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### **Should taxpayers be treated like schoolchildren?**

Central Tech is a broad, majestic building that gazes out on a large expanse of green grass at the otherwise nothing corner of Bathurst and Harbord in downtown Toronto. On November 19, 2014 the Governance, Policy and Risk Management committee of Toronto District School Board recommended that the board authorize its Director of Education to sign a license agreement with Raizenne Inc. which wants to cover the field in an artificial substance called FieldTurf. FieldTurf is composed of tire waste and tire waste contains 200 chemicals some of which are the most carcinogenic substances known. The plan then calls for an eight-storey inflatable dome covering the tire waste the cold months of the year.

This plan is utterly misguided for the following four reasons:

1. While no study has linked FieldTurf to cancer, there is a growing list of young people who have had acute exposure to artificial turf developing blood cancers. Soccer goalies, who are in the greatest contact with the turf, feature prominently on this list. For more information go to <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/how-safe-artificial-turf-your-child-plays-n220166>. One should not be rolling the dice on matters involving children's health. Until artificial turf is proven to be safe (which is not the same thing as saying no study has proven it to be cancer causing) the board should err on the side of natural grass. There are now grass blends that are low-maintenance requiring no pesticides or herbicides and little watering or mowing.
2. It will replace a beautiful landscape with a visual and aural blight and cause terrible traffic congestion in an area where what little street parking there is had gone to permit holding residents. Sure people can take the TTC but only if they want to wait for a bus with their children in the freezing cold for half an hour only to have a caravan of four arrive at the same time.
3. For these and other good reasons the City refused the TDSB a building permit. The Board has so far taken the City to court, lost there, appealed, lost again, but, secure in the belief

that Toronto taxpayers are an inexhaustible source of revenue that will forever fund this internecine foolishness, it is now taking the City to the Ontario Municipal Board.

When I asked my trustee to find out how much the legal expenses had cost so far, she had no idea. When I asked her to find out the answer, what she came back with was that such matters were not for public disclosure. Therefore, for all we know, the amount they are spending on legal costs would be enough to run Central Tech for the next five years.

They may not appreciate how unseemly is the spectacle of one entity to which we pay property taxes using that money to start a schlepped out legal war against a second entity that then uses our tax dollars to defend itself.

4. These costs, however, are peanuts in comparison to what the board will be paying out once the lawsuits start. Rightly or wrongly almost everyone who gets cancer and who played on this artificial turf is going to start a lawsuit. There is no shortage of supersmart, hyperaggressive, highly experienced lawyers who will compete to actually fund these lawsuits without charging their clients anything unless they get a settlement or win in court. Who in their right mind would want to start up with them? And to think that all of this money could be going to maintain programmes in a city where an increasing number of students face learning challenges.

Rather than calling itself Governance, Policy and Risk Management this committee might consider renaming itself the Ungovernable, Reckless Policy and Risk-Taking Committee.