



October 17, 2016

Via Email

Kevin Brown
Director, Parks and Recreation Division
King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks
King Street Center, 201 S Jackson Street, Suite 700
Seattle, WA 98104-3855

Re: Request to Remove Storage Bins in Big Finn Hill Park

Dear Mr. Brown:

The Finn Hill Neighborhood Alliance (FHNA), a 505(c)(3) organization representing the residents of Finn Hill and the users of Big Finn Hill Park, writes to object to the County Parks' recent relocation of storage bins to a field in Big Finn Hill Park that is used for a wide variety of recreational activities. Not only does the new site for the storage bins interfere with long-standing recreational uses of the park, but it was undertaken without any public input and, indeed, was implemented in spite of concerns raised by FHNA representatives. FHNA urges the County to return the storage bins to their prior location or consider finding a new location that does not conflict with primary park uses.

The storage bins in question contain gravel, ball field mix, wood chips, and soil. Until recently storage was located behind a batting cage by Baseball Field 2 (see map, Attachment 1). In September, FHNA representatives learned that storage bins would be placed in a field west of Baseball Field 3, an area that is used in the dry season by high school and middle school cross country teams, dog trainers, kite fliers, and residents engaged in cyclocross, golf practice, flag football, and other recreational activities. On Sept 21, 2016, FHNA board member Jeanette Leach emailed Joe Hughes, the new County Park District Maintenance Coordinator with responsibility for Big Finn Hill Park, to understand what was planned for the field and to raise concerns about impediments to the public's use of the open field west of Baseball Field 3.

On Sept 22, 2016, Mr. Hughes responded, "*I appreciate your concern on where we place our bins but this is county business. I met with county ground [sic] and discuss[ed] their need and ours and this is the location we chose.*"

Mr. Hughes provided the following reasons for the re-location of the bins: *"We chose this location for four reasons. The first and foremost is safety. Large trucks and equipment next to ball fields full of kids is not a good mix. The current location fits that mold. The second reason is this area is dry and large enough for equipment to safely operate. The third reason is that it is more efficient for us to do our job. The bins are more centrally place[d]. And the fourth reason is that we can store gravel, ball field mix, wood chips, and brush without as much worry that someone will help themselves like they have in the past in the current location."*

FHNA representative Bill Blanchard sent a reply email to Mr. Hughes the morning of Sept 26, 2016. He did not respond. The storage bins were installed a few days later. See attached photos (Attachments 2a and 2b) of the site as it looks today. The new site not only occupies a previously open field that is used for a variety of recreational activities in the summer, but is also an eye sore and an environmental liability: runoff from the storage bins and field where equipment access the bins now drains directly into O.O. Denny Creek. (The previous storage site was inconspicuous and drained into a retention pond.) We are deeply concerned about flows of silt into O.O. Denny Creek. The neighborhood and King County Parks have spent thousands of dollars and thousands of hours revitalizing Denny Creek, and Kirkland has recently announced further evaluation of the creek. It would be distressing to see this work imperiled by the re-location of soil and maintenance materials to an inappropriate site

FHNA is surprised and disappointed that the County did not consult with park users before action was taken to disrupt this grassy field. Furthermore, we do not agree with the conclusions set forth in Mr. Hughes's email:

Safety: Except for weekends (especially Saturdays) during spring to mid-summer, the baseball fields are not used in morning hours so children playing in the soil storage area tend to be when KC Parks employees are not on site. Similarly, it is rare that the upper field is used during hours that park employees are on site. Both areas are used by kids for playing, with the upper field having more play activity with kids and adults than the soil storage area behind the batting cage.

Suitability for County equipment: Although County Parks staff claim that the field behind Field 3 is dry and large enough for equipment to operate safely, the field is wet for approximately 6 months of the year, in fact, it is so sodden that King County Parks' vehicles have been stuck in the mud in that location. Today, in fact, one of the County's trucks sank deep into the ground as it attempted a delivery at the new location. (See photo.) Walkers find it difficult to cross during the wet season except on the gravel path. By contrast, the ground at the old storage site is dry and well packed.

Efficiency: We appreciate efficiency, but not at the loss of a public play area when there was already an area being used adequately for the job.

Security: It is understandable that the County staff want to minimize theft of County property. However, the public has walking access to both locations, so moving the storage ~200 feet will not achieve security of park supplies.

The population of the Puget Sound metro area including Kirkland is projected to increase by 20 to 25% over the next 20 years, putting considerably more pressure on every inch of trails, groomed athletic fields and free play fields. Consequently, County Parks should proceed carefully before implementing any initiative that would reduce the recreational areas of its parks. In this case, construction has proceeded without addressing questions in public inquiries. We are aware of no environmental analysis being completed to understand potential impacts of this decision. Did an alternatives analysis take place, and what were the results of that evaluation?

While we understand the desire for added convenience for soil/mulch storage rather than the location west of the batting cage that has served for years, the added convenience comes at a tremendous loss to the owners of the land – the community of tax payers.

As noted above, FHNA requests that the County move its storage bins to their previous location or another site that is not used for public recreation and that does not create the risk of polluting streams or wetlands. We also request that the County restore the field, removing gravel and replanting the turf.

At the very least, the County should solicit public input on the merits of relocating the bins to the field west of Baseball Field 3. FHNA would be happy to work with the County to reach out to the community and solicit input on a better solution for location of the Park Department's storage bins.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We would appreciate hearing a response from the Parks Department in the near future.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors of Finn Hill Neighborhood Alliance



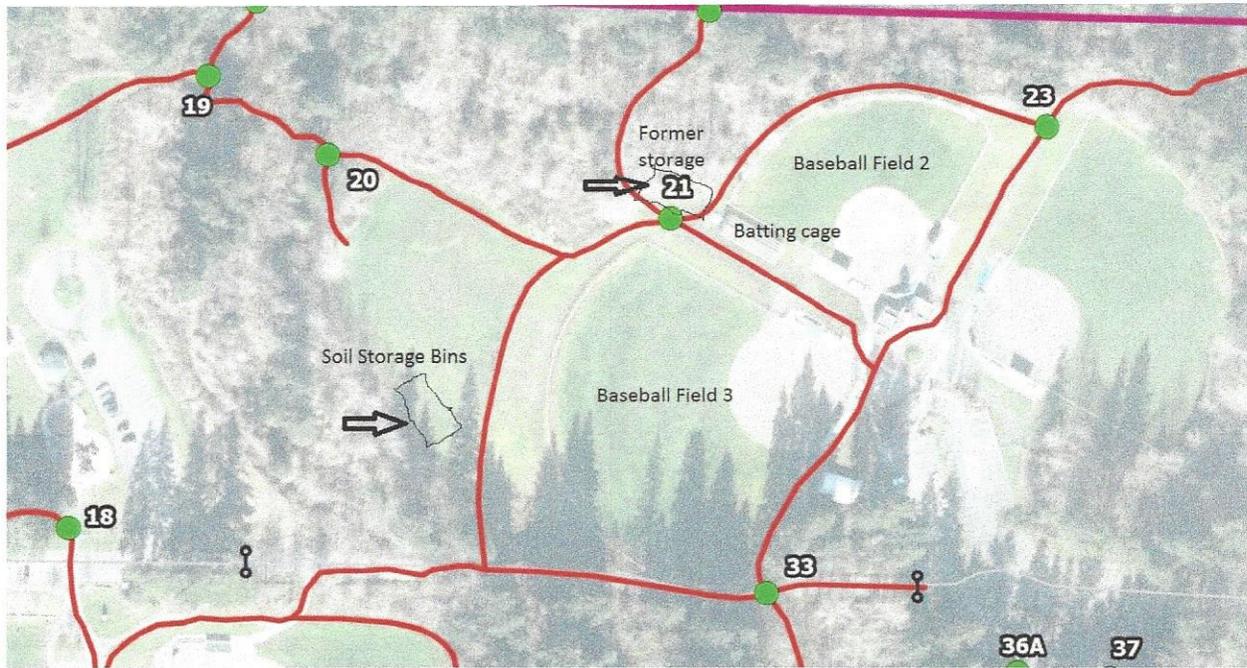
By: Scott Morris, President

Attachments

Cc: Kirsten Chapman
Don Harig
Joe Hughes
Kathryn Terry
Council Member Rod Dembowski
FHNA Board of Directors

Letter to Kevin Brown
October 17, 2016

Attachment 1: Map of Big Finn Soil Storage Bin Location



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October 17, 2016

Attachment 2a: Photo of Soil Storage Bins



Letter to Kevin Brown
October 17, 2016

Attachment 2b: Photo of Soil Storage Bins from Baseball Field 3



Letter to Kevin Brown
October 17, 2016

Attachment 3a: County Parks truck attempting delivery to soil bins at new location (October 17, 2016)



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October 17, 2016

Attachment 3b: County Parks truck attempting delivery to soil bins at new location (October 17, 2016)

