

## **Save our Park Or Enhance It?**

### **A Positive look on Changing Education**

This letter is intended to inform, entertain and create a different view that is felt in the community of Ingersoll. Not all is negative but those negatives are always louder than the positives. This letter is to point out the positives that are being felt by many citizens of this town. As councillors for the town of Ingersoll I hope you will keep an open mind and remember that children are raised by a community as a whole, not only individuals in a community. Our children should be rounded and think of all aspects of life and learning and not just focussed on the problems that are immediate to them. As we are all aware in a community all different people exist and those that feel negatively affected by change always speak louder than those that are okay with the change. I hope by writing this letter you will understand the great benefit this new school will have on an already great community of Ingersoll.

For the past year and a half the ARC has been working together with the Thames Valley district School Board and the community of Ingersoll to brainstorm ideas where the new school should go, what the school should offer and how the school system and the community can work together to create a better community for all ages. We knew the new school was going on the North side of Ingersoll but unaware of the exact building site. The committee worked hard to think of the town as a whole and put forth the best recommendations to the school board, which has been done, to work together to better our community at all levels. Our job as an ARC has been completed to the best of our ability and we are very satisfied with the recommendations that have been passed on.

The next step is to present the idea of a school being placed in the Garnett Elliott park area which we know is the current proposed building site. As a citizen of Ingersoll, having children myself as well as providing in home daycare and a very active member of the ARC for the community of Ingersoll, I feel strongly that this location is great for our community's children to be educated.

I understand where the community of Garnett Elliot is coming from. We were once there too with the closing of our school, a major change. Do we want schools to close? Definitely not! However, for the best interest of all students in the town of Ingersoll we needed to make some decisions that will cause change for Ingersoll and create a brightly educated future. This will affect many people, groups, businesses, clubs and citizens of our community. Most will be okay with the change and say nothing, but we will hear from those who are not pleased with the change. We still need to focus on the community as a whole. Many who are not pleased may be misinformed or they don't understand the dynamics of Ingersoll and speak out with improper information. Some may even lead others to believe untruths about the change and not even know it. Petitions will be signed because of belief and not facts. Being on the ARC has demonstrated many of these and once the people have all the information they understand why the changes need to be made and will be okay with it too. We need to educate the town with this information now.

I understand the councillors need to make a decision that they feel is in the best interest to the town of Ingersoll. You have had some disagreement with the new school proposed building site on the Garnett Elliott Property. This has come from those that may not have all the information about the positive effects this will have on our entire town of Ingersoll. As you well know if people are happy with the decision you generally will not hear from them.

When our town holds large events for other communities to share in our exciting town (for example: Rib Fest, Canterbury Folk Festival, Harvest Festival, our Winter Lights) we use Centennial Park, Memorial Park, Victoria Park and our downtown. We do not use Garnett Elliot Park. We use Garnett Elliot for Baseball Tournaments and soccer. People will still be able to use this park for soccer and baseball games. The rest of the park will be used for children playing and people walking their dogs. There will still be room for this too at all hours of the day. So regardless if there is school in session they could still use this park.

I see Garnett Elliott as a recreational park with the school being incorporated to enhance the use of this recreational facility by providing gymnasium facilities, age appropriate outdoor play equipment, updated basketball courts, room for children to laugh and play safely, plenty of paved areas to play road hockey and yes still room for a leisurely stroll with the dog on a leash with family. Creating a wonderful atmosphere for active outdoor participation all year round as the school pavement will be clear of snow during the winter.

The school on this location is central to all the students on the North side of town to be able to walk to school. What child doesn't want to walk to school? With the new sidewalks, safety for our children has been made possible. There will only be a small number of buses that will need to enter the school property. There will be only one street that the buses will have to travel up as well. If we put the school further to the North then it will be creating more students to be bussed. This would mean more buses going up and down streets that would not have buses on it. This is a larger cost for Thames Valley as well. Working together to keep operating costs down means more resources (money) available to educate our children in a great learning atmosphere. I know that the bussing cost is not the towns issue, however, money has to come from somewhere and if we pay more money for buses that means less money for our children's education. I am sure you are well aware there are several pots of money for different programs so why not utilize them effectively and maximize the use of these pots to give the children of Ingersoll a quality education.

I know people move to certain sections of town because of what is there. We moved to Whiting Street area because our children are in the middle of two schools VMS and Westfield and were able to walk to both schools safely. Unfortunately both schools are closing and now our children will be bussed. We are no longer able to allow our children to walk to school because of these changes but we realize in the bigger picture that our children will have quality education because larger numbers of students will allow for better programming provided to the children. Changes need to be made and as much as I don't want them to happen it is in the best interest in my children's education. The north side of town is losing the location of their school too but at least then can still walk to school. Don't take that away from them too.

The Garnett Elliott property is a well populated side of town that a new school will allow the existing students to walk to and also allows those children who were bussed now the privilege to walk to school. They have never had this opportunity before and they are excited about it.

The new school will benefit the ageing population of this side of town as they will be able to share in the laughter and energy given by young children all hours of the day. A concern is the citizens won't be able to watch the children laugh and play in the evening. This opportunity will be expanded to daytime and evening time now. Many children that walk to school return after hours to play more because the facility is safe and familiar to them.

The school will not be an eye sore as it is very exciting to our community to have a brand new beautiful building. Who wouldn't want to see a new building in their community, especially a state of the art school facility? The Design committee has worked hard with Thames Valley to make this school an attractive and safe learning environment for our students and the entire community. As you know this building will meet all up to date standards set by the government.

If the zoning does not go through and Thames Valley has to wait for land to purchase then all the other schools may not be able to go ahead as planned. There will not be enough room for the students for Westfield and VMS to close. The student's will now get shuffled. We all know how adults cannot deal will change and then we are asking the children to do unnecessary changes because the school can't be done with everyone else. One of the reasons for the schools to close is declining enrolment. Thames Valley receives grant money on the number of students enrolled. Right now some of our schools are limited on programming because of this. The students are going to continue to get programming cuts due to student enrolment decreasing if we wait another 2 to 3 years. Is this in the best interest to our students in Ingersoll? I don't feel it is.

Is this about money? Of course it is! Ingersoll has land that could be utilized for a school without changing the use of the land. The park will still be used for baseball, soccer, children laughing and playing on a brand new, age appropriate playground facility. There will be plenty of opportunity for more basketball games, pavement playground games as well as playground equipment to play on. It still allows for dog walking, jogging, picnics and many other family outings that families still enjoy doing.

To sell this portion the town will make money to use on other Ingersoll projects that need to be done without putting up our taxes. Who wouldn't want this to happen? Realistically to make money you sell something, get it from the government, make it yourself, or steal it. I am sure you are not going to steal it nor is anybody volunteering to give it to you. How else are you to pay for things that need to be done without raising tax dollars?

So in conclusion, looking at it from many different perspectives it only makes sense for our new school to go on the Garnett Elliot Site.

After all who uses this ground space the most, THE CHILDREN OF INGERSOLL.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to a concerned, excited and open minded citizen of Ingersoll.

Debbie & Scott Gould