

Managing Change

Seventeen years ago our family purchased a swampy piece of land in southern Johnson County with the hopes of building our “homestead” in the country. With my husband’s vision, this land was developed into a beautiful homesite complete with ponds, woods, ducks and plenty of roaming space for our children. We cherished the tranquility of our beautiful, solitary home while benefiting from the easy access to our wonderful neighboring community, Overland Park.

The benefit we received from our community came at a price as others made their expansion to the South. The old generational farms were sold and new housing developments sprung up. We feared that our lifestyle would be impacted, but we soon realized that adapting and accepting our new neighbors enriched our lives. The new schools followed with the first one actually bordering our paradise. Again we were dismayed; but as our children thrived by calling a school in their neighborhood “home”, we managed this additional change and actually learned to enjoy the marching band practices instead of grumbling that it was no longer silent in our world.

When the Overland Park neighbors decided to take the county folks in, we were again concerned about the impact on our lovely quality of life. We have had to adjust to some slight changes (like licensing the dog), but we have also appreciated the services of our new community, particularly when our carriage house burnt to the ground last year. We still enjoy our ponds, woods and ducks, but now we are a part of a thriving community. Change once again came without harm.

Like our neighbors, we have concerns about the impact the new soccer project will have on our peaceful, highly valued lifestyles. Being the largest landowner in close proximity to the project, our concerns are acute; however, our experience through the years has also taught us that managing change is better than denying that change will come. It is because of our desire to adapt, that we offer another perspective of our lives with the hope that it may influence the positive effects that project may have on our community.

Whether it is known as Futbol or known as Soccer, this sport has been an integral part of our family for the past twelve years. Practice occurred on our “back five” acres since my daughter was eight. When she departed to play soccer in college this year, we sadly sold the goals and reflected on the many good years watching the girls play as well as the growth that had taken place both in my daughter and the world of soccer in general.

Throughout our soccer years, we traveled to competitions throughout the United States. From Phoenix to Washington D.C. up to Appleton, Wisconsin and down to the Carolinas, we have played on every type of field and experienced the best and worst of soccer venues. Being the Kansas State Champion for five years running, we traveled to regional competitions where large pre-tournament ceremonies were held in arenas usually meant for minor-league baseball teams or concerts. After the ceremonies, we would often travel more than an hour to our accommodations, then travel back to another venue to actually play the games throughout the course of the tournament. I was always amazed that small cities found a way to host these large tournaments, but our own

metropolitan area did not have enough fields, much less an arena to bid for these events. Well, now it seems we might.

The concept of having a major soccer complex in our area is thrilling for the true soccer fan. The money we usually give the airlines and Applebees in far off places would actually remain in our community. Our city could actually host events most of us have traveled thousands of miles to attend, and having the Wizards would certainly benefit by the influx of spectators now that they have their own stadium right in the heart of a vibrant youth soccer community.

So the conflict comes with the community's fear of the impact such a project would bring to our way of life. I have attended large soccer tournaments on fields nestled within suburban residential areas. I have often left these games feeling sorry for those living near the fields as their privacy, not to mention driveways, were invaded by lines of honking soccer vans desperate to park the car and make it to watch the kick-off. I have also been to venues where the surrounding residential areas seemed unaffected by the buzzing activity of a major youth tournament. It has been obvious to me that the difference between these two scenarios began in the conceptual phase of the soccer park. In order to ease the fear of your neighbors, this too should be your mission - to create a venue that benefits, not threatens, the quality of life in the community.

Without doubt, your team of experts will make every attempt to preserve the country-like quality of life we enjoy. As a close resident of the project, I hope that pleasing the community will be a high priority in all your development stages. As a soccer traveler, I would want you to prepare the complex in a way that I can enter, exit and park efficiently without impeding on the surrounding neighborhood while attending the event. Below are a few items on my wish list for the project that would be important for me both as a resident and a soccer participant:

- Adequate parking to accommodate large crowds (We do not want people parking alongside of our road in the ditches)
- Multiple entrances and exits as close to the highway as possible to prevent long lines and "cutting" through residential neighborhoods, i.e., keep the traffic external to the homes
- Some type of barrier (landscaping, fencing, etc.) nearest residential areas that would provide a sense of enclosure for the complex, thereby giving the homeowners more a sense of privacy
- Aesthetics in design and landscaping that compliment the beauty of the surrounding community

Change will continue to come. It is our hope that this change is managed for the benefit of us all.