

LD 797

**Resolve, to Authorize the Conveyance of Real Property to the
Capitol Area Recreation Association**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Plueker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, my name is Paul Potvin, I am a member of the Capitol Area Recreation Association's board of directors, CARA as it is better known, I am also a past President and a 30+ year member of that board.

I am here today to testify in favor of this bill.

First, I would like to give you a short history of CARA and what CARA is all about.

In the early 1970's, because there was the need for additional space to provide for growing Little League teams, and the Augusta Parks and Receptions budget did not allow for expansion of facilities, a group of parents looked around the city for space to use to play Little League ball. They found an unused parcel of land that had been used in the early to middle part of the 1900s to raise livestock and grow vegetables for patients from what was then called the Augusta Mental Health Institute (AMHI), which is now Riverview.

A temporary OK was granted to them and work was done to mark out and craft a ball field in the corner of the much larger field.

Over the next couple of years this group of parents organized and came up with a current and long-term plan to address the issue of not enough space for recreational opportunities for the kids of the area.

This group approached the state with a plan to develop about 80 acres along the edge of the property, and in 1974, the Bureau of Public lands granted a 25-year lease to allow CARA to develop this property as proposed. And the work began!

One field turned into two, and as fields were built, additional needs were found, including the need to add facilities for softball, both for young girls and adult leagues. Fields were then added to provide for Babe Ruth and American Legion baseball. And as time went on, more sports venues were added.

Today, the CARA Complex is comprised of 12 fields (3 - Little League, 3 - Softball, 2 - Babe Ruth, 4 – Soccer/Lacrosse). The complex also has 2 full sized basketball courts and a 20-pit horseshoe complex. The Horseshoe complex and the basketball courts are the only adult sports played on the CARA Complex.

The remaining venues are used by kids ranging in ages between 5 and 18 years with organized leagues and activities. The facility is used not just by Augusta residents but from a broad area of as many as 15 -18 area communities. In addition to regular season activities on the CARA Complex, many end of season playoff opportunities such as Little League and Babe Ruth All-Stars, High School baseball championships including the Class A High School Final game, as well as High School Soccer Championships, plus many travel team competitions are held on the complex from early spring until late fall.

CARA has had a good relationship with the Bureau of Public lands over the past 50 years, as well as with the City of Augusta. The city has recreational programs and several school programs including Cony High School Baseball, Soccer and Lacrosse that take place on the CARA fields, plus the city provides resources and some funds to offset that usage.

What this bill does is to provide CARA, which is a 501-C3 organization, 2 things.

First). It will allow us to operate on our own and not be exposed to potential lease cancellation possibilities as exists in our lease agreement. Even though we now have a 99-year lease, we are concerned that future issues might place all the hard work that has been done to develop this facility in jeopardy. It is our intent to do everything possible to maintain this complex for many years to come and continue to provide recreational opportunities for the residents, not only for Augusta, but for several area communities.

Second) Being the property owner will allow CARA to fund raise more effectively, especially when bigger projects are proposed. Donors are reluctant to donate large amounts of funds when you do not own the property. Having ownership of the property will help with that issue. At this point we have no large projects planned, however ideas such as building an artificial turf field has been discussed. A project such as this will take a lot of fund-raising efforts and ownership will help with that effort.

In closing, I would like to say that next year, 2024, CARA will be celebrating its 50th anniversary. We are here to ask for your help to ensure that CARA and its complex will be around for another 50 years, 100 years, maybe more. This is a tremendous facility which provides a complex that this community can be proud of.

So, I ask you to vote in favor of this bill to give CARA this property helping us help the community.

Thank You. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.