

**Aliza Caldwell**

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**Subject:**

FW: Sports Pavillion - Disrespecting the Public

October 31, 2016

Dear Mayor Amyx and City Commissioners:

Disrespecting the Public

At least three of you hold seats on the City Commission in part because your predecessors disrespected the public in the manner in which they dealt with the Lawrence Sports Pavilion. In one instance, a commissioner wisely chose not to select re-election. In the others, both were defeated. Commissioner Farmer would have likewise been defeated had he been on the ballot.

It is shocking that the City Staff is now asking you to continue to disrespect the public by allowing the closure of all eight courts up to 20 days out of the year.

First and Foremost a Community Center

From the get go, the Sports Pavilion was supposed to be first and foremost, a “community center.” When the plan, heeding the siren call of KU Athletics, ballooned from 3 to 8 basketball courts, the Commission was quick to assure, and re-assure, the public that at all times at least one full court would be reserved for the citizens of Lawrence - the ones footing the bill for the \$22 million investment (approximately \$8-9 million more than the City could have built the exact same facility with infrastructure on land it already owned).

Parks and Recs Disrespects the Public

Even before the concrete started to fracture because of faulty workmanship (and that was almost immediately), Parks and Rec came before the commission wanting to ignore the open-court policy and use all eight courts for tournaments. The Commission firmly rejected that proposal and again re-iterated the City’s promise to the public that this was first and foremost a “community center” and that one court would always be reserved for the taxpaying citizens of Lawrence.

Notwithstanding that clear directive, Parks and Rec went right ahead and scheduled at least one tournament (and I suspect more) where it only held open ½ of a full court for Lawrence citizens.

No sooner was the new City Manager on the job than Parks and Rec (as other staff stood silently by) intentionally withheld from him its clear knowledge that the Commission had made firm promises to the citizens of Lawrence, and bamboozled him into approving the surreptitious closing of all eight courts. It was only when caught in the act that city staff within minutes tried to cover its deceit with a quick update to the website.

Parks and Recs Favors Tournament Use over Public Use

In its memo, Parks and Rec now acknowledges that it lets tournament participants push the citizens of Lawrence right off of the one public court.

And its policy of not reserving parking for Lawrence residents wanting to use the Pavilion during onsite tournaments discourages many users, and makes it impossible for others to use the “community center.” (During the KU Relays, parking was reserved.)

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### Revenue Shortfall?

The City Manager has suggested charging Lawrence residents to use the Sports Pavilion because revenue from the tournaments is not enough to cover the increased cost of staffing – this despite the fact that taxpayers are already on the hook for years to come in order to pay for the over-priced facility. (Not to mention the dubious consequences of discouraging exercise.)

A better solution would be for Parks and Rec to charge tournament participants more. After all, the Commission’s highly touted \$25,000 feasibility study (which has conveniently been removed from the city’s website) was offered as proof perfect that it would generate sufficient revenue to cover those costs. And, if those funds aren’t sufficient, take the money out of the visitor tax revenues.

### Seven versus Eight

I’m not certain how many other 8-court facilities (or 7-court for that matter) are available for tournaments within a thousand miles of Lawrence, but I think it is a finite number. I suspect that the difference between 7 and 8 courts has not been the determining factor in whether or not a single tournament ended up in our fair city.

But, even if it was, which is more important? Keeping faith with the public or a basketball tournament?

Sincerely,

JERRY HARPER