August 2, 2019

Dear North Westwood Neighborhood Council Board Members,

On June 10, 2019, we attended your Neighborhood Council meeting to explain our family’s intention to donate a full-sized athletic field to commemorate our son, Tommy. As a reminder, thousands in our community have donated to Tommy’s Field and signed a Change.org petition; and hundreds of residents, including UCLA students and residents who live in and near to the North Westwood Neighborhood Council (NWCC) area have written letters of support.

Please see the attached letters of support for Tommy’s Field.

We have come to understand that you have received some comments from a small group of neighbors who are in proximity to the park who oppose Tommy’s Field. Unfortunately, based on our experience to date, much of the opposition to Tommy’s Field has not been based in fact, and the purpose of this email is to set the record straight.

While the rallying cry of opponents to Tommy’s Field had been for many months “Save the Field,” we have learned that for some, this was a disingenuous argument. In light of that argument, we worked extensively, in conjunction with the Department of Recreation and Parks and the Westwood Park Advisory Board, to revise our plan and thereby “Save the Field.” Our current proposal does not touch “the field.” Despite this significant change, some still oppose Tommy’s Field. Sadly, we have learned that the small number of remaining opponents simply do not want any new athletic field or any kind of improvement of Westwood Park, despite the tremendous public benefit and outpouring of support.

The money for Tommy’s Field was raised by thousands of members of this community. When Tommy passed away, the community came to our family and said, “Let’s build a legacy that honors Tommy and inspires our community to play.” That is what Tommy was about. Children sold lemonade, adults donated, companies held fundraisers, and together we raised $1.2 million to gift a multipurpose field with lights to Tommy’s neighborhood. This is not a private scheme by corporate interests as the remaining opponents continue to falsely state. It is a project of love, to honor a child who left us far too early, to improve our public park and to benefit an entire community of children and adults alike. It is from our community to our community. Our family has lived in Westwood for 60 years.

The Department of Recreation and Parks chose Westwood Recreation Center as the most viable location for Tommy’s Field. After measuring and considering other West L.A. Parks as options, including Cheviot Park and Stoner Park, the City determined that Westwood Recreation Center is underutilized. The park does not have its own youth programming and would like to develop some. It also had a Master Plan in place to add synthetic turf to the current open space and to repurpose tennis courts. The opposition continues to falsely claim that other parks were never considered and that the City’s assessment is an intentional falsehood. We don’t know why they say this, other than to foster anger.

As the donors, we asked from the very beginning that the field never be locked, have a low fence to keep dogs off it and hold meaningful hours for free and unstructured play. Sadly, the remaining park opponents have intentionally ignored these facts and purposely spread rumors that the field will be a “fortress” and “unavailable to the public.” They continue to make unfounded assertions, without any providing any evidence. For example, they have alleged that private organizations are “secretly plotting” to take over the park. The truth is that not a single donor has asked for a single field permit.

AYSO Region 70, which operates its youth soccer program at this park and others, posted a Q&A on their website clarifying the truth about Tommy’s Field, due in large part to its Chairman’s strong concern about the blatant falsehoods that the remaining opposition is spreading. The Q&A, which you can read here (<https://www.ayso70.org/general-info/>), is intended to give the thousands of AYSO families the ability to form an opinion based on the facts rather than rumors, innuendo and intentional misinformation.

Over the past seven public meetings, the City has revised designs time and again to try and appease as many neighbors as possible. Several weeks ago, at a well-publicized community roundtable discussion about Tommy’s Field, Recreation and Parks staff publicly shared a new design that leaves the current open field space as-is, and places Tommy’s Field over six of the existing eight tennis courts. Two brand new courts will be built next to two remaining upgraded courts and help activate the east end of the park. For background, the City’s figures state that the current tennis courts are being used for an average of 1.5 matches per day, leaving them vacant more than 75% of the time, so removing 4 courts will have no real impact on the tennis community there.

Upon making this announcement, most of the prior opponents resigned their opposition, with some embracing us, hugging us, and announcing their support for the new plan because the “Field had been saved.”

However, it also became clear that no change or compromise would make a difference to a small number of remaining die-hard opponents, who seek to fight Tommy’s Field at any cost. As each of their arguments were addressed by design modifications, the remaining opponents simply made up new arguments until they were left admitting that they just “want their open space and don’t care if it’s dirt.” They claim that Westwood Recreation Center is “their park” and “their backyard” and they don’t want “outsiders” coming to it. The truth is that Westwood Park serves a broad range of residents and patrons, drawing from a five-mile service area.

At that most recent meeting, the absurdity of the remaining opposition was directly called out by several parties. A senior member of the Department of Recreation and Park’s said to them, “You got your open space and now you want to dictate how we run the rest of the park?” A senior member of Councilmember Koretz’ staff followed up by saying to the same group, “I see, you just don’t want anything.”

It is extremely difficult for our family and the majority of this community to understand how giving a gift of this nature could be so difficult and fuel such irrational anger among a select group of park neighbors, along with members of the Westwood Neighborhood Council who clearly are supporting their efforts. Some members of the Westwood Neighborhood Council voted against Tommy’s Field without having set foot in the park for many years, if ever. One Board member publicly spread falsehoods stating that FIFA (the world soccer governing body) does not allow turf fields, when basic research shows us that FIFA constructs synthetic fields and oversees youth soccer games on synthetic fields in countries all over the world. It appears that Tommy’s Field has been opposed by people with other axes to grind against the City.

The majority of this community, as well as the Department of Recreation and Parks, believes Tommy’s Field is a much-needed upgrade to our local public park. Tommy’s Field will accommodate our City’s growing population and better support recent trends in sports. Tommy’s Field will inspire children and adults to play. Tommy’s Field will activate a space in the park that that usually has more dogs running off leash and homeless individuals sleeping in it than it does people playing in it.

A rec center is not someone’s backyard; it belongs to everyone and it should be developed to benefit the entire community, not just a select few.

We hope that you will join our family and the thousands of neighbors, supporters and donors who hope to make Tommy’s Field a reality, for the benefit of everyone. We plan on attending your next scheduled meeting on August 7, 2019 and welcome the opportunity to provide a brief presentation to the NWNC at that time.

Best Regards,

Nikki and Doug Mark