

SPEECH - Grand Opening Ceremony, October 11, 2023

Welcome Everyone. I'm Mayor Darlene Norman. We are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral land of the Mi'kmaq who, along with the Maliseet first signed "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" covering this land with the British Crown almost 300 years ago.

Elder Cherry Whynot will open the event by smudge this park.

This is an exciting day, one that has taken many years to reach and involved many in our community and beyond. Today we thank all the donors – large and small, who have made Etli Milita'mk Playpark a reality.

Today is also a story about setting a high goal and reaching out for support to help the goal. In 2016, a local mom, Debbie Wamboldt, asked the candidates running for Mayor in the municipal election what they would do to help make the community more inclusive and accessible. Following the election, she met with Mayor David Dagley and shared a vision of a playground that was safe, accessible and inclusive for any child, or anyone of any age or ability to play in.

Council was supportive of the idea and the community provided overwhelming support. Soon a local committee formed and the early fundraisers began. Zombie walks, bottle drives, bake sales, children asking only for donations for the park as their birthday gifts, service club and business donations are but a few examples of the generous trust many people from this community provided to Debbie's Dream. And give deeply they did with approximately \$100,000 of the project's \$600,000 cost coming directly from the fundraising drives of the local committee.

Autism Nova Scotia became a partner and were invaluable in their ability to source grants, issue charitable receipts and provide administrative support. All of these pieces made this big dream a reality.

Providing services to the community is a priority of Council. The Etli Milita'mk Playpark is a much needed asset as it allows inclusive play for all ages. Region of Queens was pleased to be an early donor, with a cash donation of slightly less than \$112,000 plus the land that the playpark sits on. Every member of past and present council deserve to be proud of this partnership agreement. It will require this pride to continue as RQM becomes the owner and caretaker of this



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extraordinary piece of built infrastructure.

This playpark speaks volumes to Region of Queens commitment to accessibility and inclusion for all residents. The benefit of universal design was very evident throughout the summer months as children through to seniors laughed and had fun at the very well received spraypad which is part of Etli Milita'mk. Accessibility and inclusion are all placed at the forefront within Region of Queens. Policies and practices are being implemented that support inclusion within our recreation, social, cultural and workplace environments.

Can we please take a moment to give thanks to the person who had this big dream, who championed this project for more than 6 years – Debbie Wamboldt, thank you very much!

I'd also like to thank David Dagley, Autism Nova Scotia, and the many Municipal staff members involved - all of these people have committed countless hours in assisting to reach this milestone. It's been a long journey to get to this day – but we have arrived!

Thanking and acknowledging the donors is important for us today. Please join me in welcoming to the podium Cynthia Carrol, Executive Director, of Autism Nova Scotia who will be talking to you about the generosity that has brought us all together today.

(speeches by Cynthia Carrol, Autism Nova Scotia, and Catherine Rahey who read the speech prepared by Debbie Wamboldt)

And now, finally, I would like to ask the person with the dream, Debbie Wamboldt, to open the gates of Etli Milita'mk and let the play begin.