



December 19, 2007

Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners  
541 N. Fairbanks Court  
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear President Chico:

In September 2006, we were approached by Jim Chronis of the Park District and Park Planning staff, who presented a plan at that month's meeting for an artificial turf soccer field at the south end of Lincoln Park, as part of a plan to install several of these fields at different parks around the city. Our minutes from that September 13, 2006, meeting indicate that the field that would be installed:

“is turf, grass-like, maintained with a zamboni, playable after rain and would extend the playing season. Three others are scheduled (Reiss, Calumet and Lincoln) [to be constructed]. Permit fees will increase to recoup expenses. It takes 5 months for construction and design. The life span is 8 - 10 years.”

There was no mention of Latin School's involvement in the development or construction of the field, or of the contract that provided use of that field to Latin School for many hours during the year.

More recently, we received a copy of the Latin School contract through our Alderman. Reviewing it, we had these concerns:

- a. Latin School's deal is an inappropriate exclusive use of park land by a private organization, despite their 'giving back' 10% of the hours originally scheduled for their use.
- b. The contract allows Latin School to hold fund raising events at that site for the benefit of Latin.
- c. The contract unfairly allows Latin School to opt out of the lottery process that assigns field use to different schools and clubs in the area.

This deal sets a precedent for other private use of park lands in the name of public-private partnerships. I think we generally agree that such partnerships can be beneficial for the parks and park users, but need to be developed in an open and transparent process with informed public input. Therefore, it was particularly disappointing to learn in November, from a local news reporter, that the Park District

had embarked on another project, this time with the American Youth Soccer Organization, to build a field near the north end of the park, yet again without proper notice of the organizations such as LPAC, Friends of the Parks and others. We are not necessarily opposed to the AYSO project, but decry the continuing lack of transparency and openness in its initiation.

Ironically, regarding the Latin School project, the Park District legal staff continues to claim that the 'open meetings process was followed', which is only true if we accept the premise that providing half the story, and not the whole truth, is sufficient at an open public meeting. We ask the Park District Board of Commissioners to review these concerns and recommend ways that the park district can meet its legal obligations to the user community and ensure that such projects afford the opportunity for fully informed public input.

Jill Niland  
LPAC President