

Mayor Liggett and City of Cambridge Councilors and Staff,

My name is Theresa Smith. I am a lifelong resident of the City of Cambridge. I have been a coach for Buddy League since the beginning of the organization. An organization I am proud to say both of my special needs children are athletes.

In my work life I am a pediatric palliative care nurse for the Victorian Order of Nurses covering Brantford, Haldimand, and Norfolk. Part of my job is to attend school with medically fragile palliative children. At school is where I met a remarkable young lady named Evie. Evie (who is not one of my patients) is 16 years old and has cerebral palsy. She cannot move anything below her waist thus requiring a wheelchair, she has very little control of her upper body movements and cannot speak in anything louder than a whisper.

This past January our class was talking about goals for 2024. Evie's goal was to play a sport. I introduced her to Buddy League. After some discussion with her father (as this would involve driving her to Cambridge as Brantford lacks programs for individuals with special needs) they signed her up. Her excitement about this new experience was palpable and she quickly became Buddy Leagues biggest fan before her first day on the diamond.

We started practicing at school and with the use of weight training gloves, Velcro straps and a foam bat we were able to make a set up so Evie can swing a bat on her own. She is so proud because now she can play baseball just like her parents and sister.

Despite Evie's enthusiasm and love of the game not all was perfect. After baseball Evie requires extra rounds of cough assist (a device that uses positive and negative pressure to clear the lungs of secretions) and nebulizer treatments. Her parents as well as myself strongly believe the this is due to the extra dust from the sand on the diamond of Little Kin 1 which gets kicked up from running and lingers in the air, especially when it is very dry. In spite of this, Evie still came out every night and despite not being able to speak above a whisper, is one of our loudest most enthusiastic athletes.

When I think about accessibility, I consider more than wheelchairs and their ability to physically get to the diamond. Pushing a wheelchair around a dirt diamond is difficult and with the slightest amount of dampness it becomes even harder.

Not only do we have athletes in wheelchairs but athletes who require the use of ankle foot orthosis (AFOs), knee ankle foot orthosis (KAFOs), gait issues, behaviors and those we know as "runners". A fully accessible diamond would ensure that no matter their physical or cognitive capabilities, all athletes would feel safe, welcome and accepted.

When I think of the possibility of a fully accessible diamond at Little Kin 1, I think about not only the impact for our athletes but the region and our neighboring cities.

Imagine for a second how incredible it would be for the City of Cambridge to be the first city in the area to have a fully accessible baseball diamond?

The City of Cambridge has a unique opportunity here. To build a legacy of leaders for inclusion. To show no child or adult should be left on the sidelines. The time is now for the City of Cambridge to prove that inclusion and accessibility should not be an afterthought but the first thought.

Thank you for your time

Theresa Smith

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Cambridge, Ontario

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