

Ms. Mary Ann Womelsdorf
Chief of Staff

Re: Seger Park Design Project

Dear Ms. Womelsdorf:

I respectfully write to you in regard to the approved funding by your office for the re-design of Seger Park, which has been proposed by the private interest group called The Friends of Seger Park Playground (Friend's Group). I have grave concerns over their management of the process to which they moved through the ranks in order to accomplish their goals. I am requesting that a full review of how this group was able to secure government funding while using limited resources to ensure that their design efforts meet the demands of the entire community.

I am currently on the board of my homeowner's association which is the Society Square Homeowners Association representing 20 homes and over 40 citizens who own homes which take up the entire east side of Seger Park. I also run an interest group called The Seger Playground Community Association (segerpark.org).

On Monday, we noticed surveyors were out at Seger Park and consequently contacted Deborah Cahill from the Department of Public Property to discuss why city surveyors were sent out. To our surprise, it was because we were told the Friend's Group was able to secure the financing through your office along with state funding to implement their plan to re-design Seger Park. The last time our homeowners association heard about these plans was when the CDC Task Force concluded. The CDC Task Force included our board President who was never contacted in regard to any status or finalization of the plans. We found out from the surveyors.

Additionally, we contacted Brian Villa, Director of the Seger Park Tennis Club who was also not aware that the friends group was planning to send out an RFP for the re-design of our park. Additionally, I spoke with many neighbors within a block of Seger Park and not one knew that this plan was being implemented. I further spoke with several businesses between 9th and 11th Streets and they heard nothing about this plan being implemented. I contacted a board member of Washington Square West Civic Association who owns a home two houses off of Seger Park and that person needed to make some calls and did not know that these plans were being implemented.

There are two major concerns here: 1) Many people who should have a voice in this process were not procedurally afforded that voice; and 2) Public funding was approved for this one group that has not effectively communicated their ambitions to the local community. The other issue is the plan itself. While we fully support a re-design effort, our homeowners association, The Tennis Association Director, and the several businesses and many residents who we spoke to all seem to support

another plan which, this Friend's Group also supports but only as an alternative to their own idea of the park design. And, all are dismayed that they knew nothing.

Our understanding of the group's process began with a survey to the community that concluded around March of 2008. We are trying to contact the Friend's Group to discuss the matter but we have been unable to obtain a response at the time this letter was written. This survey was intended to offer insight into the park users and how a re-design would best utilize the park space. Our homeowners association was excluded from being part of the survey. The tennis club membership, tennis reservations system members, and general tennis users -- hundreds of individuals and their families-- were excluded from being able to provide a sampling for the survey. We were in touch with our business contacts between 9th and 11th Street on South and none were afforded the opportunity to participate in the survey. We polled several neighbors within 2 blocks of Seger Park and none knew a survey ever took place.

Here is a breakdown of those who were excluded from the survey:

A. Our homeowner's association has 20 homes which make up the entire east side of the park and have an estimated value of \$12 million dollars of property on this park. As your office is well aware, we take great interest in what is happening in Seger Park.

B. The Seger Park Tennis Club, which has some 300 members, the more than 200 Seger Park tennis reservations members who are allowed to use the court reservation system, and the hundreds-strong general tennis users.

C. The businesses that chose to make their home in our neighborhood and have contributed countless dollars and effort to be part of this community in our "mini downtown" between 9th and 11th Streets on South Street.

D. The countless neighbors who live directly on this park or within two blocks of Seger Park.

We plan to continue our efforts to ask as many people, groups and businesses in the neighborhood and further assess how limited the user base was when they formed the foundations for this design project. There is certainly cause for alarm when these critical members of the local community are left out of the survey which was used to understand the park users and has led to the potentially large overhaul of our park space.

The next concern is the friends group's primary plan, which we believe they have presented to your office and our elected state officials, which prompted funding. A task force was formed approximately 1.5 to 2 years ago. This group initially included a few neighbors in the community who we viewed as supporters of the friends group and largely interest, civic and political offices such as your own. The initial

group did not include any representatives from the homeowners/condo associations on the park. We filed complaints with the Advisory Council and the Friend's Group demanding that we be included and have representation on the task force. Our President of Society Square Homeowners Association was given a seat. The results of this task force included two plans. The Friend's Group identified these plans as the primary and alternative plan. Our President openly objected to the primary plan, as did the tennis community, and no considerations were ever offered.

The positive of the primary plan is the re-design of the playground area that falls west of the recreation building at Seger Park. Our chief concern is their conclusion that there is a need for an additional basketball court. In the Friends Group's alternative plan, the playground design remains the same but there is an additional tennis court added where the basketball court currently resides. Based on the research and numbers that has been provided to you and the Recreation Department multiple times, by the tennis club director, a third tennis court is a solution that would meet the demands of the current, and future, park user base. Back around 2006, Councilman DiCicco wrote a letter supporting an additional tennis court. We believe the friends group has failed to recognize the current community demographics and the dynamics of the park. This has us alarmed and extremely concerned. Your office is well aware of the significant and long-standing problems surrounding the basketball courts. The problems were consistent, and uncontrollable by our city government. Many people attempted to intervene and communicate with the basketball court users and that failed. The result was the city's reduction in playtime for basketball at Seger Park to approximately 45% of park hours including no play on weekends. Removable hoops were purchased for enforcement.

The Friends Group is well aware of this situation, has been involved in several debates over the issues over the past few years, knows the courts were moved away from the 11th Street homes many years ago, knows the extreme demand for tennis in the park but somehow has concluded that the community is best served with adding an additional basketball court on the east side of the park. The result of this add-on would be another large chunk of our park not being used for 65% of the time for its intended use. I have pulled specific quotes from the Task Force documents, which have led the friends group to conclude that additional basketball space, and the existing basketball area is beneficial to the Seger Park user base.

Their conclusions about the basketball area states:

Basketball Courts: The courts need to be remodeled and upgraded. There is no formal basketball program. The Department of Recreation has sanctioned the nets to come down daily and on the weekends as a result of concerns regarding noise and safety. Those representing the basketball courts explained that the Seger courts used to be a premier site in the city (featured in a video, on ESPN, and listed in the Pennsylvania book). NBA players, players from Division 1 schools and college coaches used to scout the courts and work with the kids. However, the hours of operation have changed, and

in their opinion have affected access to these opportunities. The discussion is on-going with the city regarding these concerns.

Additionally they state:

It was pointed out that the park has changed over the years with the changing needs of the surrounding community (i.e.; creation of the dog park/there used to be a baseball diamond and a creek running through it/ the basketball courts used to be located on the 11th street side but moved because there was no community housing on the 10th street side)

Contrary to the facts about the demographics of this neighborhood, contrary to neighborhood demand, and contrary to the fact that there are 24 courts in less than a mile radius of Seger Park, yet the friends group has decided that it is necessary to not only re-vitalize an area of the park which was shutdown for large periods of time due to uncontrollable illegal and immoral activity but they want to add on more basketball. Their conclusions are based on the hope for a person to be seen by NBA scouts or Division 1 coaches and because a video was made which included the basketball courts. There is no mention of public park users and demographics. Furthermore, it is clearly stated that the basketball courts were moved away from community housing. Now, once again, the community housing, but on the east side of the park as opposed to the west, has requested the basketball courts to be moved away from their housing or removed from the park permanently.

Their conclusions about tennis at Seger Park:

Tennis Club: There is under utilized space at the park, which could be used to add a third tennis court. There are currently 300 members of the Seger Park Tennis Club. They are willing to change their non-profit status in order to get funding for children's activities. They have envisioned three courts, and have an interest in implementing an environmentally sustainable facility model that could include a synthetic clay court surface which they believe will decrease park flooding, light pollution, and asphalt "heat sink" issues, while also increasing the level of play. There is a significant tennis-playing demographic in Center City; installing a winter tent system could promote year-round play and become an even greater revenue-producing activity for the park. The USTA may provide funding for kid's and adult programming and kids and adult tournaments could occur at the park if there were three courts.

The Friend's Group has concluded that there is under utilized space (basketball area), there are 300 members of the Seger Park Tennis Club, and they are willing to do whatever it takes to add programming for children, they recognize the overwhelming demographics for tennis in Center City, and that a private group, the USTA (among others) would consider funding to pay for some of the work (as well as professional assistance) if a third court were installed.

When I review the conclusions made by the friends group and the task force, I have

to be wary as to their agenda in making their plan for more tennis an alternative while adding more basketball. The Seger Tennis Club has had a well-thought out plan for adding a third tennis court for years, which aligns with the Friends Group's alternative plan. We, the Society Square Homeowners Association (SSHA) would fully support this plan and the businesses and residents who I have spoken with all have support for this plan as well. We cannot possibly understand how their primary plan was ever conceived when an objective observer reviews the facts.

This Friends Group's alternative plan brings a consensus to the neighborhood and gives our neighborhood what we want to have in our park space. The primary plan to add more basketball is ill fit for the demography, geography, and demands of our community. The Friend's Group primary plan brings no consensus, and therefore will continue to divide the community and not allow all to enjoy the park space.

I respectfully request a meeting where we can discuss this matter in greater detail and hopefully we can better understand this situation. Thank you for all that you have done in our neighborhood. In the past, you have been an ally in making the quality of life in our neighborhood better and safer. I look forward hearing from you soon.

Kind Regards,