



WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, November 21, 2005, for the purpose of meeting with the Park & Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) to discuss their report on lighting at municipal ball fields.

Mayor Davis called the meeting to order at 8:10 p.m. It was held in the Council Room of the Municipal Building.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; Hank Irving, Director, and Joe McNeal, Assistant Director, Recreation; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Greg Fisanich, Greenbelt Baseball; PRAB members Lola Skolnik (chair), Tony Fleming, Larry Hilliard, Chris Husker, Kelly Ivy, Clement Lau, Richard D. Ransom, and Marc Siegel; Bridget Osborne, resident of 9 Court Southway; and Natalie McGill, Greenbelt News Review.

Mr. McLaughlin pointed out a November 21 memo from Joe McNeal that provided further updates on estimated costs for field lighting. Prior estimates for lighting McDonald and Schrom Park fields had been for different types of lighting. Including the higher-quality "Light Structure Green" (LSG) lighting and the Pepco power-up fee at McDonald Field brought the estimate to \$134,000. At Schrom Hills, the estimates, including the LSG lighting and the Pepco power-up fee, were: \$176,000 for the soccer/football field; \$206,000 for the baseball/softball field; and \$351,000 for both.

By way of further preliminary information, Mr. Irving noted that McDonald Field serves youth, while Schrom Hills provides more flexibility for different age groups. He said he also wanted to be very clear that in broadening the topic to look at other fields, there was no intention of taking anything away from the excellent job that had always been done by Little League at McDonald Field. The Mayor also added that although the topic has not been reviewed or discussed recently in Greenbelt East, at one time there was strong opposition to field lighting at Schrom Hills Park.

Mayor Davis asked Ms. Skolnik to address PRAB's recommendation on the matter. Ms. Skolnik said when the request first came to the City to light McDonald, the proposition was to do it at very low cost. When the costs later mushroomed, PRAB thought it was appropriate to step back and look at what would provide the best benefit for the money Citywide. She added that the technology for field lighting has changed drastically since the subject was previously reviewed for Schrom Hills, with the result that the same objections might not exist now.

Ms. Mach asked whether, since the Braden fields are lighted, Greenbelt Baseball might not use them when lighting is needed. She said there were specific impediments to doing so that Greenbelt Baseball had identified, but perhaps remedying those would

cost less than lighting McDonald. Mr. McNeal noted that Braden is already modified for a number of different uses and that Little League's needs are even more different (e.g., field size). Mr. Fisanich had concerns about managing concession stands at multiple locations, given the importance of this to their revenues.

Mr. Hilliard commented that if the principle reason for the lighting is to permit fall ball, then it may not be a great idea to have 9-12 year-olds staying up on school nights to play ball anyway. He said there is a big difference between moving from spring to summer ball and from summer to fall ball. Mr. Ransom concurred, adding that at the public hearing there was not a rush of parents clamoring for fall ball or for lighted fields.

Mayor Davis commented that it appeared that Greenbelt Baseball was very wedded to McDonald Field. She asked about the current use of temporary lighting.

Mr. Roberts asked why Council wasn't taking a much harder look at what was needed in Greenbelt West, especially considering that it was obvious tonight that more and upgraded facilities were needed citywide.

Mr. Herling asked if some of these problems wouldn't go away when daylight savings time is extended in two years. Mr. Fisanich said they will gain a week in the fall.

There was discussion of the potential use of the \$2 million to be earmarked by the Greenbelt Station developers for use for recreation. Mr. Roberts was of the opinion that the City could use the money anywhere in Greenbelt and that Council should be able to use it for recreation facilities without having to compete with other capital projects. Mayor Davis said she believed the use of this money would be restricted to Greenbelt West. Ms. Mach agreed, as did Mr. McLaughlin, though he said "facilities" was broadly defined.

Ms. Skolnik said she was all in favor of lighted fields in Greenbelt West but that this would not take away from needs in other parts of town. She noted that there is much greater demand now, with a much broader part of the population interested. Ms. Mach agreed, saying the overall situation needed to be looked at.

The Mayor read an e-mail from Devin Bison at 56-E Ridge Road supporting the request for lighting.

Mayor Davis asked Mr. Fisanich about complaints that had been received about litter after the games. He said they have a process for cleaning up, and they do so. He said there are other people who go through that area who leave debris.

Mr. Fleming asked whether lighting at McDonald would expand its capacity for other sports or activities. It was concluded it would not.

Mr. Ivy suggested setting a target date for lighting McDonald. He said Braden Field was not done all at once. He also suggested asking the county for support, commenting that ball field support would serve many more people than skateboard park support. He also urged Council not to consider building any new City fields without lighting them. Mayor

Davis replied that Council could look at funding McDonald but that it would have to be looked at within the whole context of the capital projects "wish list."

Mr. Siegel suggested including it in a bond issue. Ms. Skolnik also suggested the possibility of private fundraising by sports groups. Mr. McNeal commented that many of these groups must engage in a good deal of fundraising just to support the immediate needs of the teams.

Mr. Roberts said an in-depth, comprehensive review needs to be undertaken for the City. He asked about a needs study that was done years ago by the M-NCPPC and requested that staff locate and update it. He said it should include the new projections for Greenbelt West.

Ms. Osborne said she did not think the lights at McDonald were necessary. She said she thought it was too late for children to be up in the fall. She encouraged more Saturday and Sunday daytime games, though others pointed out that there is a lot of competition from other sports already scheduled on weekend days. Ms. Osborne said she was not the only resident who objected but others took no position. She also objected to the temporary permit issued by the City, since permanent lighting has not been approved, and since there is no process by which citizens are informed about the temporary permit or given an opportunity to comment on it. She emphasized that McDonald Field is surrounded by houses. She said she was concerned with the incremental increase in the use of lights: e.g., that fall lighting could lead to summer lighting to permit even later hours.

Mr. Siegel said he thought Ms. Osborne was making a valid point regarding the indefinite renewal of a temporary permit. There was some discussion regarding giving notice to neighbors.

Andrew Bronstein, 6-S Ridge Road, spoke as a current team manager and former player to encourage adding the lights, which he said greatly enhance the experience of playing. The Mayor explained that the City's recreational funds were fully committed, with the result that a decision to do something new requires either cutting an existing program or finding a new source of revenue.

Mr. Roberts suggested that if new facilities in Greenbelt West would meet Greenbelt Baseball's needs, it might be beneficial to move the program there.

In conclusion, Ms. Skolnik said she wanted to reiterate that PRAB had simply been looking to see where there would be the greatest good for the greatest number. She said it was not PRAB's role to make a value judgment on whether lighting at McDonald was good or bad, since the impacts on the neighborhood were an entirely different matter.

The Mayor said she saw no problem with putting lighting for the fields at McDonald and Schrom Hills on the capital projects "wish list" but that the matter needed to be discussed with the residents of Greenbelt East. Mr. McLaughlin said McDonald Field is already on that list. Council directed staff to add Schrom Hills to the list and to send Recreation Department staff to brief the Greenbelt East Advisory Committee in the near

future. Council also directed staff to follow up on Mr. Roberts' request for the updated needs assessment.

Mr. Fisanich asked if it was okay to do fundraising in support of the lights. The Mayor said it was. Ms. Skolnik said she would add a proviso that the project would need to maintain its support from the neighborhood.

The work session on ball field lighting concluded at 9:45 p.m.

Other Business

Several informational announcements were made.

Ms. Mach asked if the December 14 work session on Greenbelt Middle School could be held at the site. Mr. McLaughlin said he would ask José Morales, who had initiated the meeting.

There was considerable discussion about the needs of a number of homeless people in the area.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kathleen Gallagher
City Clerk*