

Asheville City Council January 11, 2022 Email Comments

TimeStamp

1/10/2022 1:01:00 PM

Text

As an Asheville native, I have been truly saddened by the amount of homeless folks...I realize it must be a VERY difficult situation for our City leaders to wrestle with. Am hoping that a fair and caring resolution of some sort will continue to be on the agenda. I am sure it is.

I teach both private lessons and for the Asheville Tennis Association at Aston Park as a certified tennis instructor – we hold free clinics for the underserved kids of Asheville as well as inexpensive programming for kids and adults. This year 650 kids came through our programs.

It has been heartbreaking and disturbing to try to teach in an atmosphere that is not acceptable – fights, loud cursing, garbage (which includes needles), random folks with bizarre behavior actually ON the tennis courts. It feels unsafe.

Aston Park is a truly wonderful city treasure – I hope you will just keep my safety, and ALL the kids and adults that use the park in mind.

Mary Ann Myers

Executive Board, ATA

USPTA tennis instructor

828 989 2580

1/10/2022 2:58:00 PM

To the Asheville City Council,
On behalf of the Asheville Tennis Association (ATA), I would like to bring your attention to an escalating issue at Aston Park regarding the homeless camp.

The ATA is a compassionate organization, and recognizes that we need to have empathy for those that are in a situation of being homeless. The ATA cares deeply for all people, therefore our stance comes from an overall sense of community safety.

But unfortunately, there have been escalating incidents at Aston Park that include threats of violence, assaults, negative sanitation issues, drug trafficking, theft, and used needles being left all over the park. This has placed many children, adults, and park staff in a dangerous environment while using the Aston Tennis Center and surrounding public park.

The ATA feels that parks should NOT be used as locations for people to live in and that the city ordinance to have parks close at 10pm should be enforced.

With that being said, the ATA strongly advocates the City and County governments to develop a reasonable plan that tackles the homeless crisis while still ensuring the safety of the general public.

If this crisis is not dealt with, the negative atmosphere will continue to escalate and Aston Park will not be a safe place for the community. This will lead to a loss in revenue from the local neighborhood & tax paying citizens, a negative impact on tourism, and a loss of healthy activities for the citizens of Asheville.

Thank you for your time and concern regarding this situation.
Tray Shapiro
ATA Board Member

1/10/2022 5:27:00 PM

II. Consent Agenda:

C. Resolution authorizing the City Manager to enter into a contract with Harper Corp. General Contractors for the Dr. Wesley Grant Sr. Center Expansion Project.

Please do not approve the current Dr. Wesley Grant Sr. Center Expansion Project.

Outreach shortcomings

There are no public documents from the 2017 Tall Hall meetings.

There are no public documents from any meeting after 2017

As the design process progressed, only a few residents got to participate.

Online surveys were not used enough, especially during the Pandemic.

"The youth" appears to have had far greater input than the adults.

An indoor basketball court/gymnasium replaced an indoor pool without due diligence or transparency.

Shortcomings of the proposal

The pool is smaller than the old Walton Street pool, which was already inadequate. This pool will be too small to meet Southside's needs from day one.

Residents asked for open space for recreation and a farmers' market. Since this is a food desert, fresh food within walking distance would be valuable.

An open-air platform for casual music events, story-telling, and summer plays would help bring the community together.

A splash pad would provide a FREE and easily accessible place to relax.

This proposal is overwhelmed by buildings and chainlink fencing. It will no longer be a park.

The rec space for after-school activities is painfully small. It appears that if you are not interested in sports, activities for kids will be inadequate.

Southside does not need a facility designed for events, like the tournament-ready indoor basketball courts. Parks are for the entire city, but this location needs amenities designed to meet the needs of residents first and foremost.

Thank you for your time,
Laura J. Bryant

1/10/2022 5:38:00 PM

City Council Members:

As a city resident, I am a passholder at Aston Park where I enjoy playing tennis. The homeless situation at Aston Park creates an unsafe environment to all folks using the park. I have witnessed inappropriate behavior from the homeless population while playing tennis at Aston. This behavior is concerning and scary.

I also volunteer for Terminettors - a tennis clinic for underserved children (ages 6-11) on Saturday mornings at Aston Park. During this clinic, the homeless have threatened our kids and their parents as they enter or leave the park. We have had to call the police since these threats insinuate potential violence.

I am aware the homeless situation in Asheville is getting out of control. I hope the City Council will work with the organizations that support the homeless to find a reasonable solution. Living and camping in a public park in downtown Asheville is not the solution. Parks are meant to be enjoyed by ALL and for ALL to feel safe; yet parks are not a campground.

Thank you for listening to my concerns.

Debbie
President, ATA

~Debbie Southern (she/hers/her)

“Life is a paradise for those who love many things with a passion.” Leo Buscaglia

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1/10/2022 9:13:00 PM

The City of Asheville's current proposal to expand the Wesley Grant, Sr Southside Community Center does not meet community needs of equivalent services. This proposal is meant make good on promises made surrounding the closure of the Walton Street Pool.

The proposed regulation-size indoor and outdoor basketball courts are an effort to patch a hole made by Asheville City Schools junior-size court that can't be used for tournaments. If these courts are consuming the budget at the expense of the pool, there is a real problem. Wesley Grant, Sr Southside Center needs to address more than a single sport.

Why is Southside pool going to be smaller than the pool it is replacing? Why is the newest pool going to be the smallest pool in the city's system? Is Asheville not growing? Are there not hundreds of housing units under construction nearby, with still more planned? The community expressed a strong desire for a splashzone, a high-access amenity. There was talk of an all-season pool and many other inspirational suggestions to activate the center inside and out.

The city's outreach began before 2017 and was extensive. Parks and Recreation then waited 4 years to bring this proposal back to the public. Running down the clock until it was Parks and Recreation Director Roderick Simmons' last days in office, this plan was first publicly presented to council in June 2021. At that time, approval was imminently important as the contracted construction quotes were nearly expired.

It was only an hour before Roderick Simmons made his swan-song presentation that the proposal became publicly available online. How could the public comment at that time? I know council strives to be transparent, but City of Asheville staff appear to have no such drive.

Now the city has the Wesley Grant, Sr Southside Center proposal on it's consent agenda for Tuesday's meeting. The consent agenda doesn't allow public comment. The consent agenda does provide documents in which the City of Asheville claims to have conducted "Additional community and council engagement followed in the fall of 2021, which resulted in confirmation that the previous project scope was appropriate and had sufficient community buy-in."

This "community engagement" was unpublicized and unacknowledged by City of Asheville staff tasked with neighborhood and community engagement.

What will become of the Walton Street Pool legacy if this plan is approved?

1/10/2022 9:24:00 PM

I failed to note I was commenting on Consent Agenda Item C

please update my previous submission if needed,

Mike Wasmer
131 South Grove Street
Asheville, NC 28801

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It's all been a bit of a blitz since Council's Agenda was published on Friday.

On Mon, Jan 10, 2022 at 4:12 PM Michael Wasmer <wasmer.silver@gmail.com> wrote:

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- > Southside Community Center does not meet community needs of equivalent
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> This "community engagement" was a public hearing held by the City of

1/10/2022 10:12:00 PM

For the record of January 11, 2022 Asheville City Council Meeting. I have shared several emails with you concerning the issues of the homeless at Aston Park. It is a real concern that you may allow camping in our public parks. This would be a huge mistake. The incidents at Aston Park during 2021 have provided you and the community with enough evidence to not allow this to happen. Another incident took place today, Monday, January 10, 2022 at Aston Park where drug use, extreme profanity, and starting a fire next to the building took place and were witnessed by the Manager of the Tennis Center. This situation could have gotten a lot worse if it had not been for the actions of the staff person at the Park, who quickly doused the fire with water while waiting for the Fire Department to arrive. The Fire Marshall filed a report. In addition, a tent has been erected on the lower level in front of the women's rest room. This could just be the beginning, and it will be very difficult to move a camp once it is established. Please have City Staff enforce the 10 pm ordinance.

I went by the Park on Sunday afternoon and viewed trash throughout the park. And there is a camp that has been developed (4 tents on Sunday) below the lower parking lot, down from the brand new apartments that people on the west side of the tennis courts are now living. What a shame.

Please keep our parks open for the enjoyment of all people, to improve the quality of life. That is what parks are for. They are not designed for people to live in.

Thank You for your time and consideration.

Jeff Joyce
828-691-1197