ASHEVILLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION

October 14, 2021

Dear Members of Asheville City Council,

With success comes challenges. The successes that we have shared in 2021 are highlighted in page 2 of this letter. We should all be proud of these accomplishments. However, you must be aware of the challenges we are dealing with every weekend.

As you are well aware, the homeless camp at Aston Park was a major challenge during March. While we appreciate the City finally having the camp removed, as it made the Park a safer place to be, the allowance of the camp has caused ongoing issues. During the entire season beginning in April, when Aston Park opened the tennis courts, there has been a group called Asheville Survival that serves breakfast on Saturday mornings and lunch on Sunday afternoons to the Homeless. The group has been secretive as to who they are, as indicated by several of their leaders not even willing to give me their name, stating that it is none of my business. I have met one gentleman who goes by the name of "December". He is the only person there that has given me their name or in any way tried to cooperate. The rest of the leaders of the group have acted empowered to do exactly what they want and how they want. These feedings are **not** a city-permitted event, as they have been allowed by the City to just show up. They set up their tents and serve adjacent to the building, next to the upper part of the parking lot. Trash that has been left behind is embarrassing and very costly to continuously clean up. Staff at Aston has asked the group several times to move the feedings to the gazebo, and allow tennis players to park in the area next to the building (the only parking offered by the City). They have refused. They have also become belligerent, even to the point of stating that we have no business telling anyone what to do, that it is a "Public Park". I could share many more stories.

The major concern that I have is for the safety of the kids that come on Saturdays and Sundays. The Asheville Tennis Association (ATA) has worked extremely hard with the staff at the Aston Park Tennis Center to offer these outstanding programs and serve "ALL" citizens of the Asheville area (see last paragraph). Last weekend we had specific incidents that are keeping us from providing safe and wholesome programming to the youth of the community.

- Bathroom issues – We allow everyone to use the restrooms at Aston Park, however use by a patron of the feeding program went into the bathroom, stayed for over 20 minutes, basically took a bath in the sink, and made several youth very uncomfortable in using the rest room. When asked to finish his business and come out, he basically refused.
- Theft of snacks – Each Sunday, our Junior Team Tennis Coordinator sets out snacks for the kids in the program. This past Sunday, a patron of the feeding program just went by the table and took several snacks. When told they were not for him, he just walked away with the snacks. He even had the audacity to return and take snacks a second time.
- A "bee" invasion on the pavement in the backboard area – While I was there on Sunday, a tennis player shared that there were bees flying all around this area. When I went up to see, he was correct. Human feces and foods were left in the middle of the court area. I took bee spray and a high powered blower and cleaned up the area the best I could.

These are, unfortunately, common occurrences during and after feedings rather than rare ones. The lack of simply following some common sense rules and decency does not seem to pertain to this group.

I write this to you with a heavy heart. The homeless population needs and deserves the help of community leaders such as yourselves. However, this help should not place other patrons, especially our kids, in any kind of danger. I ask that you work with the leadership staff of the City to find another place for these feedings and to help the staff at Aston Park to maintain a safe and wholesome environment for all. In addition, it is time for the City to require that these feedings obtain city permits, just like every other event. We should not wait for an unfortunate incident to occur. We should be proactive, not reactive. Our hope is for quick action to be taken.

Now for the good news I promised. At the present time, I proudly serve as the President of the Asheville Tennis Association. The ATA represents hundreds of passionate tennis players throughout our area. Tennis has seen a boom during the pandemic, as the USTA estimates over 2 million new players nationwide during 2020-21. Locally, the Aston Park Tennis Center has seen a large number of new players participating in this great sport. This is great news for the sport and for our City.

Aston Park Tennis Center hosted several events during 2021:

- Springtime Junior Team Tennis program with 70 youth participating, and our fall season has 52 youth.
- NC Mixed Doubles Championships with over 1100 players visiting our community for a 4 day event
- Southern 55's & Over Sectional Championships with over 700 players from 9 states for a 4 day event
- 89th Asheville Open Championships with 450 players for an 8 day event

In addition to these special events, which have a significant economic impact to the community, the ATA has conducted clinics at Aston Park for all ages during this season. We have 2 special programs being conducted at the present time. First, the Fall season of Junior Team Tennis on Sunday afternoons 1-3 pm is serving 52 youth in a competitive atmosphere. Second, a brand new program, the "Terminettors" on Saturday mornings 10:30 – 12 noon, targets underserved kids ages 6-11. We are working with several local after school programs to get their kids to Aston Park and currently are serving 25-30 kids each Saturday. Both of these programs are highly successful, and you are invited to come out and see them in action any time!

Please feel free to contact me at any time. My email address is jeffbjoyce7@gmail.com and my cell number is 828-691-1197.

Respectfully,

Jeff Joyce

Jeff Joyce, President
Asheville Tennis Association