



Southwest United Soccer Club
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Lenexa, KS 66215
www.swusc.org

July 16, 2010

To: Mayor Mike Boehm
Lenexa City Council Members
Mr. Eric Wade, City Administrator
Mr. Gary Ristow, Parks and Recreation Director

From: Nick Disidore, Resident and President, SWUSC

CC: Lenexa Park and Recreation Board Members
SWUSC Executive Board Members

Re: Mill Creek Soccer Park Project

On behalf of the 1,400+ children that play each year on over 100 recreational and competitive teams within Southwest United Soccer Club - the vast majority of which are our Lenexa residents - I want to go on record with some thoughts as well as concerns regarding the Mill Creek Soccer Park – “Lagoon Expansion” project as well as the possible taking out of play the existing fields at Mill Creek to do some repairs scheduled to begin very soon. I apologize in advance for the lengthy and urgent nature of this letter however the final design and details of this park project were only been made known July 14th at the Parks Board meeting.

First, let me say that after many years of sitting idle we are very pleased to know this lagoon area will finally be converted to fields for our community. This planned expansion of 3 more full sized fields (or 6 smaller fields) will help ease the pressing need for more soccer fields within Lenexa. We understand the basic features of this project to include pitched fields to facilitate better drainage, additional parking, and trails that tie in with the existing soccer park trails. The fields will be seeded, not sodded. Thus, expected play is 2 years (or 4 seasons) under ideal weather/growth conditions – but it could be longer since an irrigation system is not included in the base design. This expansion is a step in the right direction in terms of establishing more fields which we fully support and appreciate.

But we also have numerous concerns about the process, scope and funding of this project that does not seem to align with how other Lenexa CIP's - Park's project especially - are traditionally approached. Namely;

- 1) Planning/Design – It is our understanding that two very basic needs are not being incorporated that would have significant, long term benefits (or shortfalls, if omitted) on the sustainability and quality of this park:
 - a. Irrigation: Why plan / build brand new sports fields and NOT install a permanent irrigation system to ensure the turf remains as healthy as possible? This concern was also raised by Council members when presented by Mr. Ristow at the June City Council meeting. Given that soccer is one of the most taxing sports for grass and knowing the extreme weather conditions we have in Kansas, it's incredible to think this was not planned or being installed during construction.

- b. Restrooms/drinking fountain: With up to 12 teams utilizing this park at once when fully operational, it's likely to routinely have 150+ children, 20+ coaches and a numerous parents and siblings watching/waiting needing restrooms facilities Monday – Friday for 6 months out of the year. In our estimation, no other city park currently comes close to approaching this level of activity during regular, set times and duration. As such, I'm fairly certain that no other CIP project would be planned or built without providing restrooms for so many patrons. We are certainly not expecting or requesting restrooms like those at Buffalo Meadow (which we're told cost over \$100,000) but simply adding more port-a-potties should be unacceptable for a CIP with such high citizen use.
- 2) Community/User Input – There has been no public forums or opportunities for input from the community or user organizations on this project. There has been little discussion or input sought at Parks Board Meetings other than a few brief “update reports”. We can document multiple offers to be involved in the planning process yet they have been ignored and input, when provided, largely cast aside. These are not examples of how our government has approached CIP projects – Park's especially – in the past. Why here? Why now?
- 3) Funding – Mr. Ristow has indicated that the amount of \$392,000 committed for this expansion was established and communicated to Lenexa voters as the “cap” for sports fields during the 3/8th cent sales tax campaign – thereby dramatically limiting the scope of improvements on this or ANY future field project the city could do. In all my research and meetings before, during and after this campaign (which SWUSC proudly and aggressively supported), I don't recall ever seeing or hearing any specific plans, projects or/and dollar limits stated by the city or the campaign committee to this effect. In fact, we recall that stated language for “new and improved sports fields” was left intentionally vague to allow for flexibility on needed projects as determined by the Parks Board and, ultimately, City Council. So, if this “cap” is true on the Mill Creek Lagoon, we were grossly misled and I would like to see where this was stated. We would also respectfully ask to see any public records that stated any other detailed information on how the sales tax dollars were specifically going to be spent from the Parks 30% allocation of gross tax proceeds so we're not misinformed going forward.

If there is no such documentation, then we respectfully request that funding to install such basic services as public restrooms and field irrigation be incorporated in this project, either during or shortly after field construction. Or, at minimum, be put before the public for input either prior to or a condition of City Council final approval on this project.

- 4) Existing Field Restoration Funding and Timing - As stated above, Mr. Ristow reported that there are very strict limits on available funds for the Lagoon project. But, it now appears there are some “additional funds” available as well as a strong desire by the administration to do some repairs to the current Mill Creek fields. We would gladly welcome and support this desire based on the condition that any restoration improvements be done to the same specification as that of the Lagoon fields. As we recall, the 3/8th cent sales tax initiative clearly stated that revenues would go to establish new and improve existing fields. We believe the intent and spirit of this was to ensure existing field restoration would be done right. Thus, to do anything less would be an ineffective use of time, resources and disservice to the public.

But, the primary reason stated for doing this repair at the same time as the Lagoon was concern for patron safety with heavy equipment and traffic entering and exiting the Park. While we fully agree with the importance of safety during construction, upon closer review, these concerns are

unfounded and could/should be mitigated with city restrictions typical associated with any public park or city project. Thus, we oppose this idea for the following reasons:

- a. The parking lot that serves the existing fields are the first turning point into the park. Thus, patrons will not be required to drive THROUGH any the construction area on either the Lagoon or Public Service projects.
- b. The current field and parking layout allows for very safe patron drop off/pick up and direct access to the current fields.
- c. Most construction/heavy equipment traffic in and out of the site should be done by the time most teams show-up or are picked up for practices since city ordinance require construction to terminate at 7:00pm. We assume this ordinance applies to city projects too since residents live on this access street.
- d. The current street into Mill Creek Park is wide enough to support 2-way traffic even for heavy equipment such as large, public safety vehicles (fire trucks) as it has for many years. In our many years of “co-existing” with public safety vehicles and resident, we are unaware of any prior incidents or accidents.
- e. From our standpoint - as the primary users of the existing fields - the current field conditions are satisfactory, assuming all routine field maintenance is continued, for use until such time as the Lagoon expansion fields are playable. Then, we believe it makes perfect sense to take the 3 existing fields out of play as well as the old sand volleyball court and conduct renovations and improvements similar in scope to the new Lagoon fields and move teams/patrons onto the 3 new Lagoon fields. This sequence of restoration / timing would cause the least amount of disruption to all users; teams and public citizens alike.
- f. Our position on this item “e” might change if the Park administration was willing to “permit” comparable field space and times with soccer goals at other appropriate public fields such as Buffalo Meadows and Electric Park during this unusual restoration/construction period. This would seem acceptable to staff and the community at large given the circumstances of taking an entire, dedicated soccer park out of play for an extended period of time, thus displacing it’s patrons. But, to not permit these nor allow goals would cause severe hardship to our organization and community relative to other neighboring cities programs and services, such as Shawnee, Olathe and Overland Park.
- g. Finally, after 30+ years of use, these fields need total **reconstruction** similar to the specifications of the Lagoon fields, not surface dressing. We are concerned that by doing some minimal repairs now with very limited funding, the administration can claim that “improvements” was performed and they may never be truly “renovated” properly.

Enclosed please find a “Mill Creek Soccer Park Expansion and Flat Rock Pool Improvement Comparison” Addendum for your review and consideration. We have attempted to put side-by-side the various key elements of these two different but equally important Park’s CIP projects. **Please understand that this is by no means an attempt to put a negative spin on the Rock Creek Pool project – quite the opposite.** We are pleased to see it being treated in a method and manner that Lenexa citizen have come to know and expect on such projects. We are merely asking for the same treatment – which, as you can see, has fallen well short of expectations in many key categories. There-in lies our disapproval and plea for immediate change.

Thus, while we greatly appreciate and support the city’s intention to construct and improve public fields, given the above concerns and comparisons, we feel there are far too many inequities with this project that should be addressed. The losers, should this current course be continued, are the large and growing number Lenexa soccer enthusiasts - now and for many years to come.

In conclusion, we respectfully request that city leadership come together immediately, in order to keep this project moving forward, to correct this imbalance and to ensure an equitable process and outcome is achieved - as is our city's mission - in a fair, collaborative, community-based manner.

I greatly appreciate your taking the time to hear our thoughts and concerns on this matter. As always, please accept my personal as well as club's offer to assist in any way possible.

Sincerely,

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Addendum

Mill Creek Soccer Park Expansion and Flat Rock Pool Improvement Comparison

	Mill Creek Soccer Park Expansion	Flat Rock Pool Improvements
Anticipated Funding Source	3/8 th cent sales tax revenue with stated “cap” from city administration of \$392,000	Proceeds from Sale of Cottonwood Softball park – a former multi-community use field complex \$1,900,000
Overview Scope/Budget Process	3 new fields, added parking and trails on the former city “lagoon” area. A budget “cap” was established (when and how unclear) limiting the extent of improvements to a bare minimum. Did not seek input on what is needed and desired from the community or users prior to establishing budget.	There are admitted serious issues with infrastructure, location and design of this oldest city pool that will require min \$1,000,000 just operate next yr. Keeping on budget with any new design was a stated concern at Parks meeting based on prior pool project experience. Lots of public input will be sought on best design and use and, ultimately, final cost.
Current number of patrons utilizing existing facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8,000+ youth ages 6-18/yr • 2000+ adults of all ages/yr • 500+ camps/yr • Unknown # of “walk-on’s” throughout the year 	Estimate between 8,000-10,000 in 2010.
Projected increase number of patron’s to be served by project improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9,000+ additional youth/year • 1,000’s of adults/yr due to growing interest 	Zero to minimal Should help to retain local patrons who are leaving to attend better area pools with more amenities.
Potential duration of Facility Use by public each year	12 months per year Fields are currently never restricted for public use	Less than 3 months per year
Project input and promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No report or update found searching city website regarding project - In June, Mr. Ristow presented to City Council one aerial photo outlining project - No community input opportunities on design or desired enhancements to date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lengthy report and update on city website regarding project - In March, Mr. Ristow presented 35 slide report to City Council detailing issues, options and estimated costs - Public meeting July 15th seeking citizen input - Citizen voting opportunities to select from list of many desired enhancements - Expected second public meeting planned with results and updates
Parks Board Input	“Director’s Report” at July Board meeting with no formal details distributed or opportunity for meaningful board input since project design was complete and construction expected immediately.	Conducted Parks Board Meeting at this facility on July 14 th . Had formal presentation, handouts and Q/A with outside design consultant. Input from citizens in attendance was taken.

	Mill Creek Soccer Park Expansion	Flat Rock Pool Improvements
Project Design and Development	In-house design with minimal input/investment from outside consultant in effort to save money	Complete outside professional design development services throughout project. Estimated cost: \$150,000+
Projected additional revenue to City generated by project	\$72,000+/yr team use (based on projected \$5 per hour per half field for 6 months) \$1,000's more for summer camps Added \$\$\$ from individual or weekends users	Very minimal due to current demographics, growth and intention of facility.
Project increased expense caused by project	\$20,000/yr for additional turf maintenance (weekly mowing and seasonal fert, weed treatment, seeding). Currently, irrigation is not included but should be considered to promote field sustainability which could be funded by new revenue	Unknown. Based in large part on final scope and design.
Potential net revenue to city from improvements	\$50,000/yr	Minimal, if any
Construction Start/Impact	Fast tracked. Minimal design details shared or input sought at any level due to stated desire to get seeding in ground ASAP to take advantage of fall weather. Want to fix some issues on existing fields at same time without providing like resources and scheduling options on other field options	Still in design/community development phase for several more months with multiple opportunities for input. Careful consideration will be given to construction schedule to avoid/minimize "down time" should project move forward
Number of other facilities available for public use operated by City specific to this activity	Soccer Fields with regulation goals: <u>None</u> (Freedom Fields are softball outfields and an open area)	Swimming Pools: <u>2 larger pools with more amenities</u> within 3 and 5 miles, respectively