

Jacqueline Schad

From: Susie Lutz [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 18, 2024 9:51 AM
To: Jacqueline Schad
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT: Lincoln Field

This Message originated outside your organization.

Dear Board Secretary,
Please include the following letter in PUBLIC COMMENTS.

Thank you,
Susie

Dear Ashland School District Board,

Please do not sell Lincoln Field. It is a valuable resource. If the board meets its goals to increase enrollment, then this high school campus space becomes even more critical. The reasons we are strongly opposed to the sale of the land are multifaceted and detailed below.

For the past 3 years trying to secure field space for sports in this community has been a nightmare. The tension between users escalated to multiple disagreements. Tensions got so high over field space, a frustrated coach told her players to hit softballs at youth soccer players because she errantly thought they were encroaching on her scheduled field time. Ashland youth sports (Ashland Grizzlies baseball, softball and the Ashland Soccer Club) spent \$20,000 renting field space in Medford in the past 3 years because Ashland fields could not accommodate them. The closest city park and only current place that can host soccer, North Mountain Park, is overcrowded and cannot harbor more teams.

The coordination of sending student athletes off campus to practice and play games is problematic and dangerous, especially if you plan to significantly increase neighborhood traffic due to the construction and habitation of high-density housing. Students have to carry 2 backpacks to school-one for their books and a second one for their sports equipment/clothes. By not having a field adjacent to campus, they will have to walk to an off-campus site. Forcing fifty high schoolers to walk or bike off-campus every day for practice (JV 2 Boys-18, JV Girls-18 and JV2 Girls-14) is not prudent.

In addition to the proposed housing, the new housing development down the street (in between NMP and AHS off of Mountain Ave) has 52 new units still under construction. Once those homes are sold, we will have even more traffic and parking issues. Research shows that inexperienced drivers (such as high school students) in high density traffic areas increases accidents. Auto and pedestrian accidents statistically will increase in this area due to construction traffic and the resultant increase in population density. Adding 90 units and increasing student foot traffic in this same area feels negligent to the welfare of the students. Injuries to our children due to increased traffic/accidents is distressing.

Student athletes require a safe space to change clothes and need bathrooms. Lincoln is currently the only district owned field that has a bathroom. If athletes need to play off site, they will not have access to the Athletic Trainer- another safety and well-being concern. Parents might not want their kids commuting to fields for these reasons. As a result, kids might not play sports or request to transfer to another

district. The Athletic Director would also have to drive back and forth instead of being located at one central site. First aid kits and equipment will not be readily available to coaches, and they will be required to transport these needs daily. Spectators who want to watch multiple games due to children on different teams will not be able to easily shift back and forth between fields.

Off campus games make the coordination for visiting schools also complicated and undesirable. These visiting students will need access to locker rooms and bathrooms as well as water. We are wondering how the school district plans to accommodate this need.

Revenue from the soccer "Snack Shack", which raises money for Athletics, would diminish. Due to our (girls soccer team parents) volunteer efforts, we raised over \$ 1000 over events, with the highest sales being when both JV/Varsity had games on campus.

Next year, the high school will need to accommodate more teams. Based on current numbers in youth sports, there will be an additional girls' soccer team and a JV baseball team that will need space to practice and play games. If girls' softball numbers also increase, they will also need space.

We would like to be informed as to where the Ashland School Board plans to place these teams for practice and games. When the question was presented to the Athletic Director/Vice Principal, he said with compassion, "we will figure it out." We are unaware of any feasible athletic field options aside from Lincoln Field. Board members have also stated- Lincoln field was not in use. This is incorrect. The field has been in use. Director Dyson stated the school district has better alternatives for students to practice. Please enlighten the athletic community of your plan.

Lincoln field has been under-utilized. Impacted by Covid, sports participation at the high school declined. Lincoln field also did not receive the necessary maintenance for multifield use. The Ashland Soccer Club was informed that they could no longer utilize Lincoln field because of the high school construction and plan for modular classroom placement on it. Baseball teams were prevented from using the field, despite multiple requests to the former Superintendent and Robby Moles. Organizations offered to pay for rehabilitation and maintenance of the field and were also denied.

It feels as if the current School Board school does not value athletics at AHS, evidenced but the elimination of an Athletic Director position and for a period, the Athletic Trainer and now destroying an essential field for our student athletes.

We have a list of 20 kids who in recent years left the district, for better sports programs at other local public schools. Sunstone pointed to the fact that children left our district for more affordable ones- but they did not ask the critical questions- "Why are they leaving?" A weak athletic program does decrease enrollment.

Athletics is important to our family and is vital to the mental and physical health of our vibrant community. We, too, will consider moving or transferring to another district if these issues are not addressed.

When one of us attended the Budget Meeting and heard the grim budget issues, it became clear that the ASD is in a dire financial place. However, Board members have stated the solving the budget situation and field sale are separate and unrelated goals. We applaud the objective to create more affordable housing in the community and for staff. However, we respectfully request to build your project on an alternative proposed site. If you meet your goals by increasing enrollment, you will only need this valuable space at Lincoln Field more. If the sale of the field and housing development moves forward, there is a risk for further enrollment reduction.

We were both disheartened by the portion of the survey emailed to parents that seems to refer to the Lincoln Field as "unused land". As detailed above, it is not and will not be "unused ". It may have been underutilized due to lower numbers of AHS athletes, restricted access, and poor maintenance. According to the Board minutes, Sunstone was formed to carry forward a vision of creating affordable housing using **surplus land** that the district owns. This was misinformation and misleading, as Lincoln field is **not** surplus land.

We would like to volunteer to lead the effort and engage other community members in grant writing and fund raising to revitalize Lincoln Field. We want it utilized to its potential and work to meet the needs of the youth currently living in our community, as well as future Grizzlies. We would explore opportunities to utilize the field to generate income for the district through rentals and tournaments. Ashland youth sports would much rather pay the City of Ashland or ASD for fields than the city of Medford.

We implore you to **not** sell Lincoln Field to build housing. Please keep it as an essential asset to the high school and health of the School District and community. We feel Lincoln field retention will succor your stated goal of creating and maintaining an environment that is welcoming, supportive, and inclusive to all students.

Sincerely,

Brett and Susie Lutz