

Mary Souza's Newsletter

February 26, 2014

Is Memorial Field in Danger?

Dear Newsletter Readers,

****Before we get to Memorial Field, there's hot news from NIC!****

The air in this town is sizzling with messages and phone calls right now because of the possible change in the athletic conference for the NIC teams. The idea is to change all the teams, except wrestling, from the national competition of the SWAC (Scenic West Athletic Conf) to the regional NWAACC (Northwest Athletic Assoc. of Community Colleges) to save about \$600,000 per year. There are strong arguments on both sides of the issue and, personally, I have no opinion either way on the decision.

I do, however, have an opinion on the process... it's all about the process! Seems that college President Joe Dunlap and Athletic Director Al Williams are doing an end run around normal procedure. They are going behind the scenes to ask faculty to support changing to the NWAACC. I've also been told there were threats of job loss if coaches or athletic staff talked with anyone about their opinions, and that the Booster Club was caught completely off guard by this proposal.

But, surprisingly, the Editor of the Press must have been consulted because he wrote an editorial in last Sunday's paper in which he supported the change. (How could the Press write that editorial without waiting to hear both sides at the Trustee meeting?) All of this finagling was done outside of the public eye and before the issue has even been explained to the Board of Trustees.

The Board will finally hear an official presentation from Pres. Dunlap today, at their regular meeting.* I'm hoping they will not vote on the issue now, but will take time to accept input from all sides and seriously consider this decision.

Ok, back to our main topic: Now that McEuen Park is nearing completion, the city is turning its attention to the Four Corners project. What is it and where is it?

The center of the Four Corners is the intersection downtown where Mullan Ave. and Government Way crossover NW Blvd. It's where the ugly old warehouse sat for years near the northwest corner, the Human Rights bldg is on the southwest corner, the condos on the southeast, and a smaller building, now owned by the County, (used to be a pizza place) is on the northeast corner.

The Four Corners has been discussed, off and on, for more than 10 years. The current project encompasses far more now than just those four corners, however. It includes Memorial Field (watch out!), and the Museum (that might go too), and 29 linear acres of the

old railroad land (200 ft wide) all the way along NW Blvd up to Riverstone. It's a wonderful piece of land that the BLM (Federal Bureau of Land Management) will give to the City with only two conditions: First there must be a Master Plan created and, secondly, there can be NO commercial anything on those 29 acres...ever. It must be public open space. That part is fabulous.

At last week's City Council meeting, the acting director of the Parks Dept, Bill Greenwood, was asked about Memorial Field by Councilman Dan Gookin. Bill seemed to tap dance around, saying the old grandstands are not in the best of shape, and they might want to reposition the field...etc. (In other words, they have plans to seriously change Memorial Field.) It sounded like the same old style from the recent past, of having a back room plan in place before talking to the public. So I was glad to hear new Mayor Steve Widmyer tell Bill Greenwood that the grandstands hold great historic value for people, and much of the history of the Fort Grounds has already been taken away, so he hopes the grandstands will be preserved. (In other words, no way Bill.)

This is good news because remember the Field of Dreams group that was going to have a semi-pro baseball team out on the Cherry Hill land the city bought for \$440,000 a year or so ago? Well they couldn't seem to raise enough money to outfit the field. Rumor was the baseball community here was unhappy with how the city treated the American Legion kids on McEuen, so they wouldn't give big dollars to this semi-pro group. But whatever the reason, that project was a no-go. Then new rumors swirled about them looking at Memorial Field as a location for the new semi-pro baseball field because it's within the urban renewal district and they could ask LCDC for help. Who knows if there's any truth there, but if you care about preserving some shred of local history, keep an eye on Memorial Field. It might be one of the last chances.

And so, dear readers, these are just a few of the important bits you will never find in the local paper. Stay tuned, there's a lot going on!

Hope you have a great rest of the week. -Mary

*The NIC Board meeting is tonight at 6:00pm in the Edminster Student Union Bldg.