

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

Speak Up



My friends who still live in Los Angeles proper refer to my neighborhood, about 35 miles outside of the city, as “Spielberg Land,” a snide and more-than-slightly jealous reference to the idyllic yet bland suburban neighborhood depicted in the movie “E.T.” It’s an easy shot to laugh off — I prefer dogs barking, the laughter of children playing, and tract houses to sirens, occasional gunshots, and endless asphalt.

There are approximately 400 homes in this neighborhood. At the center of the tract is a three-year-old park. The park is not particularly fancy — a few acres of turf dotted with young trees, a colorful play structure, and two backstops for baseball — but it is the neighborhood’s communal hub. On warm summer and fall evenings, it is filled with children on bikes and in strollers, and their parents, dogs leaping to catch frisbees and adolescent boys chasing adolescent girls.

A few months back we received a notice of a possible “cutback in services” from the county. The notice, which credited the potential cutback to state budget shortfalls, the governor, and the state legislature, explained that the park, and several others in the area, might no longer have a maintenance budget by year’s end. The “plan,” we found out at a meeting a week or so later, was to close the park and board it off from the neighborhood with plywood — the enclosed trees and turf would simply be allowed to die.

That was the extent of the county’s “plan,” to simply shut down a community asset and let it deteriorate. That was the best our caring, intelligent, forward-thinking, well-paid elected officials could come up with. Of course, services would resume if the budget dilemma was somehow magically resolved (as if renewed irrigation and maintenance could bring turf and trees back from the dead).

Our neighborhood, and the entire local community, was less-than-thrilled with the county’s plan. One of the printable suggestions that came up at the meeting was for the tract to assume the maintenance costs for the park — an idea that met with little or no resistance from the neighbors within it. Of course, the idea carried its own set of complications. Who would be liable if someone was injured in the park? Would the park, once public, be open only to tract residents, and if it was how would that be monitored? It was an imperfect idea to be sure, but at least it was creative and proactive, in crisp contrast to what the county had proposed.

The other positive development that came out of the meeting was a letter-writing campaign. The county supervisor for the area, the state legislature, and the governor have received letters of protest regarding the plan to close the park, as well as other parks in the area.

At it stands, the fate of the park remains unknown. As I understand it, the powers-that-be are looking for alternatives to closure. I don’t know what they’ll do, but I do know this: Had the neighborhood not spoken up, the park would have died a quiet death behind plywood. And it may still.

This is the current state of much of the nation’s public sports turf, of which parks are a critical segment. If we don’t speak up and fight for these vital community resources, they may be forever lost.

Matthew Trulio

EVENTS

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

6-9 Sports Turf Managers Association fifth annual conference and exhibition. Oriole Park at Camden Yards, Baltimore, MD. Contact: (312) 644-6610.

15-18 Green Industry Expo '93. Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore, MD. Contact: Green Industry Expo Management (404) 973-2019.

16-18 Penn State Golf Turf Conference. Nittany Lion Inn, University Park, PA. Contact: Peter Landschoot (814) 863-1017.

DECEMBER

1-2 Turfgrass and Ornamental Pest Control Workshop. Turfgrass Technology Center, Plymouth, MI. Contact: Jeff Lefton (317) 846-7020.

1-3 40th Rocky Mountain Turf Conference & Trade Show. Currigan Hall, Denver, CO. Contact: (303) 688-3440.

2-3 Arbor Expo. Valley Forge Convention Center, Valley Forge, PA. Contact: Susan Sweitzer (619) 770-4370.

6-9 Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show. Columbus Convention Center, Columbus, OH. Contact: John R. Street, extension turfgrass specialist (614) 292-2601.

7-9 Georgia Turfgrass Conference and Trade Show. Georgia International Convention and Trade Center, College Park, GA. Contact: Georgia Turfgrass Association (404) 975-4123.

14-15 Turfgrass and Ornamental Pest Control Workshop. Turfgrass Technology Center, Indianapolis, IN. Contact: Jeff Lefton (317) 846-7020.

31 Application deadline for Pennsylvania State University’s Two-Year Technical Turfgrass Management Program. University Park, PA. Contact: Turfgrass Management Technical Program, Pennsylvania State University (814) 865-8301.

Send announcements on your events two months in advance to:
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