

Reply to: [safarrow22@gmail.com](mailto:safarrow22@gmail.com) and your response will be circulated to all of the undersigned

September 14, 2021

Dear Mayor Deutsch, Members of the Dunwoody City Council, and Parks and Recreation Director Walker:

We write to you as long-time supporters of youth athletics and in particular girls' fastpitch softball. We are associated with one or more of the following four softball organizations or groups, a description of which is provided in the attached Appendix A: Atlanta Flames Fastpitch, Inc., Murphey Candler Girls Softball Association, Inc. ("MCGSA"), Dunwoody High School Softball Booster Club, and coaches and parents from the Peachtree Jr. Wildcats Girls' Softball team (a non-sanctioned team of students from Peachtree Middle School). All of these groups serve Dunwoody and the surrounding area.

### **The Lack of Softball Fields at Public Parks in Dunwoody**

We have a problem that can only be addressed by the City of Dunwoody: the lack of field space and indoor practice facilities in our city for girls' softball. In the entire city of Dunwoody, an affluent community with a population of roughly 50,000, there is not a single softball field in a publicly owned park. In the nearby city of Chamblee (roughly 30,000 residents), there is one softball field in a publicly owned park but it is reserved for men's and adult-mixed softball leagues.

The only softball fields available for girls at publicly owned parks in North DeKalb County (Brookhaven, Chamblee, and Dunwoody) are the five fields at Brookhaven's Murphey Candler Park. As the attached Appendix B shows, five is a misleading number. Field 1 is tiny, and only suitable for tee ball (6 and under). Field 2 is slightly larger than 1, and only suitable for coach pitch (8 and under). Field 3 also is small and only suitable for ages 9-10. (Field 3's outfield fences of 157' are below the recommended minimum size for 10U.)<sup>1</sup> That leaves Fields 4 and 5 for ages 11 and above. Field 4's outfield fences of 163'(LF) and 178' (RF) are well

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<sup>1</sup> USA Softball (the largest governing body for girls' softball) recommends the following minimum field dimensions (home plate to foul pole) for girls' fastpitch softball:

Age	Minimum	Maximum
10U	175'	225'
12U	200'	225'
14U	200'	225'
16U	200'	225'
18U	200'	225'
High Sch.	200'	225'

(USA Softball Rule 2, Section 1.)

below the recommended minimum size (200') and cannot be enlarged because the outfield abuts the dam for the lake. As a result, only one field (Field 5) meets the recommended minimum field dimensions for ages 11 to 18.

As the sport of girls' fastpitch has grown in popularity, the girls using Murphey Candler's fields has increased to over 500 each season and many of these girls are Dunwoody residents (MCGSA and the Flames, Spring 2021). The fields are now booked every weeknight from 5 to 9 and throughout the weekend. MCGSA has curtailed advertisement of its program because it does not have the field capacity to accommodate more teams.

### **The Lack of Other Practice Options in North DeKalb**

In an effort to find additional field space, coaches have explored other options in the community. The Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta ("MJCCA") has two softball fields that are used for adult softball but has historically declined to allow outside teams to use its fields. (One exception to this has been MJCCA's recent accommodation of Peachtree Jr. Wildcats for practices and games.) While the MJCCA's two softball fields might be available in isolated situations, the fields are not a viable option for reducing the significant field shortage because of heavy usage for adult softball and other activities such as soccer.

Private schools rarely allow outside teams on their fields unless the team has a connection to the school. Public schools, likewise, are reluctant to allow outside teams; the one exception has been Dunwoody High School. Dunwoody High's field is less than ideal for several reasons. First, it has no lights, which limits its use in the winter and spring and eliminates its use in the fall due to school use during daylight hours. Second, its field dimensions (180' (LF); 145' (RF)) are well below the recommended minimum. Right field, the most glaring problem, is **55'** short of the recommended minimum and cannot be enlarged without encroaching on the entrance and parking lot for Vanderlyn School. There also are no permanent, publicly available restrooms anywhere near the field.

Because of the dearth of available fields, the Atlanta Flames have often filled practice schedules with a combination of field space at Dunwoody High, Murphey Candler Park, and the Flames' Gym at the old Chamblee Middle School. In January 2021, the DeKalb County Public Schools terminated the Flames' lease of the Gym due to the redevelopment of the site as an elementary school, thus eliminating a crucial practice option.

When the Peachtree Jr. Wildcats started a softball program for the 2021-2022 school year, its team had to schedule practices at two different facilities (Dunwoody High School and the MJCCA) because of the lack of any field in a public park. Dunwoody High's field is already used in the fall by the school's varsity and JV teams, leaving little time for the middle school. The Peachtree Jr. Wildcats explored using the Brook Run Baseball Fields for practices but the fields have raised mounds and, therefore, cannot be used for softball games (softball fields do not have raised mounds).

### **The Disparity Between Fields for Girls' Softball vs. Boys' Baseball**

As one looks at the shortage of softball fields for girls in North DeKalb, one cannot help but notice the stark contrast between the facilities available for baseball as compared to girls' softball. At Murphey Candler, baseball has seven fields (the size of those fields is detailed in Appendix C). On top of that, there are two huge fields (one with 303' fences, the other with 295' fences) at Peachtree Middle School (Brook Run Baseball Fields) devoted to baseball.

By any measure, there is a large disparity in North DeKalb between the fields available for girls' softball as compared to boys' baseball. In number of fields, the difference is four (**5** vs. **9**). In physical space devoted to softball vs. baseball, the disparity increases (**14,640** yd<sup>2</sup> vs. **38,450** yd<sup>2</sup>). When viewed as a percentage of the total land devoted to girls' softball and baseball (53,090 yd<sup>2</sup>), 27.6 percent is devoted to girls' softball while 72.4 percent is devoted to baseball. But the problem does not end there. In addition to softball and baseball programs, Murphey Candler is home to Atlanta Colts football, and the park's two football fields are located next to the softball fields. In the fall, the Colts have priority over the softball fields, which means the girls must accede control of their fields to football teams that practice in the outfields. MCGSA's fall softball league is only allowed to use the fields on Wednesdays, Saturdays (fields 2-4 only), and Sundays. In 2021, MCGSA's fall leagues have 370 participants, which means there is almost no time for Flames teams. When the use of softball fields by football teams is factored in, the disparity between the facilities for girls vs. boys only increases.

### **How did this happen?**

The 135-acre site for Murphey Candler Park was purchased by DeKalb County in 1952, and the ground breaking for the park followed on January 31, 1954. Murphey Candler Baseball, Inc. traces its roots to 1958, when baseball started at the park. Atlanta Colt Youth Association, the football organization, was incorporated in 1965. In 1968, Murphey Candler became the first park in Atlanta to offer girls' fastpitch softball. Because softball was the last to arrive, the softball fields were shoehorned into the small remaining tract below the lake. Anyone who has been to the park on a Saturday in the spring will see cars parked along the streets, a testament to the lack of planning for increased usage.

Dunwoody Senior Baseball, Inc. was formed in 1972, presumably around the time the two senior baseball fields were built at the site where Austin Elementary is now located. This facility provided fields for senior boys (13 and older). No similar facility for girls was ever constructed. Senior Girls were expected to make do with what was provided in the 1960s - two fields at Murphey Candler.

When the Brook Run Baseball Fields were built in 2017, softball supporters asked the City of Dunwoody to make the fields multiuse by using portable mounds, a practice used throughout the country. The City declined this request and, as a result, the fields have been used exclusively for baseball. Even if a softball team were willing to work around the raised mounds and practice on the fields, there is practically no time available because Dunwoody Senior has priority. Seemingly in jest, the City of Dunwoody's website provides the following oddball times from February to May when one field is available for "free play":

Saturdays 8pm-10pm (West Field)

Sundays 8am-10am (West Field)

The below days and times are also available, in addition to the schedule listed above:

3rd Saturday of each month: 4pm-10pm (West Field)

3rd Sunday of each month: 8am-10am (West Field)

### **How many Softball Fields should Dunwoody have?**

DeKalb County's 2010- 2020 Comprehensive Master Plan for Parks and Recreation (a copy of which is available at [dekalbcountyga.gov/parks/](http://dekalbcountyga.gov/parks/)) included the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 1 - Facility Standards for Ballfields.** The recommended standard is one ballfield for every 5,000 people. Utilizing these standards, the County should have 142 ballfields based upon its 2005 demographics, and 161 based on 2015 demographics. The county currently has 109 ballfields and 15 football fields, for a total of 124 fields. This means the County needs to add 37 ballfields by the year 2015. The majority of these fields need to be constructed in the northern part of the county.

Ballfield includes softball, baseball, and football/soccer fields. That would mean ten "ballfields" in Dunwoody. With two soccer fields and two baseball fields, Dunwoody has a deficit of six fields. (The City of Dunwoody's website mentions two "open fields" at Brook Run but includes the following admonition: "Please no organized games or practices in these areas.")

The recent Parks and Recreation Master Plan (August 2017) commissioned by the City of Dunwoody also recommended more athletic fields but did not specify the type or number:

#### **Sports Fields Analysis**

The City of Dunwoody provides a total of five sports field facilities within its system. The sports field facilities will serve the south central sectors of the city. Two (2) baseball fields are located at Dunwoody Park but will soon be relocated to Brook Run Park while the three (3) multi-purpose fields (unprogrammed) are located at Brook Run (1) and

**Pernoshal Park (2). If the City wishes to continue serving the northwest sector; future park development at the Austin ES park site should include athletic fields.**

(City of Dunwoody's Parks and Recreation Master Plan, p. 61 (emphasis added.) (The Master Plan overstated the sports fields in Dunwoody because Pernoshal Park only has one open field which, like the open field in Brook Run, is not suitable for organized practices.)

In the survey that preceded the Master Plan, respondents noted that "Youth and Adult Sports" were underserved and listed a "Sports Complex" as number two on the list of additional recreation facilities they would like to see, behind only "Trail Connectivity." (Appendix B to the Master Plan.)

### **Our Proposal for More Softball Fields**

We believe Dunwoody should have at least two softball fields at public parks with 200' to 225' fences, which would be the softball equivalent of the Brook Run Baseball Fields. These fields, of course, would require considerably less space than the Brook Run Baseball Fields. If the City followed the lead of other small cities in Georgia, it would build four softball fields in the shape of a wheel and use the revenue from tournaments to help cover costs. Cities like Carrollton (28,869 pop.) and Dalton (33,921 pop.) have generated considerable revenue for their operating budgets while helping local businesses by hosting softball tournaments.

### **We need a Facility to Replace the Gym**

In 2009, the DeKalb County School System allowed the Atlanta Flames to convert the gym at old Chamblee Middle School (4680 Chamblee Dunwoody Rd.) into an indoor practice facility. From 2009 to 2021, the old Chamblee Middle School gym ("the Gym") was used throughout the year by baseball and softball teams for indoor practice, by instructors for batting, pitching, and catching lessons, and by the Flames for coaching and instructional clinics. Each winter, roughly 225 girls and boys used the Gym each week for practice or lessons. Volunteers handled all of the organization and management of this facility. (No one on the Flames Board made money from the operation of the Gym.) Even though the Gym was located in the City of Dunwoody, the Atlanta Flames received no support from the City.

The Gym was too small but it served a vital purpose. Like almost every sport today, girls playing fastpitch softball need professional instruction in order to progress. The windmill motion used by pitchers is unique in sports. Pitchers require consistent, professional instruction in order to master the skill. And because the mound is closer in softball than in baseball, batters have less time to recognize and react to a pitch than in baseball. That means hitters must have a compact swing with no wasted motion. And baseball players also require professional instruction.

There are some privately-owned indoor batting cages in the Atlanta area, typically in warehouse districts; however, Atlanta's rush-hour traffic makes it difficult for many Dunwoody residents to get to them, especially on week nights. The Gym provided a convenient and needed service to Dunwoody residents at a reasonable cost. Over the last ten years, thousands of girls,

boys, and coaches have benefitted from the gym through practice or professional instruction and clinics. Many of the players who practiced in the Gym have gone on to play college baseball or softball.

**A Team Practice in the old Chamblee Middle School Gym (2019)**



### **Our Proposal for an Indoor Facility**

The Flames Board tried to move the operation at the Gym to the Austin Gym but were told the cost of operating and maintaining that facility would not be practical. The Flames Board also looked for comparable space in Dunwoody and the surrounding area but real estate prices made such a move cost-prohibitive. We believe the only way to create a facility like the Gym within the City of Dunwoody is with the help of the City. We propose that the City build an indoor facility in Dunwoody and allow a nonprofit such as the Atlanta Flames to operate it. The facility could be used by both girls and boys. With moveable nets, the building could also be used during the day for exercise classes. While we are not set on a particular site, it needs to be in a convenient location and preferably near a major roadway.

### **Conclusion**

Team sports like softball not only promote physical fitness but also teach life lessons like team work, performance under pressure, and dealing with adversity. We believe sports like softball are important to our youth and serve a crucial role in public recreation. We ask you, as leaders in our community, to help us provide this vital service to our community by building softball fields and an indoor practice facility in Dunwoody.

Respectfully Yours,

/s/ Scott Farrow

Scott Farrow  
Atlanta Flames Board Member, former  
President; MCGSA, former Board Member

/s/ Laura Horlock

Laura Horlock  
Former Player, Coach and Board Member,  
MCGSA

/s/ Mike Puckett

Mike Puckett  
Atlanta Flames Board Member; DHS Softball  
Booster Club, former President

/s/ Peter Kottke

Peter Kottke  
President, Atlanta Flames; Secretary and  
Board Member, MCGSA

/s/ Kim Hiler

Kim Hiler  
President, DHS Softball Booster Club

/s/ Matt Rosenkoff

Matt Rosenkoff  
Coach, Peachtree Jr. Wildcats; Vice  
President, MCGSA

/s/ Charles Frederick

Charles Frederick  
Atlanta Flames, Treasurer and Board Member

/s/ David Axelson

David Axelson  
Atlanta Flames, Former President and Board  
Member; MCGSA, Former President

/s/ Mark Light

Mark Light  
Former coach at North Springs High School;  
Atlanta Flames Board Member; MCGSA,  
former Board Member

/s/ Sonja Greeley

Sonja Greeley  
Atlanta Flames, Board Member



## Appendix A

**Atlanta Flames Fastpitch, Inc.** is a 501(c)(3) organization incorporated in 2009 with the mission of teaching life-long skills and teamwork to young women through competitive softball. Each year the Flames organize at least 5 or 6 travel teams for girls, ages 11 to 18 (roughly 80 to 100 girls). In 2009, the Flames equipped an indoor practice facility at old Chamblee Middle School Gym (4680 Chamblee Dunwoody Rd.) for use by both girls and boys and then managed this facility until 2021. The Flames are the softball equivalent of the Dunwoody Diablos, a group of baseball travel teams that play out of the Brook Run Baseball fields.

**Murphey Candler Girls Softball Association, Inc.** (“MCGSA”) is a 501(c)(3) organization incorporated in 1971. MCGSA organizes and administers spring and fall fastpitch softball leagues for girls, ages 5 to 18, at Murphey Candler Park. Its spring 2021 season had 442 players while its fall 2021 season has 370 players. MCGSA is the softball equivalent of Murphey Candler Baseball, Inc.

**Dunwoody High School Softball Booster Club** is a booster club of supporters of the Dunwoody High School softball program. This group provides financial and volunteer support for the varsity and junior varsity teams.

**Coaches and Parents of the Peachtree Jr. Wildcats** is an informal group of Dunwoody residents with daughters who attend Peachtree Middle School and play on the Peachtree Jr. Wildcats softball team. The Peachtree Jr. Wildcats were formed in 2021. Most private and many public schools in metropolitan Atlanta have middle school softball teams. In Georgia, school fastpitch softball is a fall sport.

## Appendix B

Softball fields available for girls' softball at public parks in North DeKalb County:

- A. City of Dunwoody: no softball fields at any public park.
- B. City of Chamblee: no softball fields for girls at any public park.
  - 1. Keswick Park has one softball field that is used for men's and adult mixed leagues and a small tee ball field used for 8 and under boys and girls. This appears to be a noncompetitive league as the season consists of only six games.
- C. City of Brookhaven
  - 1. Murphey Candler Park: five softball fields. Total area of these fields is 14,640 sq. yd. A description of these fields is in the table below.

Field	L*	C*	R*	Use
1	118'	116'	116'	A tiny field only suitable for tee ball, ages 6 and under.
2	125'	125'	127'	A very small field only suitable for coach pitch, ages 7-8.
3	157'	157'	157'	Only suitable for ages 9-10. Does not meet recommended minimum size for 10U.
4	163'	190'	178'	Used for ages 11-18; does not meet recommended minimum standard and cannot be enlarged due to its location at the base of the dam for Murphey Candler lake.
5	207'	205'	206'	Used for ages 11-18; the only softball field at Murphey Candler that meets USA Softball's recommended minimum size for ages 11-18.

\*Distance from home plate to the outfield fence in left, center, and right field.

- 2. Blackburn Park has two softball fields; both are used for men's and mixed adult leagues.

## Appendix C

Baseball fields available for baseball at public parks in North DeKalb County:  
Murphey Candler Baseball (Total area 16,180 sq. yd.)

<b>Field</b>	<b>L*</b>	<b>C*</b>	<b>R*</b>
AAA	188'	200'	190'
14	161'	195'	176'
Majors	196'	200'	193'
Coastal	150'	149'	148'
Southern	131'	115'	131'
International	130'	123'	131'
AA	176'	172'	171'

\*Distance from home plate to the outfield fence in left, center, and right field.

Dunwoody Senior Baseball Fields (Total area 22,270 sq. yd.)

<b>Field</b>	<b>L*</b>	<b>C*</b>	<b>R*</b>
DSB 1	303'	348'	303'
DSB 2	295'	310'	295'