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Circumnavigation- Build Tracks at our Fields
Statement to the Alexandria, Virginia City Council, 10-16-2008
by Gary J. Carr

One of the critical elements missing from the field strategy in the City of Alexandria is the circumnavigation, used in this context for encirclement the parameter of our fields with a surface that allows for walking, jogging or running. The common terminology for this structure is a running track. A track so defined, simply needs to be wide enough to allow two people to comfortably walk side by side, up to the premier 8 lanes and 400 hundred meters required for international competitions. This oval can be made of a material as simple as dirt, mulch, pea gravel, asphalt, or a specialized rubber surface. To most runners a concrete sidewalk is a running track. Yet, this eminently useful, and relatively inexpensive accessory has been woefully overlooked in our city's plans, hence it left Alexandria without a single public running track for nearly five years.

This void was recently partially filled by the opening of the running track at the new T.C. Williams High School. Yet, most residents are dumbfounded to find out that we just dropped 100 million dollars on a high school, and the track and field does not even have lights. Because the track is closed during school hours, and limited to 3 lanes for public use immediately after-school, when daylight saving time starts, and it gets dark early, were back to where we started- effectively no public running facilities. This compounded by the fact that there is no means to properly circumnavigate most of the fields currently available in the city.

Take for example the field at Four Mile Run. Beautiful irrigated, natural grass field with lights. This is a perfect place to put a natural surface, such as pea gravel, running track. No impact on a sensitive environment, and would increase the sites recreational value exponentially.

This fact is also lost in the plans at the new Potomac Yards Field. No means to encircle the site by a track, path, trail, sidewalk, whatever you want to call it, you cannot easily walk around the parameter of the fields as current planned. That's all a runner wants, simply a way to circumnavigate, or they, and consequentially, the vast majority of the community suffers.

The preliminary plans for Wittier Fields shows the same lack of vision. No means for circumnavigation. And at the ill-conceived "All City Sport Facility" same blind spot was demonstrated, no track, and moreover no means of circumnavigating. This is a persistent myopic vision of the future. All while sedentary lifestyles drain the health from our community.

The Fort Ward Field now has a new artificial turf field and lights, but is has been leased out to a private school, making it basically unavailable to the community. The same inside the box thinking at the new lacrosse field at Minnie Howard School, no circumnavigation. All while our middle schools track and field's languish in disrepair. It is representative of a system, especially were compared to private school counterparts and the constituencies policy serve, that has become separate, and manifestly unequal.

This is called a lack of vision- because a running track, however narrowly or broadly defined- does not subtract from the field inventory one iota. It enhances our field inventory and should be included in any site plan, for any field. How could a person run or walk around the parameter of this site? Circumnavigation, this is the question you should ask every time. Then, there is issue of our two middle schools. Something must be done to repair this oversight, and make it right. Pay it forward and restore these tracks for our children.

I will end this statement where I begun- *If we build them, they will run.*