Manager, Members of Council, my name is Gary Carr. I rise in an ongoing effort to get you to pay it forward, to repair the fields and restore the running tracks at Francis Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools. My father received a Purple Heart in Korea, my brother is in Iraq as I speak, I am a honorably-discharged veteran, with two children in the Alexandria City public schools. So if it pains you that I speak redundantly on this issue, I am sorry; and if it doesn't move you because I speak alone, I'm sorry about that too. But my brother, and my father, and the thousands of my brothers and sister protecting this country have provided me with the opportunity to petition my government, and I have the right, indeed the obligation, so that is exactly what I intend to do.

There are many justifications Alexandria has for restoring its running tracks. I have enumerated most of them before, from health reasons to the economic benefits. One special reason is history. Running tracks is a our part of our legacy. There used to be five tracks serving this city. At George Washington, Hammond, T.C. Williams and Parker-Gray. The fifth track that served the city, little known to almost everyone, was Dunbar High School in Washington, DC, where in the early years African Americans in Alexandria had to go to get a high school education. We also have won numerous State championships in track and field, and to this day own the American record at the Penn Relay in the men's 4x100.

It seems at every opportunity it seems we have scorned tracks. For five-years this city had no public track facilities. At when daylight savings-time begins, again we will be in the dark, again with no publicly available track. This fall with daylight savings time, when the citizens in this city get off work, there will be no track for them to run on, or take their children. And none are projected in the near term as we face an epidemic of childhood and adult obesity.

There is no track, or even a parameter path, at the proposed Sports Complex, none Potomac Yard Fields, and none at Witter Fields. None are projected for Ben Brenman Park. There is none at Minnie Howard Field, or Ft. Ward Field. And none at our Middle Schools. And our only track we do have, T.C. Williams, does not have even a minimal amount of illumination to make it useful after dark. Let's be serious, The T.C Williams High School track and field should be illuminated, it is the only school in its league without lights. No fields in this City should be repaired until we fix the ones at are schools. And any that are considered for development should include a track, or at minimal a perimeter path, to make it useful to the entire community.

There is a soldier laying in the military hospital outside of Baghdad where my brother works. Their limbs may be mangled, but their patriotism is intact. And when they return home to participate in the Army Ten-Miler or the Marine Corp Marathon, it is Alexandria where I want them to come. For if we build them they will come. And if we build them, they will run.

**ACPS SCHOOL BOARD Message 10-8-2009 by Gary J. Carr**

I often think of the statement of the late Senator Edward Kennedy, "Some people see things as they are and say "Why?" Some see things that never were and say, "Why not?"

Madame Chair, Mr. Superintendent, Members of the Board my name is Gary Carr. I rise in an ongoing effort to get you to pay it forward, and restore the running tracks to Francis Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to practice my public speaking skills. I am getting a little better at these three minute speeches. Now if I could only find something I feel passionate about. Until then, why not discuss the City's running tracks.

You may have become a little jaded to my message. I understand that there is not this great groundswell of demand, for what to me seem obvious. I am puzzled by this. I wish that supporters of this concept would make themselves known. Still, I have not been challenged on the veracity or logic of my arguments. If I misstate any fact, please correct me. I continue to hope at some point, the merits of my statements will resonate in the community, and its influential leaders and groups to get this done. My efforts will be forgotten, but when this comes to pass, it will live in this community for posterity.

The field at Hammond Middle School is a contradiction to many of the things we claim to believe. What I see at Hammond is a playground that belongs at an elementary school on one side, and a rock garden that belongs at a college on the other. Wedged in between is a poorly maintained track and field that belonged to what used to be a high school. Moreover, what troubles me the most, is you rarely see any children playing there. Every book you ever read never said anything about a track at a middle school. If you step outside that book, that box, it exposes a plain fact. Running, as reading, is fundamental. There is not a better time to instill this healthy habit than in middle school. Why Not?

I would guess that most, if not all of you, were athletes of one sort or another. In fact there a rumor going around that one of the reasons you not fixing the tracks, is you'll have get on them and get back in shape yourselves. Leadership by example. I've heard the Superintendent says time and time again, the qualities he was looking in new hires was leaders, who could also work together. I would wager that every one of the principals he selected are former athletes or at least causal runners. Running allows those who are not gifted as athletes the opportunity to develop character and leadership skills. Ted Leonis, owner of the Washington Wizards and Capitols, stated in an interview, because his parents, like many of us, we busy trying to make ends meet, that the way he developed his leadership and teamworking skills was through sports. Well for the majority of us who are not tall, or fast, or otherwise gifted, there is one way to get these important skills. Through running on a track. Why not ? You know this was coming, cheek-in-tongue- If we build it, they will run.