Council Direction: At its meeting of July 13, 2005 Council received correspondence from the Sanford Healthy Community Development Committee, requesting clarification about the impact on Norman “Pinky” Lewis Recreation Centre when Sanford Avenue School is closed. This item was received and referred to the General Manager of the Community Services Department with the request to prepare a committee report.

On March 6, 2006 staff provided an information report to the Community Services Committee outlining the potential impacts on the Norman “Pinky” Lewis Recreation Centre once the existing school is closed.

Information Report CS06009(a) is to update the Committee on the programs and activities currently taking place at the Norman “Pinky” Lewis Recreation Centre and highlight the impact of the school closure.

Information: In September 2006, the new Cathy Wever School opened on the site of the existing Sanford Avenue School. The new Cathy Wever School is a stand-alone building and is not physically attached to the Norman “Pinky” Lewis Recreation Centre. Currently there are two schools operating at this location servicing over 1,500 students (JK- Grade 8). Sanford Avenue School is being used to house students displaced while new schools are built. Sanford Avenue School is scheduled to be demolished in 2010 as it will no longer be needed to house these students.

When the new Cathy Wever School began operating in September 2006, the Sanford Healthy Community Development Committee changed its name to the Wever Community Development Committee (WCDC). The City has been instrumental in the formation of this committee and continues to provide key representation on it. The
WCDC meets monthly and has been very active in developing programs to enhance the community in the Sanford neighbourhood.

Through the work of the WCDC and staff from the Social Development and Early Childhood Services, the Centre has been able to add to its daytime core programs and offer a free after-school program known as “Bingo to Better Health” (which attracts between 80- and 100+ youth/daily). We are also able to offer an Early Learning and Parenting Centre operated by the Niwasa Head Start program with an Aboriginal focus under the Best Start Initiative.

The expansions of the programs at the Norman “Pinky” Lewis Recreation Centre have highlighted the need for additional space to accommodate community day time programs. The Niwasa Head Start Program has been trying to expand their services to meet the needs of the community, but have been unable to do so due to the lack of programming space.

The critical concern remains that with the loss of the two Sanford Avenue School gymnasiums, the Recreation Centre would not be able to continue to provide all of the necessary existing recreational opportunities (with the exception of the pool) in this recognized high need community. When the Sanford Avenue School is decommissioned, the Norman “Pinky” Lewis Recreation Centre will no longer have access to the gymnasiums that house the majority of the current programs (Monday-Friday, 3:00 -10:00 p.m. and weekends). The programs will be reduced to having access to one school gymnasium (Cathy Wever Elementary School) at 6:00 p.m., which will severely limit the type of programming they will be able to provide. The location of the gymnasium, at Cathy Wever Elementary School, presents many challenges as the gymnasium is in the middle of the school, which creates security and monitoring issues. This has resulted in Norman “Pinky” Lewis only using this gymnasium for self-contained groups and rentals.

Monteith Brown has been hired by the City of Hamilton to undertake a Public Facility Use Study of our existing facilities. This study will identify which recreation centres should be expanded, which ones should be decommissioned and which ones should be renovated. The Norman “Pinky” Lewis Recreation Centre will be a part of this study and the perceived need for additional community space will be addressed during the study.

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board owns all of the land surrounding the existing recreation centre. Staff have met with representatives from the School Board to see if the recreation centre could be expanded when the school is removed if the need for additional space is identified as part of the Public Use Study. The School Board has indicated to staff that they will not enter into any agreements with the City of Hamilton until their dispute over parkland dedication is addressed by the City.

Staff at the Norman “Pinky” Lewis Recreation Centre will continue to work with the Wever Community Development Committee, to provide programs and opportunities for the residents living in the Sanford Community.

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Joe-Anne Priel
General Manager
Community Services Department