A Report from the President of the
Woodlawn Lake Community Association

Alejandro Soto
Attorney at Law

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CITY COUNCIL REJECTS NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS & MARS HISTORIC PARK

Council Names Tennis Courts Over Solid Neighborhood Objection

On May 29th, the San Antonio City Council voted unanimously to rename the tennis courts at Woodlawn Lake Park for Joe V. Alderete Jr. (District 6's Ray Lopez was absent but called in his support.) Council ignored the solid opposition of the neighborhood associations in this area, the historic district status of the park, the violations in the process, and the questionable background and character of the "honoree." I do not believe that I have ever seen the wishes and words of WLCA brushed aside and trampled on as much as what happened during this entire procedure. The Council vote had been delayed for over two months since the Public Hearing on March 18th. No matter how you slice the City Code, the last time the Council should have been able to consider this matter was on April 17th. The delay in bringing it before Council had to be to allow the proponents to secure votes from the other Council members. At the City Council meeting, our points seemed to be ignored and were not even addressed. When opponents spoke, Medina would walk out of the room. The whole process was disturbing to all of us who believe in having our voices heard, especially when it comes to matters in our own communities.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Alejandro Soto, WLCA President

I am preparing and mailing this Report at my expense. As President of the Woodlawn Lake Community Association (WLCA), I have spent the past 11½ years working to preserve, protect, and enhance our neighborhood and our park. The action filed by District 7 Councilman Cris Medina on January 21, 2014, goes directly against this work. As a result, on February 25, 2014, I resigned as his representative on the City's Parks & Recreation Board on which I had served since 2007. The process was flawed and slanted from start to finish. This report is to inform our members of the entire process. It is not an official WLCA position, although we did vote unanimously at our February 25, 2014, meeting against the naming of the tennis courts.

How It Started

In 2010, WLCA member Norma Rodriguez, retired City Clerk, called me about a proposal to name the Woodlawn Lake Park tennis courts for Joe Alderete. At the time Alderete was running for District 1 Trustee of the Alamo Colleges. I told Rodriguez that any action now would appear as political favoritism. I did not tell her whether I was for or against the idea.

In August 2012, I received a call from the District 7 office, asking to set up a breakfast meeting with one of the Alderete daughters. I called Councilman Cris Medina to ask what the meeting was about. He said that the Alderete family was asking that the tennis courts be named for Joe. Ester (my wife) and I had Medina come by our home to discuss it. He told us that Chris Alderete, her two daughters, and Norma Rodriguez had approached him, the Mayor, and District 1 Councilman Diego Bernal on this issue. We told Medina that we were against the naming. He said that since he "gave us the curfew" at the park, he owed Alderete something. (Alderete had tried to block the curfew.) He added that he was afraid that the Alderetes could hurt his re-election chances if he did not go along. We told him that if the proposal were to be made, Joe's dirty laundry would come out. Medina said that this would hurt the family.

I met with the Alderete daughter at Koffee Kup (she bought me coffee). She told me of the proposal and of her father's service. I listened, asked a few questions, but gave no indication of being for or against the matter. I spoke again with Medina, who finally said that he would name nothing at our park for anyone. Nothing more was heard for over a year.

On January 31, 2014, I received a mailed Notice of Public Hearing to name the tennis courts. Medina, nor anyone on his staff, had said that this was coming. No mention had been made in the D7 eblasts, presentations by D7 staff to neighborhood associations, or other D7 meetings. Medina wrote his proposal on December 5, 2013. He constantly told us about his parties, dances, movies, and so on, but never mentioned this action. I had received no courtesy notice or heads-up as his representative on the City's Parks and Recreation Board.

UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD OPPOSITION

On February 25, 2014, WLCA voted unanimously against the naming of the Woodlawn Lake Park tennis courts. On March 17th, the Hillcrest Neighborhood Association (HNA) voted unanimously against the naming of the tennis courts. On March 31st, the Monticello Park Neighborhood Association (MPNA) unanimously voted against. On April 14th, the Jefferson Neighborhood Association (JNA) voted all but one member against. Medina was aware of all these votes.

At City Council, Medina tried to balance the opposition by saying that Sunshine Estates, Donaldson Terrace, and Maverick NA's were in favor of the naming. Although the presidents of the first two (Gracie Villarreal & Bert Guerrero) spoke at the Council meeting, and a member of the third (Frank Fonseca) emailed his support, none said that their associations had in fact voted on the issue. In a court of law, this would have been inadmissible as hearsay and assuming facts not in evidence.

FAULTY PROCESS

City Code [§6-660] requires that in a naming process a representative be appointed from each Council District in which the affected facility is located. Woodlawn Lake Park is in Districts 1 and 7, yet only 7 had a representative. D1 Councilman Bernal said that only a small part of the park is in his district. The Code does not measure inches and acres; it is in the district or it is not.

The Code also says that the representative is someone "who would otherwise be noticed under this article…." A person requiring a mailed notice is someone who resides within a 200 foot radius of the facility (the park) [§6-664(b)(1)]. The District 7 representative resides five blocks north of the park, a much greater distance than 200 feet, so should not have qualified.

Once the public hearing was scheduled, the committee was required to immediately cause notice to be served to the entire city [§6-664(b)(2)]. I received the Notice of Public Hearing on January 31st with a set date for the hearing. But until March 12th, notice had been posted only in the *Southside Recorder*. I have this confirmed by an email from Parks Director and committee member Xavier Urrutia. This was not notice to the entire city; it was not even notice to the Woodlawn Lake area. This appears to have been another deception to keep the public uninformed.

Application for the naming was completed on January 21st when it was filed with the City Clerk. The application was to have been submitted to City Council within 90 days [§6-668]. The committee is required to forward the application to Council no more than 30 days after consideration [§6-671(1)]. In fact, application to Council took 128 days, and public hearing to Council took 72 days. For a facility being developed, the naming is considered by Council "as soon as practical" [§6-666(a)]. The delay in considering the naming until the eighth Council meeting after the public hearing cannot be construed as "as soon as practical." The matter should have been dropped as untimely.

THE DISTRICT 7 REPRESENTATIVE

Medina appointed Norma Rodriguez as his representative on the naming committee. Rodriguez had been an advocate for Alderete going back to 2010. See "How It Started," reverse page. See also Brian Chasnoff, *Express-News*, March 28, 2014, "Naming Process Less Than Neutral."

Also, Rodriguez and Alderete have baptized each other's children. In Southwest culture, that just about makes you a member of the family. There was a definite conflict of interest which Rodriguez, as former City Clerk, should have realized. When I pointed this out to Xavier Urrutia at the February 24th Parks Board meeting, he shrugged it off.

AT CITY COUNCIL

On May 29th, Bianca Maldonado, MPNA president; Elia Reyna, JNA Scholarship Chair; Dr. Gloria Rodriguez, DTNA member and former Avance CEO; Ashley Hernandez, WLCA board member; and I spoke against the naming of the tennis courts. We covered such matters as the historic district status of our park, the faulty process (see left column), the quality of the summer tennis camps, questionable financial dealings, the legal haggles of Joe Alderete (reported by Chasnoff, *E-N*, and Rick Casey, KLRN), community involvement in the development of the park, and the desire not to name anything for anyone at the park. The matters covered had also been brought up at the March 18th public hearing and in several emails sent to all Council members, the Mayor, the City Manager, and the City Attorney.

Of the speakers for the naming, only one resides anywhere near the park. They gave Alderete credit for his tennis camps (half days, four weeks per year) and all the credit for park improvements. (We pointed out City bond issues and community efforts). None spoke about why it was proper to place a private recognition at a historic landmark or why Alderete's contribution exceeded that of any other person to warrant this honor.

Medina said that the opposition to the naming was "simply on the premise that nothing should be named for someone still alive." This despite everything said from late January to the Council meeting. He also asked Urrutia if the process was proper. Urrutia's response was that it was the same as followed in other park naming actions. So, if previous ones were done improperly, this could also be done wrong.

Council members accepted without question Medina's summation. It is as if deals had been made before the meeting. D10's Gallagher called Medina a hard worker. D9's Krier went with Medina by default - it's in D7, Medina know best. D8's Nirenberg labeled our objections "personal attacks." D1's Bernal, an attorney, brushed off procedural questions. He also equated "not guilty" with "innocent." (Criminal law has a higher burden than does civil law; this was a civil-type proceeding and prior accusations should have been considered.) No one thought about asking the City Attorney or City Clerk about the process.