

ATTACHMENT A
VANCOUVER ISLAND RAIDERS FOOTBALL SUPPORT LETTER

Vancouver Island Raiders Football

July 11, 2023

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Mayor and Council
City of Nanaimo
455 Wallace Street
Nanaimo, B.C. V9R 5J6

Dear Mr. Mayor and Members of Council

Re: Vancouver Island Raiders Football Society

I am writing on behalf of the VI Raiders Football Society, a non-profit organization that provides an opportunity for youth to play football at a high level, within the British Columbia Football Conference of the Canadian Junior Football League.

We are writing to express very strong support for the proposal by the Facility and Parks Operations Department to install lights at Caledonia Park. Having lights at Caledonia is a critical need for the team, on many fronts, not the least of which is that it may help mitigate what we have been going through at Caledonia. Even as I write this letter, I have been informed, a person has been found dead in the bushes around the Caledonia field and our tower has been broken into, yet again. Something has to be done to prevent these types of issues. While the lights are not going solve the problem entirely, it is a step in the right direction as noted later in this letter. We sincerely believe, it will be a positive step.

As a team, our Mission Statement has been to provide a once in a lifetime opportunity that allows young athletes to learn life skills that will help them transition into becoming successful adults. The Raider program is built on a strong tradition and involves a large network of community members (players, parents, peers, volunteers, alumni, coaches) that work hard to make the Raider Football team, the best they can make it become.

Our goal is to be the best team in the country, while providing an enjoyable, challenging, and rewarding experience for our athletes.

Raider Football teaches all participants important skills and the values they need to be successful in life – commitment, discipline, courage, teamwork, respect, preparation, accountability, how to overcome adversity and how to compete on and off the field.

Everyone who is and has been a member of the Raiders football program can take pride in being part of one of the greatest experiences that a young person can participate in.

The Team was started in 2005. In the 18 years that the team has been in existence, it has won 9 BC Football Conference Championship, and 3 National Championships. In addition, it has participated in another 2 National Championship games and 2 additional BC Football Conference Championship games.

The team has also been inducted in the British Columbia Football Hall of Fame, the only Junior Football team to have been recognized as such, as well as the Nanaimo Hall of Fame.

This has been an unprecedented run of success in its short history, one that has not been duplicated in the history of Junior Football in Canada.

In addition to these successes on the field, the Raiders feel that they have contributed to the social, economic, and athletic fabric of the City of Nanaimo. Through teams visiting for games and monies being injected into the local economy by the team, it is felt that the team contributes somewhere around \$500,000 annually, directly into the local economy. This is a significant amount for an athletic team.

The team also volunteers for charity programs throughout the city and helps mentor younger athletes as part of its desire to give back to the community.

It is also felt that the team contributes significantly to maintain the vibrancy of the City. As we recruit across Canada for players, we feel we have been great ambassadors for the City, selling it as a great place to play and live. Every year, we have more players staying through the off season and attending school at Vancouver Island University or just working. We are also seeing more and more parents moving to the area as well.

The Raider's team is building for the future and in this regard, it has been very active in promoting the team and selling its Mission Statement to players and parents, as well as to the community, all across Canada.

To this end, we have brought in Andrew Harris, the most accomplished Junior Football player to have played the game and a Raider Alumni to be our Director of Football Operations. As a winner of 4 Grey Cups, he has really helped to legitimize our efforts moving forward. He has brought a whole new level of energy and opportunity to our program and its place within Nanaimo. Having a proper training facility is paramount to keep moving forward in a positive direction.

Along with improving the caliber of players coming to Nanaimo and enhancing our reputation within the City of Nanaimo, we have been trying to improve the level of the facilities we utilize in order to give our players the best opportunity to succeed.

Caledonia Park has once again become our home practice facility. Caledonia provides us with most of what we need but is missing a few critical pieces to become the type of facility we need. The most important of these is lights so we can practice at the facility in late fall and early winter. As it is now, we have to shift to another field for practice during this time period, while all our change rooms, equipment, and film rooms are at Caledonia. This is really a disjointed and disruptive way to operate and we are the only team across Canada having to do this. This puts us at a competitive disadvantage with competing with other teams, not only on the field but when it comes to recruiting players as well.

However, we do not think that we would be the only beneficiaries of having lights at Caledonia. Football Nanaimo, which utilizes the field would also benefit as well as the other sports that might use the field during the winter and early spring.

Having lights at Caledonia may also actually help Caledonia see increased use at the park again. With the lights, there would be more use of the facility and that in turn may help reduce the amount of thefts and break in that have occurred, as recently as today.

Since moving in, last summer, we have had multiple break ins into our locker rooms and equipment rooms, with the latest, resulting in over \$50,000 worth of team gear being stolen in total. We have also had to deal with fires set against the locker room building as well as against our media tower. In addition, we have to do sweeps of the facility, prior to any practices, to clean up the feces left behind, needles being strewn throughout the field, and clean up other debris. In addition, on more than one occasion, the electrical wiring to many of the buildings has been stripped out and taken and the water taps, near the field, are contaminated due to their location. These are things that we should not have to worry about.

Caledonia Park is a park. It should be there for the enjoyment of the public and should be as safe as possible. Right now, it is not. The problem will become even more exacerbated, given that Football Nanaimo will be moving some their practices and games to Caledonia. We have no issue with this and have been more than supportive of Football Nanaimo and have helped as much as we can in their transition. This move brings approximately 350 players and a parents to the park for practices during the week and 1,000 to 1,500 players and parents to the park on weekends for games. Kids who are 7-14 years of age should not have to witness what goes around the field and should feel safe when they come participate in a sport they love. Right now, we are not sure that is the case. The proposed lights can help in adding to the safety of the park. This year, we have had to hire and pay the Van Isle Clean Team for assistance in cleaning the field prior to use.

We need Council's help in trying to get the park back to what it was intended to for and that was to host sporting events and teams, as well as cultural events. By doing so, also helps the neighbourhood. People who live in the area have told us how they like us practicing at Caledonia because it allows them to come out and enjoy the park again, knowing that there are people around, which in turn, make them feel safe when using the park. Something they would not do otherwise. So helping us also helps the general neighbourhood and the citizens of Nanaimo that reside in the area.

Having the lights installed at Caledonia can go a long way in terms of helping resolve some of these issues. They will allow for greater utilization of the park. More use of the park and more people having eyes on the park can go a long way in dealing with the issues of break ins, drug use, and deleterious materials being strewn throughout the park.

As we understand the poles that the new lights will be mounted on are from Harewood Centennial Park. They could and should be utilized. Putting them at Caledonia not only maximizes their utilization as well as provides a benefit to the community. A more cost effective solution will never present itself. Why waste such a resource.

The Raiders feel that they have done a lot in helping put Nanaimo on the sporting map as well as having contributed to the cultural and social fabric of the community. In addition, the team strives to provide an experience to young athletes that allows them to grow not only athletically but personally as well. All this has become increasingly difficult to do. Having lights at Caledonia helps cement the team's long time commitment to Nanaimo and allows the team to compete with other Junior football teams, as well as providing athletes a safe environment in which to pursue their goals. Right now, we cannot and without lights at Caledonia, it is not known how long we can continue to do so.

We feel we are a contributing member of the City of Nanaimo and our issues should be recognized. We are not looking for a hand out but a hand up.

To this end, we sincerely hope that you can approve the funding for the relocation of the lights to Caledonia.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely.

Kabel Atwall, President
VI Raiders

