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Dear Members of the Pima County Board of Supervisors:

I would like to respond to several issues raised in the past few weeks concerning the use of Rillito Park.

In fairness to all concerned, I want to state at the outset that the Arizona Youth Soccer Ass'n (AYSA), Pima County Junior Soccer League (PCJSL) and Tucson Soccer Academy (TSA) (collectively youth soccer) agree that a two year extension of the current lease of the Rillito track by the Rillito Park Foundation (RPF) is probably appropriate, provided the Board of Supervisors (BOS) agrees to research, accept public input and ultimately make the policy decision regarding the future long term use of Rillito Park. It would not be fair to shut-down the race track with so little notice to those who work there. However, it is equally clear that the status quo at this facility is not working and the large majority of public users deserve better.



First Let's Get the Players Right

In the ongoing saga of strife over the use of Rillito Park attacks have been leveled at TSA. I want to respond to those but first I think it is important that we get the players straight.

The conflict between the horseracing schedule and youth soccer has almost nothing to do with TSA. It is AYSA and PCJSL and not TSA that have the contract with Pima County to use Rillito on weekends. TSA practices week nights at Rillito and there is of course no racing on weeknights so there is no conflict. The conflicts that do arise are between PCJSL and its 14 member clubs, as well as AYSA and its 73 member clubs. TSA is but one member club in each of these organizations.

AYSA is the state organization which operates under the auspices of US Youth Soccer and is responsible for scheduling state league games. PCJSL is an AYSA member league that schedules games separate and apart from state league, strictly for Pima county teams. All AYSA and PCJSL club teams practice during the week so they can play games on weekends scheduled by AYSA and PCJSL. When there are conflicts between horse racing, AYSA and PCJSL, it's particularly the many teams in each of the 14 Southern Arizona clubs that suffer.

1. AZ Champions FC – Marana, Tucson, Nogales, Rio Rico, Douglas
2. AYSO 206 Elite – Marana
3. CDO SC – Oro Valley, Marana
4. Freedom Soccer Club – Southeast Tucson
5. Ft. Lowell SC – Eastside of Tucson
6. FC Sonora – Central and Southwest Tucson & Sahuarita
7. Highland FC – East Tucson
8. Sereno SC – Southwest and West Tucson & Nogales
9. Southern AZ SC – Sahuarita and South Tucson
10. Tanque Verde SC – East and Northeast Tucson
11. Tucson Aztecs – City Wide, primarily Menlo Park
12. Tucson Mountain FC – City Wide

13. Tucson Soccer Academy – City Wide

14. Vail Soccer Club – Vail

My point is the attacks directed at TSA, though false, nonetheless have almost nothing to do with the issue presently before the BOS.

TSA's "Substantial Assets"

For the record, I wish to nonetheless respond to these erroneous claims.

It has been claimed that TSA has substantial assets and should be made to pay for its use of the Rillito fields. The truth is that TSA pays the county roughly \$35,000 a year in lighting fees to use Rillito and Brandi Fenton Memorial Park. All youth sports using Rillito pay the same rate on fees for lights. No youth or adult sports club or league pays rent for the fields. After all, these organizations all exist for the benefit of the health and recreation of the public at large so this is not surprising.

While TSA, does own assets they are totally contained within a county owned building at Brandi Fenton Memorial Park. As recently as 3 years ago this building was a vacant, gutted, run-down structure, unusable for anything other than storing shovels and wheelbarrows.

TSA approached the county in 2012 and, largely with Supervisor Ann Day's help, secured an agreement that this building could be turned into a Clubhouse for kids playing soccer and for other community activities. Ultimately it was agreed that the county would allow TSA to use the structure if TSA, at its expense, renovated the building and made it ADA and county building code compliant.

TSA then embarked on a very ambitious capital campaign and secured donations from local businesses and individuals of nearly \$200,000 including donated materials and labor (including the labor of our soccer playing kids) to convert the structure into a Clubhouse that serves our community in a variety of ways. You can go by there virtually any late afternoon or evening and see kids and parents using the facility. TSA's fixed assets of about \$170,000 are entirely its leasehold improvements, furniture, fixtures and equipment at the Clubhouse. These assets are depreciated over time.

Yes, it is primarily a Clubhouse for TSA and kids work out, do homework on donated computers, hold meetings, see an on-site trainer for injuries, watch video of their games and have social events there. However, this is only one aspect of the Clubhouse's use. It is also used for AYSA and PCJSL meetings,

coaching and referee education, meetings and social events for other youth groups, hearings and training as well as community service projects like the —“Coaches Against Cancer Shave-Off” where we have raised thousands of dollars over the last 3 years to support research and treatment of cancer suffered by children.

Additionally, TSA makes the clubhouse available for other community groups who want to have meetings and social events such as the “Parrot-Heads” Club which keeps the Rillito Trail and Brandi Fenton Memorial Park clean with litter pickups every month, the dog park folks and others. TSA also maintains the facility at its expense and makes continued improvements to it at its expense.

Bottom line, TSA turned a useless and deteriorating county building into a wonderful community youth center that serves many groups and interests in our community; One of the most remarkable county and private interest collaborations for the good of our community you will find anywhere.

Additionally many thousands of hours of volunteer time are given by TSA, AYSA and PCJSL parents and other adults to promote the health, education and development of our children. We all strive to make soccer the best it can be for the largest number of kids possible in our community and all we ask of the county is give us suitable places to play.

TSA’s “Significant” Unclassified Expenses and “Overpaid” Staff

It has also been alleged that TSA’s primary cost driver is \$404,000 in “Unclassified Expenses” and that its median compensation cost per employee is nearly 40% higher than similarly sized Youth Organizations. This is just plain false. While tax returns do have a column to summarize expenses, TSA always attaches a detailed listing to its Form 990 tax filings – so, it has no “unclassified expenses.” Currently it has “liquid assets” (cash in bank) of about \$100,000. This has been accumulated over the past 15 years (about \$5000 a year plus the extra funds from our capital campaign). This cash flow cushion is absolutely essential and necessary to an organization like TSA—a nest egg for emergencies and unforeseen circumstances.

It has been stated that TSA’s employees are paid substantially more than similar organizations. This claim is unsubstantiated and simply false. TSA has six employees who each earn just over \$30,000 a year.

It should also be recognized that TSA awards approximately \$50,000 a year to scores of underprivileged kids in the form of scholarships to make youth soccer available to them at an affordable price.

“Priority” vs “Exclusive”

In June of 2015 it was agreed that youth soccer would have “priority” over other uses of the fields at Rillito. It is not now, and never has been, the position of youth soccer that it should have the “exclusive” use of the park. In fact, youth soccer happily shares the park with adult soccer leagues, lacrosse, football and rugby. Youth soccer has also cooperated with the use of the fields for special events and will continue to do so. The claim that youth soccer is, for example, trying to kill the Celtic Festival is just not true.

All we have asked for is that we have the right, along with others, to reserve the fields in an orderly fashion. We have suggested that a master calendar be created and that the community be given a deadline within which to reserve the fields so that after that deadline everyone can be certain when they will have access to the fields. This is important to us because we must develop and circulate our schedules months in advance.

When the county is unable to assure us the use of the fields ahead of time it creates scheduling nightmares. Occasionally, even when we have been given dates we get bumped off the fields for special events and must cancel games. Again, we have no problem with special events, we would just like a system in place where reservations can be made by other sports groups, special events and youth soccer so that everyone knows what dates they have and can rely upon it. We have been unsuccessful in urging for this procedure.

The BOS has also seen statistics establishing that soccer is the primary user of the park and that horseracing only conflicts with that use 6% of the time. Let me suggest another statistic that you may find more relevant to the current discussion. The only real conflict between youth soccer and horse racing occurs on the 18 weekend days the track conducts races. Unfortunately these 18 days fall smack dab in the middle of the youth soccer season. Youth soccer’s game schedules runs roughly 62 weekend days. Horse racing eliminates 29% of the youth soccer game schedule at Rillito.

So are we to tell the kids you can practice during the week but a third of your games at Rillito won’t happen because the horses are running. The 6% argument is tantamount to saying that since the UA football team practices on their field 5 days a week they have 90% of the usage and therefore should

have no objection to allowing a car show on 29% of the Saturdays they would like to play during their season.

Youth Sports' Involvement in the Lease Negotiation Process

It is fairly clear that our county administrator and youth soccer have worked very hard for a very long time to resolve these issues. Sadly, these efforts have been tantamount to trying to stick a round peg in a square hole for all concerned.

Why is this? Because the horse racing proponents' desires are a moving target and frankly the RFP does not always do what it promises. In June of 2015 youth soccer and the county felt they had an understanding regarding the use of Rillito in the fall. It was agreed that there would be no horse racing in the fall.

In August the RPF likewise agreed to no racing in the fall—youth soccer's busiest time of year.

Then in September youth soccer was invited to a meeting with the county and RPF concerning RPF's proposed new lease. While we are told there were meetings throughout the summer between the county, RPF and youth soccer, this is incorrect. Youth soccer was only invited to one meeting with the county and RPF and that was in September of 2015. Supervisor Bronson was also present at that meeting.

At the September meeting and to the total surprise of youth soccer this lease included a provision for racing the entire month of October. Candidly, this change of position did not appear to be a surprise to the county and suggested other discussions between the county and racing had taken place previously to the exclusion of youth soccer. We now learn that in fact the county and RPF met several times during the summer.

At the September meeting youth soccer pointed out the prior assurances by the county and RPF that there would be no fall racing. These objections fell on deaf ears. It was clear that before we arrived and were permitted to voice our concerns the decision to allow fall racing had already been made.

We are not saying the county did not have good and valid reasons for changing its mind regarding its commitment that there would be no fall racing. However this move did create a new and unexpected conflict and certainly further shook youth soccer's faith in the word of the RPF. As a

proposed solution youth soccer was offered fields at the Kino Complex which it accepted.

Later, however it was discovered that the fields being offered were not actually the Kino Complex fields where FC Tucson plays as we had understood, but instead other unlit and inferior fields in the vicinity. Youth soccer disappointedly agreed to do its best to make this work in part based upon assurances we would also have access to the three new fields during racing that had just been dedicated at Rillito and which were outside the racetrack.

Then, again to our total surprise, we were informed only a month ago that RPF did not want us using the three new fields outside the track during racing in fear that a ball might inadvertently enter the track.

Youth soccer then requested that the RPF move its fall racing from the month of October to the month of November when our high school age kids begin playing high school soccer and the field demands are less. Without discussion, the answer was no.

This was the last straw. We have bent and twisted in every way in an effort to cooperate with RPF and share the park. However, with every concession we make another is taken. The hole becomes smaller and squarer while the peg becomes a perfect circle.

Conclusion

Hopefully it is now pretty clear that contrary to the “spin” from some who have appeared and spoken at past BOS meetings, youth soccer is not the “bad guy” in this story. We have tried over and over again to find reasonable solutions to serious conflicts between youth sports and horse racing. In the process promise after promise has been broken and the ability of youth sports to succeed at this park has been thwarted.

It is said that there is no money to convert Rillito to a full park. First, there will most certainly have to be another bond election and this problem might be solved there. As our economy continues to improve and the tax base increases, might there not in fact be funds that could be used to support something as positive as this? Alternatively, just as we raised money with private donations to build the Clubhouse, might there not be similar private and public partnerships that could be forged to convert Rillito into a real park?

It truly is time for the BOS to determine, as a policy matter, what will be the future of Rillito Park. Is the noise by the horse racing proponents simply a squeaky wheel or truly what the majority of taxpayers in our county want? Are the taxpayers fully informed of this background, the background on the maintenance and improvements at the track the rent paid by RPF and the severe needs for more park space in our fair county?

Have our citizens been informed of the economic benefit derived from horse racing at this park versus the benefit of a 17 field soccer facility which would attract visitors for regional competition and regular state league games against out of town teams? What has been done to gauge a fully informed public?

Do we need horse racing for 18 days in the center of our community or would the Pima County citizens be better served by having a facility dedicated to the recreation and physical fitness and that of their children?

We hope the BOS will have the courage to take this question head on and do what is truly best for our community.

Very Truly Yours,



Ted Schmidt

President PCJSL

Vice President AYSA

Board Member TSA