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**Statement to the Alexandria City Council June 25, 2011 by Gary J. Carr**

Public

Forty years ago, in 1971, T.C Williams became the only high school in the City of Alexandria. Lost in the story of this event dramatized in "Remember the Titans.", was the fact that the integration of the then Hammond High School was the nexus of all the controversy and animosity. Hammond High School was conveniently opened two years after *Brown vs the Board of Education*, and was never integrated as a high school. This running track and field is the last battle of the civil right era in Alexandria, and its history of separate and unequal. The repair and lighting of the field at Hammond is the epilogue an at once sad and triumphal story.

Mr. Mayor, Mr. City Manager, members of Council, my name is Gary Carr and rise as a advocate of running and running tracks to combat the malady of this generation, childhood obesity. Over the past several years my efforts have focused on the sub-optimal conditions of the field at Hammond Middle School. To the credit of the Superintendent, the School Board and all those involved, after a decade of neglect, the situation there will finally be ameliorated. The question before you now is whether to add lighting to this long neglected project. The answer to the question of lights is a categorical, "Yes."

I will not have the opportunity for detailed explanation of the need for lights, though it is part of my written statement. If I could put it succinctly into a sound bite, "you would not buy a new car without out lights." And so I will make three points.

One, it is fiscally responsible to add lights to this project. It would be imprudent to spend a million dollar to improve a valuable and needed city asset, and then not add lights (especially given the pressing need for facilities of this kind in the city). You essentially waste 50% of its usage. And may I remind you the are no lighted running tracks in the entire city.

Two, to clarify a question raised at the Planning Commission, there is no equivalency between Upper Hammond and Lower Hammond Fields. The two areas represent vastly different challenges. It is twice as hard and would cost four times as much to develop Lower Hammond (not to mention it would require an addition class period for the children to get there and back.) Don't confuse the two issues.

Lastly, a Commissioner chose to invoke some obscure and rarely use clause that says that if anyone is financial harmed from loss of property value by a project it can't proceed, or something to that effect. Someone is inevitably adversely affected by all your decisions. Your responsibility is to determine the

greater good of all of Alexandria citizenry, especially our children. If you chose to use this clause in the law, don't just use it when its convenient. Be consistent. If this clause keeps an important facility, a public middle school field from being completed, it is time to review and repeal any such ordinance.

This proposal has the unanimous support of the School Board, approval of the Planning Commission and the recommendation of city staff. Opponents of lighting never mention the welfare of the children. You cannot vote against lights at Hammond and somehow believe you are not harming children, thousands of children.. The lack of playing areas makes us have one of the highest rate of childhood obesity in this region. That hurts children and shorten their lives. Justice deferred can become justice denied. I hope that deferring action on the item is not an excuse to prevent the inclusion of lights to a vital public asset.

**Let's Shed Some Light**  
**Statement to the Alexandria City Planning Commission June 7, 2011 by Gary J. Carr**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Planning Commission, my name is Gary Carr. I rise in support of the addition of lights to the field and running track being constructed at Francis Hammond Middle School.

Some of you may be aware that I have been an advocate of running tracks in general, and specifically to improving the dismal condition of the facility at Hammond. To that end, the School Board and City Council have allocated the resources to repair the field with synthetic turf and reconstruct the historic track that once graced that site. The issue before you is whether we maximize our million dollar investment in infrastructure, and by extension in our children, by adding lighting to this project. The answer is "Yes".

I am not going to recite the benefits or needs for lighting, they have been amply expressed in many forums. (Introduce for the record notes from Community Informational Forums). Quoting the SUP: the field is a "well-used, and much needed athletic/recreational resource in the City" and "to better meet the recreational needs of Alexandria's citizens and the students of Hammond Middle School, and to improve evening use of the site" we should add lights. Sounds straight forward, logical and simple. But nothing is ever so clear-cut. The proposal goes further, "In addition to lighting the field, ACPS proposes to add safety lighting for the track as a courtesy to neighboring citizens so that they have the ability to use the track in the evening". Additionally, "The proposed lighting system will use technologically advanced fixtures that significantly limit light spill-over beyond the playing field area and track". The field makes the site better, the track makes the field better, and the lights make the facility better. The design is smart and efficient.

As a proponent of lights, let me address some of the concerns raised by the opponents. *It's a school.* This cannot be overstated, Hammond is one of only two middle schools in the City of Alexandria. So, criticism of lights have to be viewed from this perspective, *it's a school.* Every effort have been made to address the concerns of the neighboring homes and the nearby community. It therefore begs the question, "Is there anything further that can be done to mitigate the impact of lights, given the fact that *it's a school*"? Trash, noise, traffic- all are being addressed to the best possible contingency. Operations will be periodically reviewed to deal with any new concerns. But a playing field at a school cannot be, and should not be, some dark, quiet, sterile environment. These are children in a learning situation, let them have fun.

As the opponents to lights make their case, children are rarely mentioned. It is perhaps unfair to ask if they have, or will have, children attending Hammond Middle School, or know it's history. Its location in close proximity to residential housing has significant implications to the City's past. Frankly, we can't change that. The recreation staff, the school and city officials have all pledged to make this work, with the least possible disruption to the quality of life for those most directly effected. Vagrant behavior will not be tolerated around our children, anymore than it will for the school's immediate neighbors.

Many of the objections go to the core issue that this is an urban school in a densely populated area. *Item:* this will be the only illuminated running track in the entire City. *Item:* in the winter it is dark by five o'clock. *Item:* in the summer it is often too hot to play during the heat of the day. *Item:* we have one of the highest childhood obesity rates in the area. *Item:* there is an unmet and growing need for play areas. This string of statements leads to one conclusion: the lighting of this field, and all the fields at our secondary schools for that matter, is a *need*, not a want.

There is a suggestion of delaying this decision and having more studies. The construction on the field will proceed regardless. The fact is, deferring on this opportunity effectively changes the future physical and emotional development of thousands of children for decades, if not generations. Make no mistake, lighting this track and field is beneficial, and in the same converse way that not lighting it is detrimental. This is not a zero-sum decision. Over time, the positives will be amplified and negatives will be diminished. Our children have waited long enough, at Hammond Middle School Field, let's shed some light.

## Statement to the Alexandria City School Board June 9, 2011 by Gary J, Carr

Let me try this, all in 3 minutes, humor, history, philosophy, and poetry.

Humor- Look straight ahead when I say this- two out of three Americans are overweight or obese.

History- 40 years ago, in 1971, T.C. Williams High School was integrated "with all deliberate speed".

Philosophy- *It is easier to build strong children, then to fix broken men.* Frederick Douglas

Poetry- I'll save that for last.

Madame Chair, Mr. Superintendent and Members of the School Board. Thank you for fixing the broken field at Hammond Middle School, and for endorsing the addition of lights to this project. Lights are needed there, and at all of our secondary schools. You may think this running track is a small thing in the pantheon of your achievements, but I assure you, it is not. You have nothing less then corrected an historic omission, and changed the future physical and social relations of this community. You are building strong children.

You may have come to believe I view running as a panacea. In fact I do.

Mind you this is not about the sport of track per se, it is about running- running for fun and fitness; and you need a running track to do that. Let me give some quick examples of the benefits of running.

Stopping smoking won't make you start running, but running will make you stop smoking.

Losing weight won't make you start running, but running will make you lose weight.

Eating right won't make you start running, but running will make you eat right.

And graduating high school won't make you start running, but running will make you graduate. (It's a statistical fact, students who run regularly graduate almost 100% rate). I could go on... but you get my point. Positive behaviors are reinforced and negative ones diminished by the simple act of running, no matter how fast, the simple effort makes you a better person, and this a better world.

My daughter Christina is going to James Madison University. How many track scholarships do you think they have for boys? None. How many do you think they have for girls? Over forty! Twenty scholarships awards, and the running track will have paid for itself.

As this is the last Public Hearing of the year, and I have come to believe it is one of the most important. I am trying to get a few ideas onto your Board Retreat schedule. These are fully thought out concepts, but in the interest of time, call me to explore them further.

1. Build the new school first. You could address every need of the school system in one fell swoop, (Site at Jefferson-Houston is not appropriate for behemoth 3 story building being proposed.)

Combine the facility with National Science Foundation relocation bid.

Build subsidized teacher housing in critical demand areas (math, science, special education)

Build auditorium at site for Foundation, with dual-use as school board meeting room/auditorium

Move the Administration Building from this leased space. It inconvenient for teachers and it isolated from the community. And with BRAC it's going to get much worse.

Use Jefferson-Houston school for ten more years, the roof doesn't leak and the air conditioning works. Then integrate it with the Old Town pool and recreation center for a complete complex.

2. Don't delay in identifying the new school site. (Block 4 and the field site should be openly addressed), The longer you wait the less options there will be. TBD just won't do.

3. Start the school year early *virtually*. You are reinforcing the agrarian based school calendar you lament. Everything is in place- computers for every kid, widespread internet, video conferencing, email, and a relation with NOVA (a college that has distance-learning down to an art form). It could be implemented this year on a trial basis for say, Honors English. Starting the school year early should consist of simply picking up your computer in August, logging-on as required, with assignments due the day after Labor Day.

I could go on. Just wanted to end by submitting my statement to the Planning Commission on June 7, 2011, and urge anyone who is interested in to attend the City Council Public Hearing on June 25 and express your support for *sensible* lighting of the new Hammond Middle School Track and Field. Or just come to the council chamber and stand at the podium with me.

For *when* we build it, *and* we light it, they- and we- will run. (Do I have time for a poem?:)