Council vote to reconsider ball fields denied

By Councilmember Rose Herrera
Special to the Times

I am with disappointment, not failure, that I write this message to you. My hope is buoyed by the wonderfully supportive and passionate response of residents including young people who sent emails to city council and made the effort to attend multiple public meetings to voice their support for ball fields in Evergreen. Thank you to all who supported our efforts.

After overwhelming support from both our community and city staff to spend Measure P Bond Funds to build ball fields at the Arcadia site on Quinby andcapital Expressway, I am disappointed with the vote by my colleagues on the City Council to deny the motion by Councilmember Pierluigi Oliverie to reconsider last week’s vote. During last week’s council meeting, a motion was made to delay the direction to staff to begin negotiating the donation of land to the City of San Jose for ball fields by Arcadia and to, in all intents and purposes, start the process over again with very preliminary discussions with county staff about the possibility of building ball fields at the County Restrooms.

After evaluating six potential sites across the city for a year, including the County Restrooms, city park staff made a strong recommendation to build the Measure P funded softball field complex at the Arcadia site across from Evergreen. Some of the major reasons staff recommended Arcadia include: ability to construct four adult sized fields, fewer city costs (donated land), near major transportation hubs (near Evergreen transit mall, near major

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Dream a reality
Runners and walkers in the background participating in Omar’s Dream Run on Nov. 10. Photos by Jennie Carbone

Omar’s Dream Run held at Hellyer County Park Nov. 10

By Jennie C. Carbone
Managing Editor

On a crisp, crisp Saturday morning, giving promise of dreams fulfilled, runners, walkers and supporters of Omar’s Dream Run gathered to pay tribute to Omar Hassan at Hellyer County Park.

“I feel honored that God chose me for this particular position,” said Omar’s mother Jamila Hassan at the race’s opening of the run. “That was a decade I shared with him.”

Omar Hassan was two-years-old when he was diagnosed with leukemia and started frequent visits to Lucille Packard Children’s Hospital at Stanford. He knew what it was like to be separated from family and friends and he valued the time he had with those loved ones. Diagnosed with a bone marrow transplant in the winter of his fourth-grade year, and the months of isolation required after the surgery, Omar had a plan. He wanted to attend class.

As Omar battled the disease, he remotely attended Terra Middle School and participated in music lessons with 32 children playing their recordings and him in the hospital. His teacher attended assemblies bringing her laptop and placing it on a chair in front of him for his benefit. Besides keeping up with his studies, most importantly, he was able to stay in touch with his school friends. Before he lost his fight last year, he asked that children in similar situations have the same

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Omar

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According to Omar’s parents and doctors, he was the happiest patient in the bone marrow transplant unit at LCH. While the other kids felt lonely and isolated, Omar kept up with his schoolwork and all the fourth-grade gossip. He was in touch with his friends and teachers and remained an important part of their lives. Omar’s dream was to extend this to other children in the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit at LCH. Sadly, he lost his battle with leukemia on April 7, 2012, but through Omar’s Dream Run, his wish is raising funds for the equipment needed to allow other hospitalized children to attend school remotely. “Omar has impacted everyone’s life,” said Theresa Sutton, sister of Melody Sutton who taught Omar, both co-directors of the run as well as Mike Sutton. “The volunteers are an amazing group. Ninety-nine percent know Omar and all proceeds go to Lucille Packard Children’s Hospital. This is an amazing show of support.”

Melody Sutton agreed. She was Omar’s teacher and facilitated the videoconferencing so he could still be in class or assemblies with the students. The run was sold out with 255 entries. Sponsors included the Lions Club who went “above and beyond in making the run a success,” said Hassan. Jamila Hassan thanked the Suttons as well saying she was “bemused by their passion” and that they’re “a new family to me. Omar will always be a super hero and he showed us the way.”

**Herrera**

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Commercial uses (Eastside new retail development at Arcadia), access from Capitola Expressway and community support, finally the project is ready to move forward and can be completed in two to three years. The new development at Arcadia will bring additional restaurants and other retail uses that will support the softFall complex reducing the need for the city to build as much infrastructure. Arcadia is an example of the new paradigm in urban planning where we are creating complete communitie instead of parking city services in isolation where we have to build parking for one facility. The new thinking is to put libraries, softFall fields and other city services near one another to encourage shared parking, walking, biking, and to leverage economic development in the area. Families can go to the softFall complex at Arcadia and afterwards go to a restaurant or shop or see a movie. Those dollars spent mean additional revenue to the city which supports city services like police.

Requiring city staff to continue evaluating the fairground site unnecessarily delays this project which could make it depend on the completion of the County master plan which, according to staff, would likely take three to five years or more County supervisors Wagner, Simonini, and Wasserman made it clear by their comments during their November 5, 2013, supervisor’s meeting that they did not want to place more the master planning process at the fairgrounds. They were of course the potential of someday maybe, having softFall fields at the fairgrounds but did not support directing county staff to negotiate with the city with a near-term deadline. The staff recommended Arcadia site is ready to move forward now. The fairground’s site is not.

Finally, the city attorney advised council regarding spending the Measure P money and completing the softFall project within a reasonable amount of time. “The council needs to keep in mind there is certain time sensitivity here and that is per IRS regulations... We are advised by our bond council that we need to move as quickly as possible.” This warning did not appear to worry a majority of the council set on delaying the ball fields at Arcadia and taking a time-delaying detour.

So, after Tuesday’s vote, where do we stand? Last week the council deferred action on moving forward with the staff’s recommendation to negotiate with Arcadia on ball fields, and directed city staff to have an exploratory discussion with county staff regarding the fairgrounds on four terms:

**Term of lease**

Who controls the property?

What is the price for lease?

Is there going to be any contribution from the county on these fields?

In a letter sent to Mayor Reed and the City Council on Nov. 15, 2013, County Executive Jeff Smith explained, “I cannot answer the questions raised by the council and city staff without further action from the board as a whole.”

For now, city staff has been directed to return to the city council in February to give an update on their discussions with the county on the four terms. In the meantime, keep up the enthusiastic support of the Arcadia site as the best site for a city-wide ball field complex and will keep you updated on the latest developments.

As always, my office is open to input or questions by emailing dir@cityofsanjose.ca.gov or calling (408) 353-6900.

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