January 19, 2009

Mayor Fred Eisenberger,
Mr. Chair and Members of the Economic Development and Planning Committee,
and Tim McCabe
Hamilton City Centre
77 James Street North
Hamilton, Ontario
L8R 2K3

Dear Madam and Sirs:

RE: Parkland Dedication / Cash-in-Lieu

We commend City Staff for the thorough discussion of Parkland Dedication / Cash-in-Lieu in the report of December 8, 2008. It is encouraging that the report acknowledges that adjustments are required of By-Law 03-199 to provide a more equitable balance of Cash-in-Lieu of parkland per unit throughout the full range of housing densities.

As you are aware, the Durand Neighbourhood Association ("DNA") supports the proposed development on the former Thistle Club site. The Thistle Club closed its doors in 2002 and the building was demolished in 2004. There have been three changes in ownership since then but the current owner has been very forthright and open with its development plans. This site is vacant and creates an eyesore in the neighbourhood and the City in general. It is our understanding that the Parkland Dedication / Cash-in-Lieu is a large impediment to the initiation of the development. We implore you to come up with a suitable solution to this problem that will be satisfactory to both the City and the owner/developer.

The Thistle is one proposed development; there is, however, a larger issue that needs to be addressed. The current By-Law and the suggested revisions in the City report negatively impacts Hamilton’s downtown neighbourhoods. The stipulation that Parkland funds must be used to acquire new parkland needs to
be revisited. This money is unavailable to the downtown neighbourhoods as there is very little opportunity to purchase parkland in such densely populated areas. We therefore request that City Staff specifically study and investigate the impact that Parkland Dedication / Cash-in-Lieu fees have on our downtown renewal and development.

Non-traditional strategies need to be considered, including the enhancement of existing green space so that it can accommodate more people and an increased variety of uses. There are some great opportunities downtown to utilize Parkland monies to enhance existing parks, streetscapes, public squares, community gardens, and other outside public spaces whose development would be part of downtown revitalization.

In Sudbury, for example, the neighbourhood from which the Parkland Dedication fees were received is first in line to benefit because that is the legislation’s intended purpose – to provide parkland for that particular neighbourhood. Only if parkland needs are met in that neighbourhood can the money then be used to meet parkland needs in other areas.

In conclusion, we trust that you will find an appropriate solution to the Thistle site problem and use this opportunity to explore beneficial options for Parkland funds for the greater good of the downtown neighbourhoods. Thank you for your time and attention.

Yours very truly,
Sarah Matthews, President
Durand Neighbourhood Association