



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION9500 Brunett Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20901

MCPB

ITEM # B

September 23, 2004

To: The Montgomery County Planning Board

Via: Les Straw, Superintendent of Parks

From: Carolyn D. Wainwright, Community Services Supervisor

Re: Local Park Field Permit Policies

STAFF DRAFT: 9-17-04 CDW*Staff Recommendation: Discussion only; request to set date for public forum*Background

Because of community complaints about the increase of adult soccer games and periferal activities accompanying them in fields particularly in the down-county area, an Athletic Field Use Committee was formed in 1993 at the direction of the Director of Parks. Comprised of the Deputy Director of Parks, park planning staff, Permit Office staff, park managers, Park Police and representatives of the MC Human Relations Commission and the MC Recreation Department, this committee studied the problems and made recommendations. The Committee's recommendations are outlined in a summary memo from Tanya Schmieler, Park Planner who still feels that a field use policy of "first-come, first-served unless otherwise permitted" should remain in place. (See Attachment A). The report notes a "minority report" issued by the Park Police. The Park Police recommendations included: requiring permits at selected parks, bi-lingual signage of park rules, encouraging players to use alternate locations, especially fields that do not require a permit and better community relations between Park Police and soccer groups. (See Attachment B).

In the past 11 years, the basic problems generated by adult soccer play on local park fields remain the same:

- Skyrocketing demand for athletic fields for organized soccer, softball and baseball play and informal soccer play
- Close proximity to homes by local fields, often with inadequate parking
- Litter, noise and low availability of field for informal use by neighborhoods
- The increase of soccer's popularity as a social affair, resulting in large groups staying longer

- Violations of park rules, including, alcohol, disrobing, and other issues

The following are newer trends that have been reported:

- Selling on park property without a permit
- Conducting formal games and tournaments without a permit
- Playing on fields closed for renovation
- Playing on fields closed for weather conditions

Many of the 1993 recommendations have been implemented, but the basic complaints from neighbors around parks persist. Currently there are at least two communities complaining about inappropriate use of parks by adult soccer groups and demanding Commission action. The parks involved are Silver Spring International and Dewey Local Parks. (*See Attachment C*) However, several other local parks (Timberlawn, Silver Spring Nolte, North Four Corners, Ray's Meadow, Capital View, Randolph Hills, Winding Creek, etc) could be added to this list as prime places because such activity has also been reported.

Park Police records indicate that five complaints related to this issue have been recorded in the last month alone. The Police database does not capture specific information relating to unauthorized use of ball fields. The number of calls received is not indicative of the extent of the problem because several types of crimes and violations of park rules (disorderly conduct, trespassing, drinking, littering, etc) all contribute to this issue. This is an on-going issue for the Park Police.

The Planning Board has approved modifications to the "Local Park Permitting Policy over the past 11 years. (*See Attachments D and E*) These modifications have still allowed for community use during weekday and some limited time on weekends, at fields where there is an adjacent recreation building.

It has been staff's experience that unpermitted groups play on all fields, regardless of size or weather conditions. Some reports indicate sales of food and other items without a concessionaire's permit.

Recommendations

Currently, our policy allows for unpermitted use of local athletic fields by groups or individuals on a first-come, first-served basis if no permit has been acquired for use of the field. However, high demand for permitted use of overlaid fields supporting a variety of sports coupled with unpermitted use by large groups have resulted in our need to re-examine this policy. In addition, recent concerns with Homeland Security have given the Commission the added responsibility of knowing who is using our facilities and for what purposes. Staff proposes a change in our local park permitting policy that would reflect the following:

1. All local park fields would be posted "Field Use by Permit Only Weekdays after 5 p.m. and all day Saturdays and Sundays."
2. The fee for obtaining a local park field permit will remain the same: \$31 administrative fee (as of FY 05 and subject to change) for issuing the permit. For example, if a league requests dates from April through August for games on a single local field, the fee for all those dates is \$31. If a coach requests practice time for his team, he is allowed one hour to one and a half hours of practice per week per team for an unlimited amount of weeks from April through August 15 for an administrative fee of \$31 per team for all those dates.
3. For one time use, time slots are currently permitted in 2 hour blocks for \$31 (as of FY 05 and subject to change). Requests for more than 2 hours on a single day prompt Permit Staff to inquire about the type of event being proposed, which may end in consideration of a different fee schedule, i.e., tournaments, special events, etc. Staff recommends keeping the 2 hours for \$31 fee (current FY 05 fee).
4. Signs will be erected at 50 youth softball fields and 25 youth football/soccer fields, which read "Field for Youth Play Only." This added sign should prevent adult game play on fields not designed for those needs.

The posting of bi-lingual signs will provide Park Police enforcement power in local parks while still allowing casual use during the day.

Costs

When fields are heavily used or used after a rain, damage often occurs. Park management has estimated the cost of restoring these fields from \$1700 to \$2300 per field. *(See Attachment F)*

In October 2002, 342 12" x 18" bi-lingual signs (which is a 10% increase of the actual number of two-signs per local park field required to allow for theft and vandalism) with the following text in English and Spanish were produced and installed on existing posts by March 2003:

"No use when fields are wet or soggy. Call (240) 777-6889 for current status of this field. FIELDS CLOSED DECEMBER 1ST THROUGH MARCH 31ST."

The costs of \$3379.50 for the signs were shared in 2002 by the sub-areas in Northern and Southern regions. Signs were erected on existing posts.

Public Notification

Park Permits sent a notice to leagues and teams on August 15 along with their fall permits, indicating the ability for comment to the Superintendent of Parks. *(See Attachment G)*