

Name of Council Member
516 3rd Avenue Room 1200
Seattle, Washington 98104-3272

Dear

The recently announced land swap deal between the King County Parks Division (the Division) and the Lake Washington Youth Soccer Association (the Association) wherein a County park, 60 Acres South will be handed over to a private organization represents a gross misuse of a valuable public resource and deals a severe blow to all groups and individuals who will no longer be able use 60 Acres South. In addition to expressing my opposition to this misguided scheme, the purpose of my letter is to ask you to investigate all relevant factors and take a firm stand with me to stop this mistake before it is fully implemented.

The Division's proposal will result in the Association owning 60 Acres South in exchange for the land parcel known as Mueller Farm. The Association would then construct soccer fields on 60 Acres South, adding to their fields located across the street at 60 Acres *North* (60 Acres North is also a County park which has a long term lease between the Division and the Association). The farm land would then be sold to the Lake Washington Technical College to support their horticulture program. 60 Acres South (and North) was purchased in 1968 with Forward Thrust bonds intended to "provide opportunities for public recreation, aesthetic enjoyment, education and resource preservation for all the residents of the County". Displacing the current users of 60 Acres South to make room for additional soccer fields under private ownership violates the purpose and intent of Forward Thrust.

It seems to me that in addition to violating the public's trust in the Division to honor the Forward Thrust intent, taxpayers will lose park land and probably a sum of money yet to be determined. The only winners in this deal are the Association and the Lake Washington Technical College; everyone else loses.

60 Acres South is currently home to a wide variety of activities. The Boy Scouts of America and the Seattle Area Soaring Society (SASS) are the largest groups that use the park, but there are many other groups and individual users. Model rocketeers, school groups, dog racing organizations, kite flyers, numerous aeromodelling groups as well as picnickers, dog walkers and others use the field on a year-round basis, taking advantage of the park's unique combination of location, topography and climate. If the Division's plan is implemented, all of these groups will be displaced and in some cases will have no other suitable place in which to pursue their activities.

While the Division and the Association have gone on record offering assistance in alleviating this loss, their statements are as yet without substance. The Division's previous attempts to find a suitable alternate flying field for SASS failed. Their current efforts are underway though no promising locations have been proposed or evaluated. The Association's proposal to make 60 Acres South available to displaced groups when there is no soccer activity on it is misleading. The physical "footprint" imposed by soccer fields (goals, outbuildings and other structures) would make most non-sports activities difficult and, in many cases, impossible. The few groups that could use the fields would still be limited to primarily bad-weather months and beholden to the Association's schedule and fee structure. This is simply not a viable option, especially when the Association admits that their future utilization of the field will increase and their user fees will be commensurate with maintenance and operations costs which are much higher than the current maintenance and operations costs of the park. Casual, drop-in use of the field would be severely restricted. After all, such use would be considered trespassing on private property. Despite what the Association may say about their willingness to share the fields, their history proves otherwise. 60 Acres North, which they currently lease, forbids access for anything but scheduled and paid activities on this publicly owned park! Other organized sports leagues are about the only groups who can afford to pay and play.

In addition to the loss of park land, this plan, if implemented, will result in a significant traffic increase in the area, especially on 116th Street. A City of Redmond traffic engineer has described 116th Street as "woefully inadequate" to serve the needs of the current soccer traffic, let alone any significant increase. Furthermore, traffic hazards that will accompany such an expansion of soccer activities will include a substantial increase in parking spaces required to accommodate current and future needs at 60 Acres South and North. Such parking requirements probably do not fit well with Redmond's parking regulations nor the intended use of park land. Neither the Division nor the Association have mitigation plans to address these very serious and potentially insurmountable problems. Nor has any mention been made of noise abatement for nearby homeowners who would have new soccer fields literally in their backyards.

This is not the first time the Association has tried to take over 60 Acres South. A comparable attempt was made about 15 years ago. Appropriate County and City judgment prevailed in deciding against the plan due to issues associated with displacement

of current users, the negative impact on nearby homeowners and the challenges of mitigating traffic hazards. Except for traffic hazards exacerbated by the increase of soccer activities, little has changed since then. The attachment provides more information about the 1990 circumstances.

Neither the Division nor taxpayers' cash need to be involved in relieving the Association's debt burden on their Mueller farm property. The Association may sell it to any willing buyer. Including rental of soccer fields elsewhere, there are options for the Association's presumed need for additional fields. They have options. Other users of 60 Acres South including SASS and various model rocketry groups and individuals have no options. Without a suitable alternative, their forms of recreation will become extinct in King County.

60 Acres South can continue to be available to all of its current users and the Division can avoid most, if not all operations and maintenance costs of the park if the Division accepts the SASS Community Partnership Grant (CPG) proposal submitted last June. The proposal exactly meets the guidelines and mission of the CPG program. If the proposal is accepted, SASS will continue its 30 year history as a good steward of the park. The proposal includes SASS' assumption of virtually all operations responsibilities of 60 Acres South, including maintenance and scheduling. It also includes capital improvements and site enhancements to improve access and usability of the field. In contrast to the exclusionary practices of the Association's plans for the field, the SASS CPG proposal emphasizes continued access and use of 60 Acres South for a diversified range of non-sports league users. Unfortunately, the Division chose to reject this proposal, seemingly out of hand, in deference to the (then) secretive negotiations with the Association.

Beyond the factors above, I am greatly disappointed in the shadowy way in which this deal has been negotiated. Only in the eleventh hour before announcing their memorandum of understanding did the Division and the Association reveal their plan to SASS and nearby homeowners. This is despite SASS's repeated requests for the Division's accountability in rejecting their CPG proposal. Perhaps the Division and the Association anticipated a strong negative reaction or maybe it was an effort to fast track the transaction. Either way, this smacks of backroom dealing and is certainly not a process that builds trust with County government.

Although I strongly oppose implementation of this plan, please understand that I am not trying to disparage the benefits of soccer or organized sports in general. At an appropriate scale and with respect for other forms of recreation, athletic leagues are a valued part of our culture. And, I realize that open park spaces such as 60 Acres South are a rarity in King County with many competing priorities for their use. However, if it is not stopped, this plan will serve as a County sanction for big-business athletics to own and operate parks at the expense of lower profile groups and individuals with little or no funding and whose recreation activities do not include organized field sports. This is all the more reason to ensure that diversified, passive recreation activities should remain at 60 Acres South.

I look forward to your reply.

Respectfully,

your signature, name and address

CC: Ron Sims, King County Executive
Pam Bissonnette, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks
Bob Burns, Deputy Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks
Kevin Brown, Director, Parks and Recreation Division
Rosemarie M. Ives, Mayor, Redmond

Attachment: Prior Efforts to Change the use of 60 Acres South and the Political response.

Prior Efforts to Change the use of 60 Acres South and the Political response_

Excerpts from files compiled by Sherman Knight.

In a letter from Michael Wilkins, Manager of the King County Natural Resources and Parks dated February 9, 1990, to Don Martin, the President of the Lake Washington Youth Soccer Association, he states in part:

On Thursday, January 1, 1990, Linda Doherty, Chief of Recreation and Facilities Use Management, and Sandy Spence, Recreation Coordinator, met with you and representatives of the groups who use the South portion of 60 Acres Park for the purpose of discussing whether LWYSA's proposal for developed and managed soccer fields on the property would: (1) curtail or displace current users of the site; and (2) have significant negative impacts on local residences. The park property has traditionally been used as a casual drop-in and a scheduled basis by free-flight and radio controlled model gliders and model rocket hobbyists, and various dog clubs. Local residents of the nearby Valley View Estates also attended.

My understanding is there is no formal resolution of either issue. Before my division can make any final recommendations on your proposal to King County's elected officials, LWYSA should do the following:

1. Negotiate and send to the Parks Division a written, signed agreement with all currently identified user groups that indicate their support of a specific soccer field development plan, including a mutually acceptable plan for scheduled and casual use of the site.
2. Study the impact of traffic, parking and noise generated by LWYSA soccer fields currently located on the North portion of the park, and by fields proposed for the South Area; and develop recommendations for mitigating any negative impacts. (Exhibit 5)

We have only rumors, that LWYSA did actually perform a traffic mitigation study. The rumor is that the cost of mitigating traffic impacts on 116th was so cost prohibitive that they decided to look elsewhere.

Tim Hill writes a letter to Doreen Marchione, (March 26, 1990) Mayor of the City of Redmond. It states in part:

To my knowledge, the County's 60 Acre Park – South is the only public park on the Eastside that is topographically suitable and available for dog trials and model glider and rocket hobbyists. Park users come from a large geographic area including Seattle, unincorporated King County and Eastside urban cities. King County's elected officials represent all constituent groups, and the King County Parks Division is obligated to weigh and balance a broad spectrum of local and regional interests. At the same time, King County recognizes the need for soccer fields to serve the eastside soccer players, many of whom reside in the City of Redmond. (Exhibit 6)

The traffic issues were address both by Doreen Marchioni, the Mayor of the City of Redmond in 1990, and by Tim Hill, the King County Executive at the time. In her letter dated April 9, 1990, to Tim Hill, she states in part:

But we are not certain that we would support expansion of the soccer facilities at this site. That is not the principal reason for our desire to be involved. 60 Acres Park – South is within the corporate limits of the City of Redmond. The rest of the park is served by streets wholly within the city limits. As such, the City has an interest in the traffic and environmental impacts that may be generated from various uses on this site. As you may know, the traffic during peak demand from existing facilities overwhelms the road system adjacent to your facilities. We had hoped that we could be part of the discussion about the alternative uses you are

considering so we work as a constructive party in help mitigating future impacts, where possible. (Exhibit 7)

Tim Hill responds on April 25, 1990, in part:

I too am aware of, and concerned about, the potential negative impact and increased concentration of soccer fields that the 60 Acres Park might have on nearby residents in the surrounding area. **These same issues were raised by local residents and park user groups during their most recent meetings with the park division.** Enclosed is a copy of the letter Mike Wilkins, Park Division Manager, sent to the Lake Washington Youth Soccer Association identifying the noise, traffic, and other concerns which the soccer association must address before King County gives any further consideration of their proposal. It is my understanding that the soccer association has accepted responsibility for researching and addressing these concerns. (Exhibit 8)

Soccer's short term response was to purchase the property across the slough and give up on 60 Acres South, spending hundreds of thousands on that property trying to break the agriculture restrictions, losing at every turn.