

# MONTGOMERY PARKS ATHLETIC FIELDS

## FIELD PERMIT POLICY UPDATE

DECEMBER 13, 2024

### 1 - Project Background

#### Project Goals

Montgomery Parks is reviewing and updating its Athletic Field Use Permit Policy, which was last updated in 2013. The policy covers many topics including permitting seasons, application schedule, permitting criteria, off-season use regulations, field use for non-designated sports, general guidelines for field use, application procedures, and fee schedule.

During the first phase of the review process in February 2024, Montgomery Parks solicited input from 900 contacts representing 402 athletic field user groups via an online survey. They received 74 responses to the survey. No demographic data was collected.

Montgomery Parks hired Brick & Story to lead a second phase of community engagement consisting of dedicated focus groups and pop-ups to engage targeted user groups in conversation about specific aspects and effects of the policy. The primary goal of this second phase was to obtain feedback and suggestions from a representative and diverse sample of the County's many user groups to ensure that the upcoming policy update can best address the central challenges facing users and ensure equitable field use and access.

#### Why Update the Policy?

The current policy gives priority in the field permitting process to user groups with prior/historic use status. Under the current system, leagues or organizations can obtain historic use status by using the same field(s) on the same day(s) for at least the past two years. Historic users are then able to obtain field permits for the upcoming season before the online go-live event where all remaining users can attempt to secure a permit. Though the practice is designed to foster consistency and stability for leagues that provide much of the County's recreational offerings, it can also make it difficult for newer leagues/organizations (or those with fewer resources) to find field space and/or grow their leagues. The policy has also given rise to other unintended consequences, like "ghost permitting," which create additional barriers to equitable use.

As other surrounding counties have modified their field permit models in recent years, Montgomery Parks is committed to updating the policy to ameliorate the challenges faced by minority and underrepresented users while continuing to effectively serve their largest and most popular leagues and organizations.

## 2 - Summary of Engagement

### Engagement Strategy and Approach

For the second phase of engagement – a five-week span in October and November 2024 – Brick & Story and Montgomery Parks hosted two pop-up events and four focus groups. The goal of these engagement events was to obtain more detailed feedback about the policy and the individual experiences of different users and user groups. With the knowledge that the full population of athletic field users includes a diversity of leagues, organizations, and people representing different races, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, sports, and age groups, Montgomery Parks sought to better understand the challenges, concerns, ideas, and suggestions specific to each group. Montgomery Parks plans to use the broad range of perspectives to update the permit policy in a way that will increase equity and access without sacrificing efficiency and effectiveness. To reach this outcome, Montgomery Parks and Brick & Story identified several specific user groups to target via the pop-ups and focus groups and settled on the following categories: “walk-up” users, Spanish speakers, leagues serving low-to-moderate income individuals, prior/historic users, and underrepresented sports. The “walk-up” users were engaged via strategic pop-ups whereas the remaining groups were each invited to participate in their own dedicated focus group conversations.

### Pop-Ups

#### 1. Method

The pop-ups included two engagement boards to elicit responses from walk-up field users who had not secured a permit for the field on those particular days. The first board asked users what factors they considered most important for what field(s) they play on. The second board featured questions about users’ familiarity with the field permitting process, the accessibility of fields, barriers to using one’s preferred field, experiences of being asked to leave a field by a permit holder, and feelings about using a permitting process in the future. Field users could place one or more stickers in designated spaces on the interactive boards to indicate their answers or otherwise write their answers or other comments on sticky notes.

Each pop-up was attended by two Brick & Story consultants (including one Spanish speaker) and one Montgomery Parks staff member who assisted participants as necessary and answered any questions about the boards or the policy in general. In addition to the two engagement boards, Montgomery Parks and Brick & Story provided an array of snacks, waters, and swag to encourage participation. The boards were set up adjacent to the designated fields in full view of the users while the Brick & Story consultants

also proactively approached field users and spectators around the parks to further encourage engagement.

## 2. Reach

The pop-up board questions were specifically designed to understand the mindset of walk-up users at Montgomery Parks' athletic fields, those individuals or groups who did not obtain a permit for the field either by choice or due to a lack of awareness of the system. To maximize engagement potential with this user group, Montgomery Parks reviewed infrared red camera photographs to plan the pop-ups for a time and place when walk-up users would likely be on the field.

The first pop-up took place on October 6, 2024 from 11am-2pm at Jesup Blair Park in Silver Spring, Maryland. Brick & Story and Montgomery Parks staff set up the boards and table adjacent to the soccer field. Shortly after Brick & Story and Montgomery Parks staff arrived and set up the boards and table, an organized game between two uniformed teams and a referee began with a considerable number of spectators (family and friends of the players). The vast majority of players, coaches, and spectators were members of the Latinx community. No one had secured a permit for the field during this time window so both teams represented walk-up users. Over the course of three hours, 20+ people came over to the table and engaged with the boards. Brick & Story's Spanish speaking consultant handled much of the facilitation since most of the players and spectators primarily spoke Spanish.

The second pop-up was scheduled for October 20, 2024 from 11am-2pm at Rosemary Hills-Lyttonsville Park in Silver Spring, Maryland. Brick & Story and Montgomery Parks once again set up the board and tables adjacent to a full-size soccer field. However, despite the nice weekend weather, no walk-up users showed up to play on the field. This meant that the vast majority of engagement occurred with a large group of elementary and middle school aged Afghani children. After several hours, Brick & Story staff proposed relocating to a nearby park in hopes of engaging with walk-up users before the end of the event. The team moved to Meadowbrook Park in Chevy Chase, Maryland where an organized soccer game was already under way on a field that Montgomery Parks staff later confirmed had not been reserved via a permit. Most of the players and spectators at Meadowbrook were Spanish speaking young adults or middle aged adults, and a small minority were African Americans. Heavily relying on Brick & Story's Spanish speaking consultant, the team engaged 10-15 individuals in this final stage of the pop-up.

## Focus Groups

### 1. Method

The focus groups were designed to create a safe, welcoming space for representatives of several different user groups, to help elevate voices from specific user groups beyond the common, dominant voices of athletic field users. Four user groups were identified that would yield the full range of perspectives and give equal voice to minority and other underrepresented groups. The finalized groups featured Spanish speakers, leagues serving low-to-moderate income individuals, historic users, and underrepresented sports. The first two focus groups were hosted in a conference room at the M-NCPPC

Headquarters Building in Wheaton, Maryland with a virtual option also available. The latter two focus groups were fully virtual. All focus group participants received a gift card to thank them for their time and input; this was highlighted in each focus group invitation to further encourage participation.

Brick & Story worked with Montgomery Parks to formulate a series of questions for the focus groups that fell into four general categories: the permitting process, historical use, “ghost permitting,” and the two-tiered field system. During each focus group, a Brick & Story consultant facilitated an organized discussion with 5-15 individuals that covered each of these questions. A second Brick & Story consultant took detailed notes and, in the case of the two virtual focus groups, operated an interactive Mural board. One or more staff member(s) from Montgomery Parks attended each focus group to listen, answer policy or field-specific questions, and provide context as necessary. All four focus groups were recorded for internal note-taking and record-keeping purposes.

## 2. Reach

The first focus group—for Spanish speakers—took place on October 15, 2024 at the M-NCPPC building in Wheaton, Maryland. Twelve people representing eight leagues/organizations (including soccer and softball) attended the focus group. The complete list of represented leagues/organizations included Liga Internacional de Montgomery, Liga de Potomac Vida, Family Active Sports, La Super Liga MD (CATOLICA), Liga de Veteranos Maya, Real Espana de Gaithersburg MD, and Amateur Softball League.

The second focus group—for low-to-moderate income and diverse users—took place on October 22, 2024 at the M-NCPPC building in Wheaton, Maryland. Seven people (five in-person and two virtually via Microsoft Teams video call) representing five organizations/leagues attended the meeting. The complete list of represented organizations/leagues included Ethio Silver Spring, Takoma Dreamers, Takoma Park Baseball-Soccer Club, MCRD, and VHPA.

The third focus group—for prior/historic users—occurred on October 29, 2024 virtually via Zoom. 13 invitees representing 11 leagues/organizations participated. The represented leagues/organizations included Prime Soccer Academy, DCMSBL, B-CC Baseball, Player Progression Academy, Burtonsville Athletic Association, Clarksburg Baseball, Montgomery County Little League, Sandy Spring Athletic Association, MCBA, Montgomery Soccer, and Top Rank Soccer Academy.

The fourth focus group—for underrepresented sports—occurred on November 7, 2024 virtually via Zoom. 10 invitees representing 6 leagues/organizations participated. The represented leagues/organizations included Bethesda Roosters Youth Rugby Club, Germantown Kids Cricket Club, Washington DC Gaels, Maplewood Athletic Association, KOA Sports League, and Play Ball MoCo.

After the conclusion of each focus group, Brick & Story and Montgomery Parks identified specific invitees who either could not attend or did not have the opportunity to have their voice fully heard. Those individuals were given the option to provide written feedback or comments to the focus group questions. At the end of the process, seven people in total shared written responses. These responses were compiled into a document and considered alongside the feedback provided at the pop-ups and focus groups in determining the key findings and takeaways from this round of engagement.

Everyone who provided feedback during the focus groups or through written responses were offered a gift card; the majority of participants happily accepted this gesture.

A comprehensive list of all the focus group participants and represented leagues/organizations can be found in the appendix of this report.

### **3 - Key Findings**

The discussions and feedback received during the focus groups and pop-ups yielded a number of key findings that can be broken down into six categories: general issues around permitting, prior/historic use, ghost permitting, the two-tiered field system, user-specific concerns, and other points for consideration. Below we have summarized key findings within each of these categories.

#### General Permitting Issues

Many field users exhibited a lack of knowledge around the general permitting process or specific aspects of the policy. For example, most people did not realize that leagues or organizations could reserve fields via historic use up to seven days a week. Others did not fully understand the requirements and necessary steps to attain prior/historic use status. Numerous walk-up users engaged at the pop-ups expressed an awareness of the permitting process but had never obtained one. In general, concerns around permitting pertained more to perceived inconveniences, inequities, and field quality issues.

A number of people noted the limited supply of fields – especially turf and lighted fields – in certain areas, making it a challenge to secure adequate field space in close proximity to their league’s user base. In addition to supply-related challenges, certain user groups also raised the issue that larger leagues or organizations with bigger budgets enjoyed a non-trivial advantage in the permitting process. Others noted the lack of cohesion between the Montgomery Parks fields and school fields and how their differences could add confusion and logistical difficulties to the process. Participants in all four focus groups commented on the poor quality and inconsistent maintenance of a large number of soccer fields, particularly local park fields. Field quality concerns and the lack of reliable maintenance (e.g. lined fields, goals with nets, cut grass, etc.) appeared to be a top factor dissuading users from permitting certain fields or otherwise left them unsatisfied with their paid permit reservation.

#### Prior/Historic Use

There was mixed sentiment around the current prior/historic use policy depending on the user group. In general, those groups with prior/historic use felt mostly satisfied with the system though some acknowledged a willingness for modifications to the policy. Historic users expressed that the policy provided a sense of stability and consistency necessary for their leagues and organizations to operate smoothly from season to season and serve hundreds or even thousands of kids. Knowing which fields they would have in advance enabled improved planning for the future including effective scheduling well in advance. Other users, many of them representing the Spanish Speakers, Low-Moderate Income & Diverse Users, and Underrepresented Sports focus groups, expressed frustration with the current policy.

They felt that attaining prior/historic use status had proven difficult if not impossible due to a lack of supply. Some participants of the Spanish-speaking group complained that the current policy does not take into consideration the changing demographics of the County. Since historic users could more or less monopolize the fields in certain areas, other users would have to look elsewhere for field space.

### Ghost Permitting

Nearly everyone agreed that “ghost permitting” – when someone permits a field but does not show up during their allotted time – was prevalent, problematic, and posed an obstacle to optimal field utilization. Several participants expressed that the fear of losing historic status incentivized a historic field user to not hand in a field even if they knew it might be vacant for an upcoming day, week, month, or season. There was a clear belief that the current historic use policy and the practice of ghost permitting were often tied to one another. Some claimed that the current field permit cancellation fee served as a further disincentive to turn in an unused field. Field users without historic use felt frustrated that playable fields would often go unused. Several of these users seemed unaware that they could or should report instances of ghost permits to Montgomery Parks and that the permitted groups could face a penalty.

### Two-Tiered Field System

Most people appreciated that Montgomery Parks operated and maintained certain fields (regional fields) at a higher level for game use only. But this feedback tended to fit within the context of a superseding frustration about the comparative lack of quality at local park fields. Users seemed most concerned with reserving adequate field space for games and would be open to playing games on local park fields if the quality could be brought up to a higher standard. In general, people seemed reluctant to have Montgomery Parks open up regional fields for practices given the likely detriment to their quality. Some already felt that the regional fields did not live up to their billing and fell short of being worth the additional cost. However, some people expressed a willingness to pay even more than the current rates should the quality of either type of field be improved. Users were even willing to bring their own lights and help out with maintenance if allowed.

### User-Specific Feedback

Several user-specific concerns and feedback arose outside of the general divide between those with historic use status and those without.

For instance, numerous Spanish speakers expressed frustration at the difficulty of communicating with Montgomery Parks staff. This may reduce their ability or desire to work with Parks to understand and work within the Permit system. On this point, it became apparent that Spanish speakers tended not to report instances of ghost permitting either because they did not know they could (or should) or that it would even make a difference. In addition, Spanish speakers also brought up the difficulty they have faced competing with larger leagues and organizations that have bigger budgets and more resources for their preferred fields. As a result, they have generally ended up playing on lower quality local park fields. Rather than have some regional fields be opened up for mid-week practices, the Spanish speakers

engaged during this process preferred to have the local park field quality improved, and even indicated a general willingness to pay higher fees if the maintenance level could be improved.

One specific request from the low-to-moderate income users was that community-focused organizations that explicitly serve the youth or underserved should receive greater consideration in the permitting process, especially with regard to reserving fields in close proximity to the communities being served. Another suggestion from this user group involved the possibility of temporarily turning in a field in times of low demand without losing the historic use status. As for regional park fields, the low-to-moderate income users reported often having to re-line the fields themselves which made them question the fairness of the higher price point.

The historic users stressed how the historic use policy enables the smooth operation of large leagues (e.g. 100+ teams and/or players) including advance scheduling, consistency as far as practice times/fields, and adequate planning for forecasted future growth or league size reduction. But this significant user group also acknowledged issues and challenges with the policy. For example, leagues can currently maintain all their historic use permits even if their size has diminished over time, creating a misalignment of field space and historic use permits. Historic users proposed the possibility of returning a field without risking historic use status. In general, this user group also expressed a willingness to play more games on local park fields so long as their quality could be improved.

Field users from underrepresented sports expressed the difficulties they have experienced under the current historic use system, namely the challenge of attaining historic use status given the competition over desired fields and expense. They felt a 3-1 model would work better than the current 7 days a week model for historic use. On the topic of ghost permitting, this user group suggested that a reporting feature be added to the Parks website or at least that the policy be clarified to all users.

### Other

During the engagement process, we heard other pieces of feedback that fell outside the original scope of the project but are still worthy of general consideration.

Many people across all the engaged user groups expressed the need for more and better restrooms at different parks throughout the County. This request was often made with the needs and well-being of females and children in mind.

Two other points of feedback included the desire for more playgrounds and amenities for children as well as the lack of adequate parking infrastructure at numerous parks, especially at busy fields.

## **4 - Conclusions**

### Key takeaways by stakeholder groups

#### 1. Walk-Up Users



Most of the walk-up users engaged during this process claimed to have reserved a permit before or were at least aware of the existence of permits. Many also expressed a willingness to use a permit process in the future. Though some had reported being asked to leave a field by a permit holder, it did not appear to be a frequent problem. In general, this user group considered field type, field quality, ease of parking, and league/team collective preference as the most important factors determining where they play. It's also worth noting that many of these users tended to be Spanish speakers and several noted the difficulty of communicating their concerns, feedback, or general plans with Parks staff due to the language barrier. While the reason is unclear as to why they did not have a permit that day to play, they seem open to using the permit system in the future, but may need additional prompting and information to successfully do so.

## 2. Spanish Speakers

Spanish-speaking field users, the majority of whom do not hold historic use permits, generally felt that the historic use policy is unfair and does not align with the changing demographics of the County. They struggled to compete with bigger leagues for their desired fields and were often forced to settle for poorly maintained fields by comparison. In their eyes, the local park fields were not maintained at an acceptable level and they did not feel like they were getting what they paid for. Spanish speakers also noted the adverse impact of ghost permitting and how the practice clearly restricted access to playable fields. To increase equity and field access, Spanish speakers felt that at a minimum, the number of days available for historic use should be reduced. They did not, however, wish for access to regional fields for practices. Their main concerns were improving maintenance for local park fields and decreasing cases of ghost permitting to open up more fields for their leagues to use.

## 3. Low-To-Moderate Income

The low-to-moderate income users have experienced significant trouble attaining historic use status and have therefore struggled to meet their growing demand. Without historic use status, they cannot reliably add fields or even operate at all in the Fall or Spring seasons. They concluded that there was a clear supply issue, particularly in certain parts of the County, that made it extremely difficult for newer leagues and organizations to take advantage of the current system. Even those sports (e.g. Cricket) that have been able to obtain historic use permits explained that the low supply of fields limited their ability to grow. Apart from the difficulty of breaking into the historic use group, these users highlighted the issue of historic users not returning unused fields – which would hamstring their ability to grow in the future—thereby leading to ghost permitting. The users who had attained historic use status noted its advantages but there was a general consensus that the number of days per week available for historic use could and should be reduced. This user group agreed with others that the field quality (both regional fields and local park fields) and maintenance levels tended to fall below expectations.

## 4. Historic Users

Historic users pointed to heavy competition for popular fields, the limited supply of available fields, the low number of lighted fields, the difficulty of using the online portal, the minimum number of hours reservation requirements, rain-out related rescheduling challenges, and the challenge of consistently



reserving the same fields at the same times as the main barriers to securing permits for their desired field or fields. Despite these challenges, historic users also stressed how the current system provides necessary stability and allows large leagues and organizations to effectively operate. Even still, many historic users did not feel the specific number of days in a week available for historic use was especially important. Rather, the central issue pertains to supply and demand, and the severity of this challenge varies in different parts of the County. Though they felt it would be detrimental to their leagues to lose reservations or fields, these users were open to potential policy changes that could increase field access such as being able to return unused fields without risking losing historic use or needing to reserve a field for an entire season to have it qualify for historic use. On the topic of ghost permitting, historic users acknowledged its prevalence and pointed to the risk of losing historic use status as well as the \$50 cancellation fee as the primary disincentives for returning an unused field. Ultimately, historic users valued the two-tiered field model and felt that opening up regional fields to practices would significantly hurt their quality. This user group was most concerned with maintaining stability and consistency for their leagues and felt that more turf and lighted fields would help increase overall field access and reduce quality issues and maintenance needs.

## 5. Underrepresented Sports

The underrepresented sports user group also experienced difficulty competing with more popular sports for field space. This challenge partially stems from the limited number of sport-specific fields. As a result, they felt their sports (along with the youth population) should receive heightened consideration in the permit process. They also felt that ghost permitting was prevalent and likely resulted from the minimal repercussions and overall lack of enforcement. One suggestion that arose from this group was the possibility of having more than one league play at the same time on a given field—especially if the leagues did not have a large number of players—to make better use of field space. Though some expressed interest in opening regional fields for mid-week practices, others felt that the field quality would suffer too much as a result.

### Notable Trends

Throughout the engagement process, some clear trends and commonalities across stakeholder groups emerged.

There is an obvious supply and demand problem when it comes to Montgomery Parks' athletic fields, especially in denser areas like Silver Spring. Under the current system, the available field space is not adequately meeting the growing demand of all field users across the County. This often causes leagues to reserve fields located further away than desired for games and practices. Additional turf and lighted fields as well as more creative field uses (e.g. dividing fields or splitting fields between multiple teams with lower participant numbers) would help mitigate supply issues.

All user groups expressed at least some level of dissatisfaction with the current level of field quality and maintenance, particularly at local park fields. Many engaged users said they would be willing to pay more for a higher standard of maintenance or otherwise personally assist in ongoing field maintenance.

Ghost permitting is a prevalent issue. Most user groups believe the central cause is the unwillingness of the permit holder to risk losing historic use status given the importance of that status for maintaining or growing their league. The cancellation fee is also a deterrent for many leagues, as they are not penalized monetarily for no-shows.

The youth population and its specific needs and interests should be given extra consideration in the permitting policy and process.

Finally, the engagement process itself revealed an interest in and need for additional opportunities for conversation between Montgomery Parks staff and athletic field users. In the majority of cases, athletic field users were eager to participate in focus groups and openly expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to express their concerns and share their ideas. Montgomery Parks staff also recognized that, despite the challenges expressed, they want to invest more in creating spaces to listen to and learn from athletic field users. They will work to incorporate more opportunities for direct conversations with athletic field users in the future as a way to enhance their service to the community.

### Equitable Access and Use Considerations

As Montgomery County Parks works to update the Athletic Field Use Policy, there are a number of considerations based on the feedback received from the wide variety of stakeholders who participated in this engagement process.

First, **leagues do not consider permit cost itself to be a barrier for field use.** However, it does present a challenge for field consistency for some leagues. The ability to reserve fields for an entire season requires an upfront cost that not all leagues can afford; larger leagues with more resources can more easily reserve fields consistently throughout the season. In order to increase equitable access to fields, Montgomery Parks should consider ways to decrease financial barriers to season-long reservations or find creative ways that allow for long-term planning for leagues that may not have the sufficient economic resources.

There may be ways to **modify the current Prior/Historic Use policy to preserve some of its advantages but alleviate some of the inequities.** In general, historic use permits provide an additional layer of predictability that allows for seasonal planning. Even stakeholders from minority, low-income, and underrepresented sports user groups agreed that the historic use policies provide necessary stability and flexibility to leagues. However, there should be more education to field users about the historic use permitting system to provide clarity to both current permit holders and potential permit holders. Additionally, historic use must be considered within the context of the growing demand for fields throughout the County, and most specifically in high density areas. New leagues or organizations have difficulty obtaining historic use due to the limited supply of fields and inability to secure consistent field time each season.

Despite the challenges it may present to current users, a policy that limits historic use permits to 3-4 days per week, rather than 7 days per week, could increase access to fields, especially high demand fields, for other user groups and create a more equitable system for all field users. A new model that

limits days of historic use permits could be tested with a larger sample size, to better understand the implications this would have on leagues, with special attention to its impacts on leagues based on size, sport, and population served. During focus groups, many participants offered ideas around how to modify the current historic use permit policy. The team synthesized these ideas within the context of the County to provide several recommendations for consideration. These recommendations are summarized below:

1. Limit historic use to certain fields, including:
  - a. fields in non-Community Equity Index (CEI) areas
  - b. fields in lower-density areas
2. Consider a rotating and/or lottery system for historic permitting by season
3. Reserve certain time slots and/or days of the week for non-historic permitting only
4. Limit historic use permits only to leagues who reserve the field for the entire season to ensure permits support consistency for all users
5. Consider additional priority reservation status options for user groups who have been unable to attain historic use but could argue for priority status based on the population they serve, specific seasonal needs, etc.
6. Limit historic use permits for game use only

While there are no simple answers that solve for all user groups, there is a clear need for the County to consider new models for the historic use policy. In general, the prioritization system for field reservations should reflect the agency's mission to "offer various enjoyable recreational activities that encourage healthy lifestyles; and provide clean, safe, and accessible places." Historic use has the potential to create more equitable access for players of all backgrounds throughout the County. Careful consideration of field demand, specifically in CEI areas, should guide any modifications to the current historic use permit policy.

Another area of consideration in the permit policy update is **exceptions or special considerations for specific user groups**. When obtaining permits, leagues serving youth are especially interested in permitting fields during certain times of day. Could the permitting process, for example, allow special access to certain reservations times for certain user groups who can justify a need? Similarly, leagues that serve low-income communities are more limited in their ability to travel to fields further away due to lack of transportation resources or limited time windows. Parks may consider an application process that qualifies certain leagues who serve low-income populations and allows them some type of priority permitting at fields within walksheds of the neighborhoods they serve. While these nuances require careful planning and execution, there are clear opportunities to increase equity for certain user groups to ensure all County residents have access to recreation at sports fields.

One observation strictly data-related pertains to **the spread of field types throughout the County**. Currently the County boasts of 312 fields in total, 48 of which are maintained and permitted at a regional/recreational park level. Almost 44% of regional fields (21 fields across six parks) are in or serve CEI areas. However, less than 20% of all parks in the County are in or serve CEI areas. When considering possible areas for new fields, local or regional, CEI areas should be prioritized to ensure that individuals and families with limited resources have more opportunities to access County fields for recreation.

It's worth noting the high demand of athletic fields from the Latinx population, who are the most overrepresented group in CEI disadvantaged areas<sup>1</sup>. Parks might further investigate the changing demographic trends of the County, and how they relate to the changing field demands from different populations. In addition to examining supply and demand in general for fields, and accessibility based on location, Parks might also consider how accessible *game* fields are for disadvantaged populations in the County, and suggest shifts in local and regional field designations accordingly to meet the demands of the changing population.

**Field maintenance and quality** is another factor that stakeholders repeatedly agreed impacts field use and the satisfaction of users. With limited supply and high demand of fields throughout the County, leagues expect these hard-to-secure fields to offer a level of safety and usability for their teams. When fields are poorly maintained, the demand of other surrounding fields increases. This becomes an equity issue when fields with lower quality are located in the County's Equity Focus Areas, or when higher quality fields are monopolized with larger, more-resourced leagues. Opportunities to increase overall maintenance of fields, with special attention to improving the quality of fields within Equity Focus Areas, should be considered. Leagues expressed willingness and interest in supporting field maintenance. Several stakeholders also suggested the County explore an adopt-a-field model.

In line with maintenance, field amenities should also be evaluated. Poor bathrooms more highly impact female and youth leagues and users. Field amenities, like decent bathrooms, are necessary to ensure all players feel welcome, safe, and can comfortably use the facilities.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CEI\\_white\\_paper.pdf](https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CEI_white_paper.pdf)

## Appendix

### a. Pop-ups

- i. *Engagement Boards Responses Spreadsheet*
- ii. 10.06.2024 Jesup Blair
  - 1. *Run of Show*
  - 2. *Board Photos*
  - 3. *Event Photos*
- iii. 10.20.2024 Rosemary and Meadowbrook
  - 1. *Run of Show*
  - 2. *Board Photos*
  - 3. *Event Photos*

### b. Focus Groups

- i. *Focus Group Summaries*
- ii. *Focus Group Participants Spreadsheet*
- iii. *Focus Group E-mail Responses*
- iv. 10.15.2024 Spanish Speakers Focus Group
  - 1. *Run of Show*
  - 2. *Notes*
- v. 10.22.2024 Low-Moderate Income and Diverse Users Focus Group
  - 1. *Run of Show*
  - 2. *Notes*
- vi. 10.29.2024 Historic Users Focus Group
  - 1. *Run of Show*
  - 2. *Mural Board PDF*
  - 3. *Comments Spreadsheet*
- vii. 11.07.2024 Underrepresented Sports Focus Group
  - 1. *Run of Show*
  - 2. *Mural Board PDF*
  - 3. *Comments Spreadsheet*