

## **A compromise proposal to bring soccer complex back to Fletcher**

### **Dennis Justice**

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[www.hendersoncountyturf.com](http://www.hendersoncountyturf.com)

Not to be forgotten in all the outrage over the proposed soccer complex boondoggle at the Highland Lakes Golf Course in Flat Rock is how outraged Fletcher taxpayers like me are over how we bent over backwards for the soccer community, only to be spurned.

A few years ago, the Town of Fletcher hinted about annexing ArvinMeritor. ArvinMeritor hinted they might leave if they are annexed, risking hundreds of jobs. In a compromise, the Town of Fletcher acquired 93 acres of land from ArvinMeritor in exchange for seven years of delayed annexation. We lost a substantial amount of property tax revenue doing this.

Over the last few years, we had many planning sessions, with town leaders and taxpayers discussing a variety of things that a new park could have. But the primary focus was soccer. We entered a sweetheart rent deal with the soccer community two years ago. We were just as surprised as anyone when this Flat Rock project was proposed.

There is no hope of misunderstanding: Fletcher wanted the soccer complex, the people of Flat Rock don't!

The proposed Flat Rock complex is not going to happen. Over 10 years, the costs of land, lost property tax revenue, maintenance costs, field upgrades, lights, etc., can easily pass \$2 million. The zoning does not work and the people of Flat Rock clearly don't want to bend the zoning rules for the soccer complex. We were all kept in the dark. The online polls on WHKP's and the Hendersonville Times-News' websites clearly show little support.

For the same \$2 million, we could have instead put in artificial turf at high schools, something we will eventually do anyway, but unlike other counties really rent them out on weekends and summer for all sports, not just one. Soccer is not the only sport that can fight obesity and frankly is not nearly as popular as football in Henderson County.

We all know what the outcome of this proposal is, it will die. Outside of the Park Ridge Health grant of \$100,000, there isn't enough money to truly develop this complex. But it does not mean we punish kids just because some soccer parents are overzealous. Let's at least have a plan that gives certain leaders a chance to save face.

My “Justice Compromise” would try to address the legitimate anger taxpayers have, especially in Fletcher. Instead of committing \$1.15 million to buy the golf course, and over \$2 million over 10 years, we move the project back to Fletcher under these conditions:

1. The soccer community and/or Park Ridge Health offers the Town of Fletcher a \$100,000 option to buy out the Fletcher site outright.
2. Henderson County offers a conditional \$600,000 grant, given to the purchasers if and only if they can raise the remaining money for fully developing the Fletcher site by December 31, 2012. They can raise donations, sponsorships, and/or loans. No extensions on the deadline. If they fail, the \$600,000 is automatically used to pay down county debt and Fletcher sells the land to farmers for \$1.
3. If Park Ridge Health was a more established partner, they could assist in raising funds and even the loan. Put up a sign at the site saying, “Coming Soon: Park Ridge Health Soccer Complex.” Pressure makes diamonds, as General Patton said.
4. The most important part: *The soccer complex is run privately.* No other grants, subsidies, or loans from Fletcher or Henderson County for 25 years, and that’s in the contract. Xcel SportsPlex didn’t need public grants or even public loans to build and expand their volleyball center. This \$600,000 offer is very generous to the soccer community by comparison.

Yes, I am asking a lot of taxpayers. But a one-time grant of \$600,000 is about \$1.5 million less than paying and subsidizing the Flat Rock project over 10 years. Yes, the soccer community may not want this. They may want their soccer fiefdom and have us subsidize it, thinking their sport is better than every other. But they need to consider the Flat Rock proposal will not happen, Fletcher taxpayers are very upset, and frankly, they have no other option.

90% of something is better than 100% of nothing.

Soccer folks do not understand. In the south, we appreciate if people are honest and humble when asking for help. It’s hard to see humility in how this is being presented. I believe in brutal honesty and I am asking for taxpayers’ help publicly and showing them the proper respect.

This is why I am asking all sides to think about the “Justice Compromise” for a couple of weeks, maybe a month. I need an opportunity to fully present this proposal, in public, to Fletcher Town Council, County Commission, even the Park Ridge Health board. This way, the taxpayers who write the checks know everything that is going on and can contribute.

The Flat Rock project won’t happen. If the “Justice Compromise” does not happen, the soccer community is own their own. They need to abandon this nonsensical Flat Rock project, apologize to Fletcher taxpayers and county taxpayers in general, and endorse this proposal.

This “Justice Compromise” *can* work. Thank you.