




MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board and Parks Commission

VIA: Mary Bradford, Director of Parks 
Mike Riley, Deputy Director of Parks, Administration 
John Nissel, Deputy Director of Parks, Operations

FROM: Kate Stookey, Chief, Public Affairs and Community Partnerships Division 

RE: Athletic Field Use Permit Policy

Staff Recommendation: Approve the amended Athletic Field Use Permit Policy.

Background/Rationale

In December 2010, the permitting of park athletic fields transferred to the County's Office of Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF) in order to consolidate countywide field permitting and provide one-stop shopping for groups requesting the use of countywide athletic fields (CUPF also manages the permitting of athletic fields owned by Montgomery County Public Schools). Two Park Permit Office employees were relocated to the CUPF offices in Rockville and continue to manage and issue permits for park fields from that location in coordination with CUPF staff.

Over the past two years, Montgomery Parks and CUPF have worked closely to streamline our agencies' field permitting procedures and processes and improve customer service to the hundreds of leagues and other organized groups who permit athletic fields throughout the County. These changes have made it necessary to update the Department's Athletic Field Use Permit Policy.

Proposed Changes

The proposed changes to the Athletic Field Use Permit Policy reflect the transition of park field permitting to CUPF and incorporate associated operational changes, including:

- **Transition to bulk permitting for leagues:** Prior to the transition to CUPF, many individual coaches and teams requested their own permits for the use of park athletic fields separately from the leagues in which they participated. This meant the Park Permit Office was responding to field permit requests from larger leagues as well as hundreds of individual field permit requests from coaches and teams that may have also submitted requests through their leagues. In contrast, CUPF employed a much more efficient bulk permitting approach, which meant all coaches and teams associated with a league were instructed to request their game and practice time only

through their league. The league was then responsible for compiling all of those requests and submitting one large “bulk” request for field time. Permit staff then issued field permits directly to the league, and the league was responsible for coordinating field use and parceling out the appropriate game and practice slots among their own teams. Park permitting successfully transitioned to bulk permitting in Fall 2012, and the amended permit policy reflects that transition.

- **Inclusion of conditions of use for synthetic turf fields:** The amended version of the field use permit policy includes specific guidelines for the use of park synthetic turf fields that were not included in the former version.
- **Elimination of the two-week closure window in August for local park fields:** Historically, all fields were closed for two-weeks in August to enable park staff to prepare park fields for the Fall season. Local park fields are not fenced, however, and cannot be easily closed. As a result, play never fully stopped on local park fields during this two-week “closure” period and without permits there was no way to manage or track the use. The decision to eliminate the closure period for our local park fields recognizes our inability to prevent play, accommodates the evident need for more field time, and enables us to better track actual field use.
- **Clarification of when non-designated sports are allowed and whether this use constitutes historic use:** Occasionally, the outfields of diamond fields are “converted” to accommodate rectangular field sports such as soccer, lacrosse or football. This is done only if the diamond field has not already been permitted for a diamond field-based sport. Because priority will continue to be given to the sport for which each field was originally designated (e.g., diamond fields for baseball and softball, rectangular fields for soccer, lacrosse, football), historic use will not be assigned to any group using the field for alternative or “non-designated” sports. The amended policy was updated to clarify this point.
- **Clarification of application procedures:** The amended version of the Athletic Field Use Permit Policy includes updated application procedures as well as the correct contact information for CUPF.

These changes were reviewed and approved internally by Parks management and vetted and approved by CUPF management prior to releasing for public input.

Public Outreach and Feedback

On January 30, 2013, notice of the proposed amended Athletic Field Use Permit Policy was sent via email to over 1,000 athletic field user groups contained within the CUPF database and also posted on the MontgomeryParks.org home page, with the request that any public comments be submitted by February 13, 2013, for consideration. As of February 14, no concerns or issues regarding the amended policy have been received, though many groups did check to see if any of the changes would impact their already submitted requests for the Spring 2013 season (which they won't) and one group did ask if they could request a permit for non-designated use of a particular field. Since the majority of the proposed changes increase community use or simply document changes to procedures and processes that have already been piloted and introduced, we do not anticipate any additional comments or concerns.

M-NCPPC Montgomery Parks Athletic Field Use Permit Policy

Policy Statement

The purpose of this policy is to establish an orderly and fair procedure for the reservation of athletic fields for practices, games, tournaments, and special events. It is the intent of this policy to balance the increase in demand for such organized uses with the maintenance, renovation, and rest necessary to protect the long-term playability of our fields and ensure user safety.

Most regional and recreational park fields require a permit for use¹. Regional and recreational fields may be permitted for official league games only; no practices are allowed on these fields. Permits are required at all times for regional/recreational fields and other fields marked "by permit only."

If no permits have been issued, local park fields may be used on a first-come, first-served basis, unless otherwise posted, or prohibited in this policy. Non-permitted users must cede the field to designated permit holders at all times. Play is strictly prohibited from December 1 through March 14 on all natural grass fields and during field work, renovations and inclement weather, or when posted signs prohibit use.

All user groups must adhere to all rules and regulations outlined in this policy and comply with all M-NCPPC Rules & Regulations and stated Conditions of Use.

Criteria

Field allocation for leagues will be based on prior use. However, leagues representatives must apply for permits by the designated deadline of each season. When processing permit applications, every effort is made to provide each qualifying organization with a permit for at least some of the field time requested. Allocation of athletic fields is determined by the following priority system:

- FIRST PRIORITY: Montgomery County Department of Recreation Programs, City of Takoma Park Recreation Programs, Adopt-a-Field groups, public/private partnerships or other contractual agreements, and special event/tournament requests.
- SECOND PRIORITY: Montgomery or Prince George's County community-based leagues and schools, including organized youth leagues.*

Permitting Seasons

	<u>Spring / Summer</u>	<u>Fall</u>
Local Park Fields	March 15 – August 15	August 16 – November 30
Regional / Recreational Park Fields	April 1 – August 15	September 1 – November 30

Permit Application Schedule (excluding league organizations)

All permit applications must be submitted to the County's Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF).

Local/Neighborhood Parks

<u>Season</u>	<u>Application Date</u>
Spring/Summer	Beginning February 1
Fall/Winter	Beginning July 1

** Please note: First and second priority user groups must submit their requests by the respective deadline for each season or their first priority status will be forfeited for that season.*

1 All athletic fields at Ovid Hazen Wells Recreational Park are available on a first-come, first-served basis if no permits have been issued. Some fields at Damascus, Fairland, Martin Luther King, and South Germantown Recreational Parks are also available on a first-come, first-served basis if no permits have been issued. When posted, fields are available by permit only. Contact CUPF for more information.

2 An appeal process is available to users denied the fields or dates of their choosing to ensure allocation remains balanced.

3 Organizations must be based in Montgomery or Prince George's County and individual team membership must be at least two-thirds Montgomery or Prince George's County residents Membership rosters will be required for verification.

Regional/Recreational Parks

Season	Application Date
Spring/Summer	Beginning December 16
Fall/Winter	Beginning May 16

Synthetic turf fields can be permitted at any time throughout the year, weather permitting, if not closed for maintenance or renovation.

If the first day of seasonal permitted use (March 15 for Local Park Fields, and April 1 for Regional / Recreational Park Fields) falls on a Sunday, permitted use will be allowed on the preceding Saturday. If the last day of permitted use falls on a Saturday, permitted use will be allowed on the following Sunday.

Release Dates for Unneeded Field Time

To ensure as many groups as possible have access to field time, groups should release any unneeded field time as soon as their schedules are set. Users will not be charged for this field time if it is returned to CUPF by March 15 for the spring / summer season and by August 16 for the fall season. All returns must be submitted in writing. If an organization returns field time from its historic allocation list, those fields will be removed from the organization's historic use and made available for other groups.

Artificial Turf Use Schedule and Regulations

Artificial turf fields are available for permitted use year-round, except when closed for maintenance, renovation, or extreme weather conditions. Applications for seasonal use of artificial turf fields must follow the permit application schedule outlined above. Off-season requests can be submitted at any time. Games and practices are allowed on artificial turf fields. For artificial turf fields constructed in coordination with the Board of Education or other partners, the community use hours dictated by that specific agreement will be permitted; available community use hours may vary from field to field.

Holiday Use Regulations

Local Parks: This includes athletic fields in local, neighborhood and stream valley parks. These fields may be reserved by permit or used on a first-come, first-served basis, unless otherwise posted. Permit holders have priority.

Regional/Recreational Parks: Permits will not be issued for some regional or recreational fields on Memorial Day weekend, Labor Day weekend, or on other established M-NCPPC holidays.

Off-Season Use Regulations

All organized, league or team play for games or practices is prohibited on natural grass park athletic fields during the following periods:

Regional/Recreational Park Fields: December 1 – March 31 and August 16 – August 31.

Local Park Fields: December 1 – March 14

These periods are established to allow for turf growth, rest and seasonal maintenance. Exceptions include Blair and Blake High School fields and contractual partnership agreements. Synthetic turf fields are available for permitting throughout the year.

Field Use for Non-Designated Sports

Field use priority will be given first to games and practices for the sport which each field is designed (e.g., baseball/softball on diamond fields, soccer/football/lacrosse on rectangular fields). Once all games and practices for the designated sport have been assigned, use of any available fields for non-designated sports will be considered. Any fields not being used for their designated sport can be permitted for a non-designated sport with the written approval of the park manager. Fields can be used for both designated and non-designated sports during the same season only with the written approval of the park manager if there are no concerns about overuse or safety due to obstacles created by goals or other equipment. Fields used for both designated and non-designated sports will be lined and prepared only for the designated sport. Fields used for non-designated sports will not qualify for historic use allocation in future scheduling.

Field Renovation Guidelines

Fields designated for the annual turf renovation program will be closed for one year, from September 1 to August 31. All play is prohibited on these fields during this time.

General Guidelines for Field Use

All applicants must be 21 years and older.

All field users are expected to adhere to the following guidelines to help keep fields in an acceptable condition for public use.

Violation of these guidelines may result in fines or the loss of future permitting or use privileges:

- All unlit fields must be vacated by dark.
- The permit must be on site in the possession of the permitted group or individual during the scheduled time. (A game schedule or a photocopy of the permit will serve as a permit for the Department of Recreation or leagues once verified by Park staff or Park Police.)
- The permit is for the sole use of the organization named on the permit contract and is not transferable.
- Loud music, bands, or excessive noise which disturbs the peace are prohibited.
- Permit holders are required to see that players and spectators adhere to all park regulations, including:
 - No beer or alcohol allowed nor the use of illegal drugs
 - No urinating or changing clothes in public
 - No loud noises permitted (boom boxes, horns, car alarms)
 - No littering. All trash must be picked up during and after field use and placed in the nearest receptacle or carried away for proper disposal. All recyclables must be picked up and placed in the nearest recycling receptacle or carried away for proper disposal
 - Removal or repositioning of goals installed by authorized M-NCPPC staff or contractors on park fields is not allowed
 - The use of tobacco products is not permitted on the benches, playing areas, and those areas in proximity to the playing field (this includes cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, and snuff);
 - No selling of food, beverages or merchandise on park property without an approved concession permit
 - Carpooling is encouraged, and parking is allowed in designated parking areas only
 - No Parking nor driving on the field
 - All Pets must be leashed at all times
 - No grilling or any type of open flame allowed
 - Solicitation of any business, trade or occupation is strictly prohibited unless authorized by permit.
- Use of a natural grass athletic field is prohibited when:
 - It is closed for renovation or repair;
 - Water is standing on the field;
 - Soil is frozen;
 - The soil is wet and "spongy";
 - Steady rain is falling;
 - A lightning/electrical storm is occurring;
 - The field is deemed unplayable by Park staff or Park Police.
- Use of a synthetic grass athletic field is prohibited when:
 - It is closed for renovation or repair
 - A lightning/electrical storm is occurring
 - The field is deemed unplayable by Park staff or Park Police.
 - Closed due to weather conditions.
- Field users may contact the Montgomery Parks inclement weather line at 301-765-8787 to determine whether a field is open for play. Users can also sign up to receive electronic field notification alerts via text messages or emails through the County's Alert Montgomery system.

Permit Denial and Revocation

Any users found to be in violation of the guidelines outlined in this policy will be subject to all applicable fines and penalties, including loss of future permitting and use privileges. A permit may be denied or revoked if the permit holder or any member of the permitted user group:

- Violates the guidelines stated in this policy;
- Does not comply with M-NCPPC Rules & Regulations and stated Conditions of Use;

- Fails to use permitted field;
- Removes posted signs or markers, or removes or repositions goals installed by authorized M-NCPPC staff or contractors on park fields;
- Uses a field that is closed due to weather or undergoing renovations or repairs;
- Does not comply with league application procedures.

The Department of Parks reserves the right to revoke or deny a permit as necessary if a field needs to be closed for immediate repair. In all such cases, permit holders will be given as much notice as is possible.

Application Procedures

League Organization Block Scheduling

Prior to each season, CUPF will forward a field permit application packet to the representative of each designated league organizations. League representatives must submit all of their organizations' game and practice permit requests directly to CUPF by the designated application deadline for each season. Organizations should encourage their team representatives to forward any field permit needs directly to their respective league representatives.

Individual / Team Practice Requests

Individuals and team representatives may submit practice field requests directly to CUPF. However, as league game and practice permit requests will be processed prior to individual / team requests (as indicated above), team representatives should inquire with their organization regarding its allotted field time prior to submitting any additional applications to CUPF.

New Organizations and individual / team representatives may apply for game or practice permits:

1. Online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cupf
2. By faxing or mailing an application available at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cupf

CUPF
Fax: 240-777-2743

3. In Person at CUPF
Please call for Office hours and address
240-777-2725

Fee Schedule

CUPF will issue permits only after all fees have been paid in full.

Athletic Field fees follow the M-NCPPC User Fee Schedule, as approved by the Montgomery County Planning Board. A copy of the current approved fee schedule can be viewed at www.ParkPermits.org and at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cupf. A separate utility fee will be charged for use of lighted fields. A charge will be assessed for returned checks. These fees are subject to change without notice.

Cancellations and Refunds

Refund requests may be submitted for all field time cancelled by park staff due to inclement weather or other reasons. Field users are responsible for tracking these cancellations and must submit a list of all refund requests to CUPF for consideration. These lists will be compared against staff cancellation lists and refunded accordingly. Refund requests must be submitted in writing no later than July 15 for scheduled field time from March 15 – June 30, and by December 15 for scheduled field time from July 1 – November 30. Any refund requests received after those dates will not be honored.