

Wolter's Field Lights Advisory Committee Annual Report to City Council 2005-2006

The Wolter's Field Light Advisory Committee met three times during the 2005-2006 school year on the following dates; November 10th, February 9th, and May 11th. The committee members include:

Brigid Ohlwein – Community member
Kevin Fasset - Community member
Jeanne Carter - Community member
Jim Gaylord - Community member
Caroline Weisenthal - Community member
Jeff Annenberg – District 113 Board Member
Mary Anderson – City of Highland Park Director of Public Works
Larry Silberman – City of Highland Park Council Member
Barry Bolek – District 113 Assistant Superintendent of Finance
Paul Shafer – City of Highland Park Police Chief
Andy Butler – Highland Park High School Athletic Director

This years topics of discussion included proposing amendments to the Wolters Field Special Use Permit, traffic and parking, and other miscellaneous items.

The Wolters Field Advisory Committee along with Highland Park High School moved forward on applying for amendments to the Wolters Field Special Use Permit. Specifically discussed were the areas of landscaping, grass parking, and number of lighted events.

Related to the landscaping it was suggested to the school to replace the existing east perimeter fence rather than the move forward with the existing landscaping plan. The existing fence is in poor condition, some neighbors did not want new landscaping to shade their gardens, and neighbors would rather see the perimeter neat, clean, and safe. A survey was sent out to over three hundred Wolters neighbors very little feedback was provided back to the school. Andy Butler approached the seven homes bordering the east property line and all property owners preferred a new fence be erected.

Parking for night football games created challenging issues. After the first game of the year the city allowed HPHS to use the Highland Park Country Club for overflow parking. The use of the country club did alleviate many issues. However, due to the opening of the new Highland Park Recreation Center parking at the Country Club may not be a possibility in the future. The current parking plan calls for off site parking at Highland Park High School with a shuttle to Wolters Field once the Wolters Field Lot is full. We found that spectators did whatever possible to prevent taking the shuttle bus and parking at the high school. Spectators began parking creatively throughout the Sunset neighborhood, Target,

and Staples. Thus the group talked about the possibility of expanded parking at Wolters Field to grass areas to accommodate more cars and to prevent cars from parking in the neighborhood. The school had parked cars on the grass before the installation of lights for years without incident, as well, as grass parking has been effectively used at other sites in the city such as Ravinia Festival. The grass areas would be clearly marked and there would be staff on hand to direct traffic. In addition it would be helpful to park buses on the grass/gravel area located to the west of the administration building. Parking the buses in this area would allow the school to keep the buses close to their home base, would take less man power to move, and there would be no backing to prevent loud beeping. If the grass would be too wet for parking the school would go back to the original parking plan with all overflow parking at HPHS with shuttle service. The condition of the fields is important to the school district therefore the district grounds crew would make a decision early in the afternoon before the competition on the condition of the grass for parking.

This year the school used twenty-two of the twenty-five allotted lighted events permitted. Andy Butler discussed with the advisory group the need for additional lighted events for afternoon contests and football play-offs. For afternoon contests in October, March, and April it is sometimes necessary to turn the lights on at the field to end the game safely. As for football play-offs currently the special use permit on allows one game. This year the school district had to get special permission from City Council to host a second football play-off game. The advisory group was okay with the school requesting ten additional events with the following conditions; a. the event was in October, March, or April, b. the contest was starts in the afternoon, c. the lights are needed to end the contest safely, and d. the lights would be turned off by 7PM.

The preceding amendment requests were taking to the Plan Commission and then to City Council. Currently these requests are with in consideration at the City Council level.

Traffic and Parking was discussed at length during Wolters Advisory meetings. Specific issues included; cars dropping off spectators, parking at Brook Estates, spectators crossing Park Ave, visitor handicap parking, and illegally parked cars.

It was pointed out that some parents were not using the designated student drop off area. Some cars disregarded district personnel posted at barriers on the “dead end streets” proceeding to drop off and pick up students at the end of the blocks of Centerfield, Cherry, and Andean streets. The school agreed to do a better job preparing personnel posted at the barriers, and to extend the time the barriers would be manned. In addition a police car was added to monitor traffic on Beverly Avenue.

With regards to spectators illegally parking at Brook Estates, Jim Gaylord hired a security guard to man the gate during home football games. The school district paid Brook Estates for this service.

Spectators parking at the Highland Park Country Club are required to cross Park Ave. A police car was placed at the cross walk with lights to insure safety.

Handicap Parking needs to be added to the Visitor side of the field. The school plans to reserve spaces in the administration building parking lot for the future.

At times during football games cars were illegally parked and ticketed in the Sunset neighborhood. This was specifically a problem during the football play-off game against Deerfield.

Other miscellaneous topics included; better parking signage, neighbors failing to pick up after dogs, port-a-potty placement, locking and unlocking of field gates, improving communication, and snow removal on dead end streets to prevent fence damage.

As the second year of the Wolters Field Advisory Group comes to an end there will be some changes in membership. Andy Butler will no longer be the Athletic Director at HPHS. The new Athletic Director will be Ms. Bobbie Monroe. In addition, the advisory group will need to replace two community member representatives as Jeanne Carter has moved from the neighborhood and Jim Gaylord is no longer the president of Brook Estates.

As a whole night time athletic events at Wolters Field were a success for the 2005-2006 school year. The events were well managed and the lights generated excitement in the City of Highland Park and at the High School. Most of the feedback reported to the advisory committee from community members was positive. With the few complaints we had this year the advisory group feels confident that most of these issues can be resolved. All information regarding the Wolters Field Lights Advisory Committee can be found on the school's website at dist113.org/HPHS under athletics.