

WESTWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
July 10, 2019

Agenda Item #10

MOTION TO OPPOSE A 2ND MULTIPURPOSE SYNTHETIC FIELD AT WESTWOOD PARK

The WWNC strongly supports honoring the memory of Tommy Mark and appreciates the support of the many contributors.

The WWNC strongly opposes a 2nd artificial synthetic multi-purpose (including soccer) field to be built at Westwood Park.

The WWNC supports: A natural grass field – to be dedicated as “Tommy's Field” - and to be maintained as an open natural grass field in perpetuity or Enlarging the existing artificial synthetic field and name it “Tommy's Field” or If a new site for the field is developed at Westwood Park, the existing synthetic turf field be simultaneously removed so that only one field is available for use or Acquire additional land to the south of Westwood Park/Recreation Center or Build Tommy's Field at another Los Angeles park – consider Cheviot Hills Rancho Park, a short distance from Westwood Park in CD 5.

The WWNC does NOT support a 2nd artificial synthetic field at Westwood Park.

At the Rec and Park meeting on June 27, Stephen Resnick represented the WWNC and Westwood Homeowners Association on the Roundtable discussion. A new project was presented that no one had seen prior to the meeting. There was no ability to discuss this project as written questions was all that was allowed to be submitted. No further discussion on this new project. No written description of the change and many concerns and questions were left unanswered.

Some tennis courts will be removed to make room for the soccer field. The basketball courts will be moved with no plans for lighting. Please see comments from the “defenders” of the park who are fighting to maintain the open space.

Dear RAP Commissioners and Councilman Koretz,

This message is to follow up after the panel meeting with RAP and the council's office on June 27 regarding Westwood Park. This meeting was not transparent or inclusive, as we were led to believe it would be. The public was not allowed to speak during the meeting, and many questions were paraphrased or not read at all. While RAP responded to many questions, several issues remain unaddressed.

Based on the discussions that evening, I respectfully request that RAP and the council's office follow up with the following actions:

- Conduct an evidence-based examination of why Westwood park is the most appropriate location for this synthetic field. Michael Harrison agreed to develop such a report at the June 27 meeting. The public deserves to know why RAP is going against its own recommendations in its Parks Condition Assessment report (July 2018), which identified Stoner Park (not Westwood Park) as in need of a multi-purpose synthetic field. Also, Cheviot Hills is more than 50% larger than Westwood Park and should be able to accommodate at least 50% more programming than Westwood Park (inclusive of the baseball programming at Bad News Bears Park). Neither Cheviot nor Stoner has a synthetic athletic field to support their athletic activities, but they both have space for a synthetic field the exact dimensions of the one proposed at Westwood park with minimal to no disruption of existing infrastructure.
- Provide a complete project plan, including phasing of the project elements. Additional parking was discussed but not included in the proposal. This needs to be added to the proposal and constructed before the soccer field. Additionally, the proposal included the addition of 2 replacement tennis courts, the relocation of the two basketball courts, and new public restrooms. The replacement facilities need to be completed before the existing facilities are shut down. In addition, the new proposal needs to address the loss of lighting at the basketball courts and the effect of that new location on neighbors. We understand that another potential location for these basketball courts is in the current maintenance yard, which seems to be a superior location for all parties. If this location is possible, the proposal should also indicate where the maintenance yard will be relocated.
- Provide an opportunity for the public to comment on the new proposed design of the park. The public was not offered the opportunity to provide comments at the "Roundtable Meeting" conducted on June 27, which is when the new proposal was presented to the public for the first time. The new proposal will affect a different set of people (basketball and tennis) who deserve the chance to express their concerns.
- Provide a permitting plan for the field that outlines public access, and define what is meant by the "meaningful free play" requested by the donors. The public was previously told (at earlier meetings) that free play hours would be 2:30-6pm every weekday and at least half days each weekend day. RAP indicated during the meeting on June 27th that the permitting plan will change, but did not describe exactly HOW these plans will change. RAP must provide specific days/times dedicated to free play, percentage of time the field will be permitted vs unpermitted, and a commitment specifying how those permits will be prioritized.
- Clearly define how donors will be recognized for this field in a way that prevents commercialization of this public space. We know that requests were made to place logos on the field and build a "donor recognition wall," but RAP did not provide any details about these plans at the June 27 meeting. Please note the public's desire for no commercial advertising and no corporate logos. It is appropriate to include a modest donor recognition plaque that is consistent with others in the park (see attached photo of plaque). We see how the restrictions on corporate advertising at Bad News Bears

have eroded over time (see attached photo), and the public and our children deserve a space without corporate commercialization. Again, this is about retaining a public space.

I participated on the panel for this meeting in good faith and with the understanding that we would be engaging in an honest and transparent discussion, but I was not given the latest information/plan, despite my specific request for project details on Wednesday June 26. I could not have been expected to voice the concerns of the community in that situation. In addition, the public was not notified that there had been significant changes to the plan prior to the meeting, and no agenda was developed, which likely affected the decision of people to attend/not attend. It is the responsibility of RAP and the council's office to welcome comments from the community on this new proposal. The public portion of this process is not finished because the community has not had the opportunity to comment on this very different new plan.

In addition, I would like to reiterate that all information we have been provided at this point indicates that Westwood Park is not an appropriate location for this field. Given that: - the park already has one dedicated soccer field, - the extent of infrastructure disruption that would be required to fit this second soccer field, and - the extent to which the field would displace current activities and use of the park, it is RAP's duty to demonstrate to the people affected by this project why Westwood is the best location. We are talking about a dramatic long-term infrastructure modification to this busy park in a dense residential area. RAP has indicated it will develop a report considering these issues. It is imperative that the report contain a substantive response to these issues supported by data and facts.

Related to the concept of openness, truthfulness, and transparency: RAP misled the public during the meeting, denying the existence of any draft agreement between RAP and the donors, requests made for preferential permitting, and placement of logos on or around the field. We are aware of at least two iterations of a draft agreement, and explicit requests for logos and permitting time for donors. Requests made by donors to RAP include:

"The Galaxy and LAFC have suggested that their logos go in the small circles on each half of the field-as shown attached." "LA Galaxy and LAFC run the most elite youth soccer programs in our region...both organizations should be able to choose a handful of permits a year to come run preferred camps and clinics." "I did ask if Wildwood school could get some specific field time between Nov thru February-as the school is willing to make a significant six figure donation and pay for all necessary permits for what feels like a reasonable time period..." and "Some school is going to be given access, it might as well be the one that's been most involved."

Clearly, these statements point to a certain quid-pro-quo of the use and design of the field based on donor contributions. I explicitly asked about such requests. It is unacceptable that none of the other panelists or people in the room provided truthful answer to my questions about these requests. Based on RAP's description of general park permitting policies during the June 27 meeting, we understand that the Rec Center will be responsible for all permitting and will prioritize it as follows:

- The recreation center will always have priority permitting for community-based programming.
- Second-tier permitting will be offered to schools (mostly private schools) during the day when kids are at school. We assume this to be between the hours of 9am and 2pm on weekdays, not evenings or weekends.
- Youth athletic programming will be offered next during permitted times, including soccer, lacrosse, and flag football.
- Adult athletic programming will have last priority.

At the June 27 meeting, RAP told the public that “There are no promises that any one particular group will have access over anyone else.” We understand this to mean that there will be no specific dates, times or permitting priority for LAFC, LA Galaxy, or Wildwood School, despite the explicit requests (quoted above). Most of the public cannot afford entry into these elite clubs and schools. This issue is relevant to the community’s concerns about access, equity, and preserving a public space . Many don’t agree that it is appropriate to use public space to supplement the athletic programs of private clubs and private schools, while eroding the public’s access to this space.

The public deserves to know how these issues are finalized between RAP and the donors. The topics of free play and permitting have been questioned numerous times by the public at several meetings, with noncommittal or contradictory answers from RAP. Allow the public to provide comment on those plans before they go to the Commissioners.

At this time there are important questions unanswered and issues that need to be resolved with the new plan. Please don’t rush this important decision, which will affect the community for years to come. Take time to consider all locations for this soccer field, and collect and address community suggestions related to this new plan.

Respectfully,
Jaime Rooke

Therefore, the WWNC moves:

Whereas a new plan for Westwood Park has been brought forth and

Whereas a meeting was held at Westwood Park on June 27, 2019 for the purpose of responding to questions from the public and Whereas the meeting was not transparent or inclusive and Whereas many questions and concerns about this project remain unanswered

Now, therefore the WWNC submits the above letter to RAP Commissioners and Councilman Koretz and signed by Jaime Rooke as its position on the yet to be developed synthetic soccer field at Westwood Park.

There is no support for such a field until all concerns have been addressed and questions answered to the satisfaction of the public as represented in the letter signed by Jaime Rooke.