

By PETER ZELCHENKO

Park district superintendent's view is distorted

We must take Park District Superintendent Timothy Mitchell's fictions about the Latin School soccer stadium deal (Chicago Journal/Skyline, One View, March 13, p. 11) point by point: Mr. Mitchell characterizes his alleged bandwagon for the stadium only with this: "Representatives of Friends of the Parks spoke at the [Oct. 25, 2006 Park District Board] meeting on [other] matters but raised no issues about the athletic field agreement." We see no bandwagon M this little event, but it does help demonstrate that Mr. Mitchell concealed important facts regarding Latin School's involvement.

After all, immediately on discovering the truth, FOTP and others did complain loudly that the deal was snuck past them. This may explain their attention to other matters at that busy meeting. We know that they would have been on the case if Mr. Mitchell's activity had not been so secretive, as multiple independent reports indicate it was.

So far, we have been told that Mr. Mitchell may have deliberately obscured details of the Latin School giveaway from several public bodies legally authorized to review these matters—including Mr. Mitchell's own employer, the Park District Board.

The Lincoln Park Advisory Council's meeting minutes from September 2006 clearly show that they were told that the Park District would pay to install a new field; with no mention of any third party. The field itself was controversial within LPAC, but then they did not expect the deal to be rushed through as it was.

Mr. Mitchell doesn't quite lie outright when he boasts of all of the community discussion regarding this deal. The crucial point he fails to mention, however, is that the first debate came nine months after the Park District Board had already approved the plan, and even after the school had already begun the construction process. Normally in a democracy, meetings like these are held before decisions are made, not after. Thanks to Mr. Mitchell's contempt for the public process, there are going to be many more meetings than he ever bargained for over one little soccer field.

To Mr. Mitchell's claim that there are only "a small number of residents" objecting to this, the 2,000 signers of our petition, renewed activity from park advocacy groups, and our rapidly growing legal fund should be enough to demonstrate otherwise.

To sum up, Mr. Mitchell's claims of full advance disclosure and overwhelming public support is nothing short of a lie.

A bad deal for the public: Free land for Latin

Next, Mr. Mitchell claims that, because of Latin's supposed generosity, the school's effective rate for use of the field will be what he characterizes as a record-setting \$222 per hour. Here, Mr. Mitchell shrewdly omits another crucial detail: that Latin's contract allows it to recoup its entire investment by selling advertising. Latin thus effectively has a free 'soccer complex, with a 20-year concession on some of the most valuable four acres of public land and billboard space in the city.

Mr. Mitchell also states that the Latin School will have "less than 20 percent of the available time" at the new facility. But this clever calculation includes weekday early morning and late-night hours when no one would demand the field, cer-

tainly not children. In more practical terms, the Latin School has been given nearly total control of the field when school-age children would ever need it, including for Latin's exclusive summer camp. If other youngsters would like to use the field—say, at daybreak or after bedtime—they can wait in line behind the aggressive adult leagues and pay full price.

But that's all right with Mc Mitchell, because with this supposedly impressive deal he's increased the Park District's budget by a whopping three one-thousandths of one percent.

And so everything we have said is true Mr. Mitchell side-stepped countless officials and the community, quietly taking the last large meadow in South Lincoln Park away from the millions and specializing it for soccer. He has effectively given primary possession of this land to the Latin School for free.

Mr. Mitchell has a lot of nerve trying to call us liars. The only people who are not furious with him are two or three Latin board members—who are in fact rather smug about the whole thing—and the management of the profitable adult soccer leagues. That leaves thousands of others ready to wring Mr. Mitchell's neck, including a growing number of Latin parents, faculty, and alumni.

Superintendent Mitchell's heartwarming desire to bring us "facilities that enhance the quality of life for all Chicago residents" is surpassed by an even greater lust: that of vacuuming up tiny chunks of revenue by parceling off public land to the few. In this extreme case, the future interests of millions of users of that meadow have been stealthily ransomed away to one school's soccer team, for what amounts to chump change in the Park District ledgers.

Mr. Mitchell writes, apparently with irony, that "the partnerships.. forged with park advisory councils, elected officials, organizations and corporations have been instrumental in our progress." We know that the Lincoln Park Advisory Council, area aldermen, and Friends of the Parks, not to mention community groups and residents, are furious with Mr. Mitchell for not including them in the process. LPAC has just passed a resolution condemning the act and calling on the Park District to halt construction of the field pending further review.

And this is just the beginning. We look forward to our meeting with Park Board Chairman Gary Chico, where we will propose alternatives to Mr. Mitchell's follies. In the meantime, we would again advise the Park District 'of the wisdom of halting construction immediately. The Park District should throw sod down for the summer and await a review of the Lincoln Park Framework Plan, and then our referendum on the November ballot.

Meanwhile, we urge everyone to help us meet our newest \$50,000 legal fund goal. Join us at savelincolnpark.org/donate, and please give generously. We are an all-volunteer organization.

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