

## **Rollingwood Park Commission – Athletic Field Subcommittee**

### **Alternative Proposal to Enhance and Manage Park**

#### Overview

The Hatley Field park facilities represent a cherished community resource and valuable city asset that we have not maintained as well as we could or should. Part of that is due to inadequate financial commitment, and part is simply due to complacency and inconsistent oversight. Instead of addressing these deficiencies by turning our park over to another intermediary, we believe the best course of action for all stakeholders is for the City (through the Park Commission) to assume more direct responsibility for funding and supervising our park maintenance responsibilities. Although a number of details are still being worked out or quantified, this report will explain the general framework, division of responsibilities and anticipated costs for this proposal.

#### Key Participants

We value our partnership with Western Hills Little League (WHLL) and Western Hills Girls Softball (WHGS) and envision building upon that partnership in a manner that better reflects economic and managerial realities. The current lease with WHGS / WHLL expires on December 31, 2019. We propose to enter into a new lease with WHGS / WHLL effective January 1, 2020 on terms consistent with this proposal.

This proposal is also contingent upon continued, and in some cases increased, financial support from Rollingwood Community Development Corporation (RCDC).

#### Description of New Lease Concept

Historically, the City has outsourced the annual maintenance, and a significant portion of various capital improvements, to WHLL and WHGS (collectively, Western Hills). One weakness in this arrangement is that the City and Western Hills have different interests, needs and objectives. Western Hills is primarily interested in creating and maintaining nice playing fields and amenities for their two playing seasons spanning roughly seven months. In contrast, the City wants an attractive **year-round** park facility which encompasses the **entire** park, not just the playing fields. In our opinion, it is not realistic to expect Western Hills to exercise the same degree of oversight as we would ourselves. Moreover, it is not realistic or reasonable to expect Western Hills to invest significant capital improvement dollars in the non-playing field part of **our** asset.

We propose to restructure the lease with Western Hills to shift a number of maintenance and oversight responsibilities, currently borne 100% by Western Hills, to the City as follows:

**Responsibility****New System\***

Field mowing and general maintenance	City directly contracts with vendor to provide year-round services; some costs passed through to Western Hills.
Irrigation maintenance	New general contract will include monthly irrigation inspection and maintenance; goal is for park to be green year-round.
Infield maintenance	Remains with Western Hills, as they have better knowledge of what they need.
Irrigation Water	Water metering shifted to City to take advantage of City's wholesale rate. Western Hills annual cost capped at \$3,000 with City picking up any excess.
Janitorial Services	City directly contracts with vendor to provide year-round services. Western Hills pays \$6000 for heavy in-season use (@ 3x per week) with City paying for out-of-season use (@ 2x per week).
Fence Repairs	City will take care of all immediate fence repair needs and arrange for an annual inspection and maintenance program.

\* References to the City in this proposal may include both City maintenance staff and members of the Park Commission. This proposal envisions a much more engaged and active Park Commission so as not to overburden existing City staff. In addition, this proposal anticipates using third-party service providers – not City staff – to provide nearly all of the required maintenance.

**Other Lease Terms / Field Policies**

In order to provide Western Hills with sufficient stability and incentive to invest time and money in our facilities, we recommend structuring a 10 year lease term, subject to annual review of certain performance clauses. We also recommend starting the annual ground lease payment at \$3,700 – the same as the current rate – with structured increases at years 3 and 5. The exact details and rental rate increases can be worked out with Western Hills over the next month.

One of the weaknesses we identified in the current lease structure is the absence of well-defined maintenance standards, including a detailed calendar of regularly scheduled maintenance activities. Attached as Appendix A is an example of the type of maintenance

standards we would like to implement (borrowed from Austin Parks and Recreation.) Attached as Appendix B is a preliminary calendar for regular maintenance activities. Regardless of who is responsible for overseeing the field maintenance, we believe the City needs to implement and regularly monitor these written expectations in order to realize the type of park we all desire.

If the City adopts this proposal and commits to invest more community resources into our park, then we will need to implement some additional usage policies to take better care of this investment. One such policy (currently being implemented) is to restrict dogs to only the large, multi-use field known as Hatley Fields # 3/4/5. Also, given that the multi-use field will be upgraded and irrigated in the future pursuant to this proposal, we will likely need to keep all users completely off this field during certain times for reseeding or turf maintenance (the same as done at Zilker Park.)

We would also like to better manage traffic and parking congestion in the future. To that end, we would request Western Hills to allow a minimum of 30 minutes between scheduled games to allow for teams to clean up and leave before new teams arrive. Also, games on different fields should be staggered so that they don't start and end at the same time. In addition, we would request Western Hills to provide the City with a practice and game schedule at least one week prior to the start of each season.

To minimize traffic congestion during the overlapping swim team season (typically just May and early June) no baseball or softball games should be scheduled before 11 am on any Saturday swim meet date.

### Budgetary Implications

One consequence of shifting some maintenance contract responsibilities from Western Hills to the City is that we will need to implement a cost pass-through component to the new lease. For example, although this proposal contemplates that the City will directly contract with a landscaping company and pay for all field mowing expenses, the lease will pass through a portion of the annual cost to Western Hills, representing 7 months of in-season use by the athletic teams. With this new structure, we estimate that the net cost to Western Hills will increase by \$2,679, as shown on the attached WHLL Budget Comparison. It is important to realize, however, that Western Hills will gain significantly nicer fields from this arrangement as a result of the City's new commitment to water and maintain the turf.

We also need to point out that our budget assumes a modest increase in the amount of annual park donations from \$200 per year to \$5,000 per year. We believe that the Park Commission can do significantly more to enhance donations. Our review of the proposal submitted by Rollingwood Park Trust Inc. highlighted the role that community philanthropy could play to enhance and support our park – and the inadequacy of current programs to attract and support the significant philanthropic potential within our community.

Assuming the pass-through adjustments to the Western Hills lease, the increase in annual donations, and a level of funding from RCDC consistent with last year's budget, we believe that the change in responsibilities embodied by this proposal can be achieved with a relatively modest increase to our projected operational deficit as compared to the current park budget. (See attached Budget Comparison.)

### Conclusion

Our park is a gem that deserves our financial support and attention. Nobody cares as much about our park as our own residents. An engaged and active Park Commission will be critical to the successful implementation of this proposal, but we believe such a result is both achievable and preferable to alternatives.

Respectfully submitted,

### Park Subcommittee

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