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9-15-07

Good Morning City Council Members.

My name is Helen Epley and I live in the 100 block of Prince Street with my husband Michael and twin 8-year-old daughters, Lilian and Olivia.

My daughters have played soccer with ASA for 4 seasons, the first one spent practicing in Windmill Hill Park, the next two at Mt. Vernon Community School and after several years of lobbying for an Old Town coach for girls of this age, we optimistically started this season on Thursday afternoon with 10 little girls and two coaches back at Windmill Hill Park.

However, earlier this week I was upset to hear from our new coach Ron Vassallo that we were apparently not going to be able to practice at Windmill Hill but would have to find some other pitch, because the ASA had been told by the RPCA that no practices or games were allowed to be scheduled there due to complaints of some sort. After a little digging, I discovered that the real issue was that the park had been 're-ordinanced' a few years ago to do away with "active use" events and was now only supposed to host "passive use" events, the difference being apparently, the need to schedule the event, thus requiring a permit or rental, with fees, to use the "lawn." The most recent complaint had been in the form of a reminder that the park now had different rules which were not being enforced but should be, according to the complainant.

While it is clear that the process by which this 're-ordinancing' was done was perfectly proper and legal, and passed by the city council in good faith, I feel that it was done selfishly and unwisely, with little or no eye toward the park's main constituency: families and young children. There is very little space in most Old Town back yards and to have the most popular play spot in town declared off limits for the most popular kids' activity in the country just boggles my mind. I now also understand the range of groups competing for the space and the reasons that some track must be kept of the park's use schedule – if only to avoid arguments over who is supposed to be there and who is not. I also feel that with the city in possession of only half the number of fields it actually needs by population according to a recent field study, there is little excuse to throw anything in the way of ASA having the absolute written and permitted priority to use the lawn for soccer practices.

I have been given to understand in the last few days of back-and-forth emails with several of you very busy city councilmen a few more of the details of the issue and have personally decided that there are no real demons here, just a couple of misunderstandings that I have been assured are very easy to clear up and in fact are in the process of being straightened out at almost this moment. However, I decided to attend the meeting today and use my 3 minutes at the mic to make certain that you all know what an important issue this is to me and to so many people, a few of whom are gathered here with their young soccer players, and to let you know that we expect this to be cleared up well and quickly and not have to revisit it in the near future. I appreciate all your hard work on this issue. Thank you.