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June 04, 2024

Chair Lehman and Members of the Planning and Environment Committee
City of London
300 Dufferin Avenue
London, ON N6B 1Z2
Via email: pec@london.ca

Re: Sites for New Schools in the City of London

Dear Chair Lehman and Members of the Planning and Environment Committee,

On behalf of the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB), we would like to request that the City of London review its policies regarding the availability of land for schools as it is becoming increasingly difficult to acquire school sites within new developments in a timely manner.

As the City of London continues to grow, the TVDSB has encountered challenges in acquiring school blocks in new plans of subdivisions.

School boards in Ontario fund large capital projects, such as new schools and additions, through the Ministry of Education's Capital Priorities Program. This is the only source of funding for school boards. Usually, there is one annual call for submissions. All school boards in Ontario have the same opportunity to submit business cases and the Ministry of Education considers the strongest submissions for approval. Recent changes to the Ministry's capital approval process also prioritize shovel-ready business cases - meaning land is readily available and agreements of purchase and sale can be carried out quickly, in some cases even before business case submissions are made.

The existing timeframe the City of London allows to purchase school blocks often does not provide enough time for TVDSB to secure sites. Option agreements may run out well before a business case receives approval for a specific area, depending on the pace of the development. New neighbourhoods often need to be well built-out before a viable business case is possible, at which point it may be too late to negotiate the acquisition of a multi-acre school site if a dedicated block is not still available. Not having school sites to purchase when needed significantly hinders TVDSB's ability to provide for student accommodations in support of the City of London's target to create 47,000 new housing units by 2031.

This also leads to increased reliance on portables as well as capping school enrolments and busing significant numbers of students to schools with available space, which are significant additional expenses for the board.

Thames Valley also strives to reduce our carbon footprint in support of the City of London's climate emergency declaration and wants to decrease our reliance on school bus transportation.

We would also like to request that the City of London hold land set aside for new school sites for longer periods of time, to align with Ministry of Education timelines for capital submissions, requirements and approvals.

Recognizing that schools are essential infrastructure for complete communities, we respectfully request that school site sizes within new developments be determined in consultation with TVDSB in order to ensure they are adequately sized to accommodate expected enrolment. Given the limited availability of school sites, their small sizes and the time constraints for their acquisition, it is becoming increasingly challenging for TVDSB to accommodate our rapidly rising enrolment and supporting the growth of the community.

Our Board of Trustees would greatly appreciate your support to ensure students continue to have access to quality education spaces in complete communities.



Beth Mai
Chair of the Board
Thames Valley District School Board

cc: Mark Fisher, Director Fisher
Trustees
Student Trustees