



Agenda Item #: \_\_\_\_\_



# Staff Report

## City of Manhattan Beach

**TO:** Honorable Mayor Cohen and Members of the City Council

**THROUGH:** Geoff Dolan, City Manager *GD*

**FROM:** Richard Gill, Director of Parks and Recreation *R. G.*

**DATE:** October 6, 2009

**SUBJECT:** Consideration of a Request from Manhattan Beach Little League to Rename Marine Park and Install a Commemorative Wall within Marine Park That Recognizes Our Youth and Adults Who Have Contributed to Youth Sports in Manhattan Beach

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### RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that if the City Council is interested in renaming Marine Park and installing a commemorative wall for our youth sports, then the issue should be referred to the Parks and Recreation Commission to develop a list of possible names for the park and policies for the commemorative wall.

### FISCAL IMPLICATION:

There is no fiscal impact at this time related to the renaming of the park and commemorative wall. However, if a new name and commemorative wall for the park is approved, then the park will need a new monument sign and depending on what kind of wall is decided, there will be a need for funds to build the wall.

### BACKGROUND:

Staff recently received the attached letter from the President of Manhattan Beach Little League to rename Marine Avenue Park and develop a commemorative wall that will honor the city's youth and adults who have contributed to the youth sports program in Manhattan Beach.

### DISCUSSION:

As Council is aware, last spring two former Manhattan Beach Little Leaguers and Mira Costa High School baseball stars (Henry Pearson, Jon Wilhite) were involved in a terrible accident that took the life of Henry Pearson and critically injured Jon Wilhite. Two other young passengers in the car were killed. It was determined that the person who caused the accident was drunk and ran a red light. This tragic accident sent shock waves through the community as three young lives were lost and one left with years of recovery.

Little League representatives and the Pearson and Wilhite families met and felt that this tragic accident caused by a drunk driver should be remembered for the horrible effects alcohol and driving have on all of our lives.

The attached letter requests that the City change the name of Marine Avenue Park, not after a person or individuals but something more inspirational such as "Celebration Field, Inspiration Park, Honor Field, Remembrance Park, Tribute Park, Spirit Park and Perseverance Field."

In addition, the letter from Little League requests that the City "build a memorial wall that is less a testament to any individual than one that commemorates the power to influence that person or his or her experience stands to bear."

The letter goes on to state "this memorial wall would bear these stories that influence. It's important to commemorate those within our community who have given their life to community service and to whatever extent those same persons' lives - past, present and especially future - might have a similar lesson or parable to recognize, then they certainly belong on this memorial. But it's the influence, the lesson that comes first."

If the City Council is interested in approving the request from Little League, staff thinks it would be best to direct this item to the Parks and Recreation Commission to explore all the details. Who is recognized, how they are recognized, for what experiences they are recognized, who makes the selections, what does the wall look like, where is it placed are just a few of the details that need to be worked out.

Regarding the naming of the park, staff would like to reach out to all the youth agencies for ideas. The Commission could then narrow the list for Council.

Also, it might be best to develop a committee of members from the youth agencies to work with the Commission to develop policies, procedures and recommendations.

The letter requests that all approved recommendations be implemented for Little League Opening Day in March. Everyone will strive to meet this schedule; however, it may be difficult because of the need to set up a committee, develop policies and procedures for a fairly sensitive and complex subject, building/buying a wall and new monument sign, the upcoming holidays and the demands the holidays have on volunteer committees and commissions and finding a funding source.

In conclusion, staff recommends that if the City Council wishes to pursue Little League's request to rename Marine Park and install a commemorative wall, this issue should be referred to the Parks and Recreation Commission to work out the details and then make a recommendation to the City Council.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Manhattan Beach Little League Correspondence

## MANHATTAN BEACH LITTLE LEAGUE

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are needed to see the picture.

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September 11, 2009

To the Honorable Richard Gill  
Director of Parks and Recreation  
City of Manhattan Beach

Dear Richard:

Manhattan Beach Youth Athletics, and its predecessor Manhattan Beach Little League, is only one important strand within a tapestry of local youth sports organizations, fortunate to help contribute to the broader Manhattan Beach community each day. MBYA, AYSO, Manhattan Beach Youth Basketball, Pony League baseball, Amateur Softball Association and other local sports enable our young people to experience life lessons and emulate positive character within an environment that's both structured and safe. And so, through their combination, and others, the same is true of Manhattan Beach.

Together, these organizations, and the hundreds – if not thousands – of volunteers who act as their foundation, empower our future generations, helping to provide experiences in which their character, choices and actions can lead to wins or to losses, but little of higher consequence.

Unfortunately, that's not the case, as these kids grow older. Their choices, actions and character are what will sustain them – and our community – and so it's in that spirit that the families of Henry Pearson and Jon Wilhite, as well as Manhattan Beach Youth Athletics, would like to propose the creation of a new memorial and renaming of what's informally known as "Big Marine Field."

It's important to note that the time, money and, most importantly, enthusiasm that our youth sports communities' volunteers bring to their efforts comes with little expectation of personal reward or recognition beyond the smile or positive influence they might bring to any child who participates. In that anonymity, lies its true power. It is not offered for sake of accolade. It's offered unconditionally and for the greater community good.

And so we would hope the City of Manhattan Beach, as well as any other youth organizations with common goals, would welcome this effort.

The goal of this civic project is quite simple:

*Build a memorial wall that is less a testament to any individual than one that commemorates the power to influence that person or his or her experience stands to bear.*

For instance, the tragedy that claimed Henry's life and continues to challenge Jon's cannot be reversed, but it can have a positive impact. Our families and Manhattan Beach Youth Athletics have used it as a very real and unfortunate example of the dire consequences that occur from drinking and driving. It is an important – and genuine – example for the youth of Manhattan Beach to hear, and so the attention our families have held because of this tragedy might at least bear this positive outcome.

This memorial wall would bear these stories; that influence.

It's important to commemorate those within our community who have given their life to community service, and to whatever extent those same persons' lives – past, present and especially future – might have a similar lesson or parable to recognize, then they certainly belong on this memorial.

But it's the influence, the lesson; that comes first.

Any pre-teen or teenager who sees this memorial – and there will be many, since its proposed location is adjacent to soccer, baseball and basketball facilities where they all practice and play games – should come away with a warning, an admonition or an inspiration that he or she can truly apply to his or her own character, actions and experience.

At their best, youth sports urge children to give maximum effort, devote one's self to his or her community of team; don't be afraid to fail; and to play fair. In life, we rely upon social and, oftentimes, Divine justice, but sometimes life is not fair, and we lose someone like Henry, or a person like Jon is presented difficult obstacles he must now surmount every day. This memorial – and the renaming of the park – will honor the tremendous influence and inspiration to be derived from Henry and Jon and others remembered here and so we would hope for a new name to reflect that goal:

*Celebration Field*

*Inspiration Park*

*Honor Field*

*Remembrance Park*

*Tribute Park*

*Spirit Field*

*Perseverance Field*

So, if you and the City agree, we would propose a few things to move this along quickly:

- 1) Immediate study into the design, cost and construction of a stone memorial wall adjacent to the current walkway leading between the basketball courts and major baseball field at "Big Marine." This location provides a high traffic area where individual players and teams must pass en route to practice and games. "Big Marine" is also home to Mira Costa baseball practices and many freshman and Junior Varsity Games, not to mention the hundreds of teens who play in the new Juniors and Seniors programs through MBYA.
- 2) Creation of a small committee with representation from major youth sports organizations, the City of Manhattan Beach, and members of the Wilhite and Pearson families, to more fully detail the criteria by which future persons or events ought to be considered for inclusion on the memorial. The goal of this committee ought not to be exclusion of future personal candidates, but refinement of the idea.
- 3) Study into the cost and acquisition of the first of what we envision to be several future weatherproof brass plaques that would rest within the wall, offering their lessons and inspiration. The first would commemorate

Henry and Jon, Courtney and Nick, yet do so in such a way to call attention to the true consequences of drunk driving.

Our goal is an aggressive one: to have all of this agreed upon, funded, constructed and ready for dedication on Saturday, March 6, the first day of the new Manhattan Beach Youth Athletics baseball and softball spring season. MBYA and the City will again host the Opening Day Parade that morning, and it would prove a tremendous occasion to call attention to the meaning of this project, and the inspiration we continue to draw from Henry, from Jon, and from others who are like them – and that we would all hope to share.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Most sincerely,



Thomas Tyrer  
President, MBYA

Nigel Pearson  
on behalf of the Pearson Family

Michael Wilhite  
on behalf of the Wilhite Family