

Westwood City Council

May 8, 2025

Comments of Tara Laird Hensley

Mayor and Council Members, my name is Tara Laird Hensley. I reside at 4944 Norwood in Westwood, and I am the President of the Friends of Westwood Parkland. I am also one of the three incorporators of that group, all of whom are Westwood residents.

I am here representing the grassroots group of about 20 citizens of Westwood, Westwood Hills, and Mission Woods.

In the special mail ballot election, citizens of Westwood on both sides of the issue desired a bigger and better park.

We have presented a proposal to the Westwood Foundation and to the Mayor as to how to achieve that goal.

First, any donor wants to know that their contribution will qualify for a charitable contribution deduction. The WWF's Section 501(c)(3) status assures that this desire will be met. We have not been able to solicit contributions to date because we have not yet received permission from the WWF to do so. We also needed regulatory guidance regarding our legal obligations, which we have now received from both the Kansas and Missouri Attorney General offices.

The other aim a donor seeks is assurance as to exactly how their contribution will be used. Our proposal is quite simple—the Friends of Westwood Parkland will solicit contributions of \$500,000 to be deposited in a special account at the Westwood Foundation called the Joe D. Dennis Park Expansion Restricted Fund. It will be used for the purposes of:

1. Paying off the lease purchase obligations on the church property of \$284,625;
2. Establishing a renovation and repair fund for Joe D. Dennis Park of \$165,375; and
3. Establishing an initial \$50,000 maintenance fund for the park.

The only condition to release of the funds to the City is that, once the full \$500,000 is raised, the church property be dedicated as an expansion of Joe D. Dennis Park and the City acknowledge the expanded park is subject to K.S.A. 12-1301.

There are other details to be worked out and we will work with the Westwood Foundation to address those issues.

We believe the initial Joe D. Dennis Park Expansion Restricted Fund will establish a level of cooperation between and among the parties. The park dedication will also honor the Westwood Christian Church's expressed desire that the property be returned to the community, not a developer. This motivation was why the church agreed to sell its property in 2014 at a price of \$400,000, which was \$100,000 less than its appraised value. The

dedication as a park assures that the citizens of Westwood will have a say in any sale of the former church property.

We cannot solicit funds from our known and perceived donor base without this level of assurance. So, if the City indicates they will not ultimately accept the \$500,000 once raised with the park dedication prerequisite to release of the funds, then any effort is wasted and discourages any desire by donors to contribute more funds. So, we need to know the City's position. Time is a wasting.

The Friends of Westwood Parkland believe that everything does not need to be done at once. Steps are necessary to achieve our goal. This is the first one. We are ready, willing, and able to be Westwood's fundraisers without any compensation, charge, or reimbursement of any kind.

We look forward to a prompt response from Westwood.

Thank you

Tara Laird Hensley

Good evening, Mayor Waters and members of the City Council,

I would like my statement to be part of the public record.

My name is Malisa Monyakula. I live at 2821 West 51st Terrace, and I am both a resident and a business owner here in Westwood.

I'm here tonight to speak in response to the April 1 mail-in ballot election and the Mayor's message dated April 16. As he noted, 58.73% of registered Westwood voters participated—and the result was clear: we want a bigger park.

The Mayor said—and I quote—"The City respects the process and the ultimate decision made by our Westwood community." He also asked residents to bring forward feasible ideas and paths for moving ahead. I'm here tonight to say that we are ready.

Our plan is to secure 5050 Rainbow as dedicated parkland in perpetuity. Based on that pledge, we already have over \$150,000 in pledges and donations committed to launching the campaign for a bigger park.

You have an army of supporters and donors behind you—not just in Westwood, but also in Westwood Hills, Mission Woods, and Fairway. People are standing by, eager to help make this park a reality for all our communities.

I also want to remind you of the Westwood Foundation Mission, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1974. Resolution No. 120-2023 Approving Amended By-Laws of the Foundation was passed on July 13, 2023. It's mission is to support charitable, educational, and community-focused projects that benefit Westwood and its surrounding areas.

The Foundation has supported land acquisition, city expenses, and scholarships—and it's well positioned to assist with a project like this.

The people have spoken. The resources are here. Let's work together to expand and protect this vital green space for future generations.

In conclusion, I urge the governing body to consider this extraordinary opportunity. The support is here. The funding mechanisms are in place. And the people, your constituents- have spoken with clarity and conviction. This is your opportunity to create a legacy that will be embraced by your children, your neighbors children, your grand children and all future residents of not only Westwood but of our neighboring sister cities.

Thank you.