

## **Outdoor Sports Field Provision, Maintenance Standards and Fee Structure**

<b>Date:</b>	May 29, 2012
<b>To:</b>	Executive Committee
<b>From:</b>	Jim Hart, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	P:\2012\Cluster A\PFR\EX21-061212-AFS#15700

### **SUMMARY**

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This report responds to Council's direction regarding establishing a fee structure for children and youth organizations permitting outdoor sports facilities. Additionally, this report provides a summary of the consultations held with sports organizations and the results of a comparison of Toronto's sports fields, fees, and policies with those in other municipalities.

Among other things, this report recommends the introduction of new, lower fees for the 2013 season. These new fees have been recommended at a lower rate than those introduced as part of the 2012 budget to respond to the concerns raised by many organizations about keeping children and youth sports affordable. These lower rates also acknowledge that there is work to be done to improve the quality of sports fields.

Charging a nominal fee complies with the Council-adopted User Fee Policy, which recommends a portion of the cost of a service be recovered by fees where the benefits accrue to an identifiable group and where it is possible to prevent someone from accessing the service. There has historically been a 100% subsidy for sports field permit fees for children and youth groups. This report recommends bringing that subsidy down from 100% to a level more in-line with the level of subsidy provided to children and youth groups who permit other facilities.

Charging fees has other benefits for the maintenance and utilization of sports fields as well. For example, it encourages permit holders to use these facilities efficiently, freeing up some time for other groups looking to use fields. The revenue generated from permit fees will help support the improved quality of the fields, which is a major benefit to the

permit holders. Further, the City will benefit from the improved utilization data that will result when permits more accurately reflect the activity on the field.

This report also outlines several steps that will improve and strengthen the partnership between Parks, Forestry and Recreation and sports organizations who provide a valuable opportunity for children and youth to stay active and receive the benefit of sport, along with volunteering their time and resources to maintain City facilities. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will improve communication with these groups, and work with them as partners to develop a new field classification system, a new policy for dealing inclement weather, and to improve the quality of sports fields.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### **The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:**

1. Sports field permit fees for children and youth organizations be introduced in 2013 at the following rates (including HST):
  - a. \$6/hour for A fields;
  - b. \$4/hour for B fields;
  - c. \$2/hour for C fields; and
  - d. \$2/hour for dry pads.
2. The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation undertake the steps outlined in this report to strengthen the City's partnership with sports organizations and to improve the quality of sports fields and report back to Council after the 2013 season.
3. The permit fees for 2014 be set through the User Fee Review process, and that any increases to the 2013 fees beyond the annual inflationary increases be phased in over time, with appropriate consultation and in a manner that allows the sports groups to adjust their fees accordingly.
4. The General Manager of Parks, Forestry, and Recreation explore the option of creating a new fee for lit fields and facilities to recover a portion of the electricity costs for each lit field and report back through the User Fee Review process.

### **Implementation Points**

After Council determines the proposed fees for 2013, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division will send letters to the affected permit holding organizations with a summary of their 2012 permitted hours and an estimate of the impact of the new fees, assuming the organization permits the same facilities for the same hours in 2013. This communication will also summarize the other decisions of Council and policy changes that may impact permit holders. This will provide the organizations with ample time to plan for their 2013 seasons, including setting their schedules and 2013 registration fees.

## **Financial Impact**

The Parks, Forestry and Recreation approved 2012 Operating Budget included the creation of new fees for children and youth groups using class A, B, and C Outdoor Sports Fields as well as Rooms, Kitchens, and Dry Pads. These fees were expected to generate \$1.5 million in revenue in 2012. On April 10, 2012, Council waived the outdoor sports field fees.

This report recommends a new set of lower fees for children and youth organizations using these facilities, which would replace those adopted by Council as part of the 2012 operating budget. Implementing the new set of fees for the 2013 season will generate \$0.85 million in revenue which represents a reduction of \$0.65 million from the existing \$1.5 million revenue target.

This report has no impact on the 2012 approved operating budget. The reduced revenue expected as a result of the introduction of new, lower fees will be addressed through the 2013 operating budget process.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

At its meeting of January 17, 2012, City Council approved new fees in the 2012 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget for children and youth groups for permitting sports fields.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.EX14.1>

At its meeting of March 5, 2012, City Council adopted Member Motion MM19.3, which directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report directly to the April 10, 2012 City Council meeting:

- i. with a process for offering relief to those having financial difficulty complying with the new fee structure for sports fields permits;
- ii. on the establishment of flexible payment plans for 2012 to provide them with the opportunity to continue their regular season and to raise the necessary funds to pay their 2012 fees; and
- iii. on the development of a protocol for notifying groups in advance of fee changes in the future.

The member's motion can be viewed at:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.MM19.3>

At its meeting of April 10 and 11, 2012, Council considered the report, "Children and Youth Permit Fees for Sports Fields" (item CC22.6), which recommended the implementation of a system for 2012 only, for providing relief to those having difficulty paying with the new fees. Council deleted the recommendations contained in this report, and directed that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation report to the June 12, 2012, meeting of the Executive Committee on a range of issues regarding sports field fees. The Council decision can be found here:

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

During the 2012 Operating Budget process, staff identified that there were no permit charges for children and youth permits for outdoor sports fields that are A, B and C category, while similar fields were subject to permit charges in other Ontario municipalities.

The 2012 recommended Operating Budget, which was later approved by Council, included the hourly children and youth permit fees (including HST) of \$12 for sport field type A, \$8 for sport field type B, and \$6 for sport field type C. The expected revenue from the implementation of these fees was \$1.5 million in 2012, which assumed a 30% reduction in permit hours of these facilities over 2011 levels. This reduction was projected to account for the fact that some sports groups permitted fields that they did not use because permits were free of charge.

Following the adoption of the Operating Budget, a letter was sent to children and youth permit holders informing them of the new Council-adopted fees. Subsequently, 2012 permits and invoices including these new fees were sent to organizations. The new charges came as a surprise to many organizations, who were concerned about the timing of the new fees and the impact on their organizations. These concerns prompted Council to reconsider the fees and direct staff to report back on a variety of issues related to field classifications, field standards, and other policies related to permitting sports fields.

## **COMMENTS**

At its meeting on April 10, 2012, Council provided the following direction to the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation:

1. City Council direct the City Manager to:
  - a. meet with representatives of the sports teams, leagues and affected individuals in order to review the new rates, field classifications and the impact of these fees;
  - b. report back to the Executive Committee and City Council by July 2012 on fees for sports fields in 2013 and how the concerns raised at the meetings (from Part 1a above) can be addressed for 2013;
  - c. in the interim, waive these new fees for 2012; and
  - d. offset the \$1.5M in shortfall in the Parks, Forestry and Recreation approved Operating budget resulting from waiving of fees by a transfer from salary savings in the non-program budget.
2. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to consult with the Toronto Sport Council (TSC) and permit holders, and to report to July 11, 2012 meeting of City Council on the following:

- a. the classification of the Toronto fields, a comparison with surrounding municipalities, level of maintenance and infrastructure and proposed fee structure in relation to the classifications;
- b. an appropriate fee structure for box lacrosse and ball hockey;
- c. the previous and ongoing value of contributions and improvements to fields by leagues and clubs;
- d. a process for offering relief to those having financial difficulty paying for sports field permits;
- e. a finalized protocol for notifying groups in advance of fee changes in the future;
- f. how to ensure fields in priority neighbourhoods remain affordable after improvements by donations through the partnership office(s); and
- g. a policy for rain outs and block bookings.

Council also adopted the following recommendation contained in item MM22.18, also considered at the April 10 and 11, 2012 meeting of Council:

1. City Council request the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to consult with the General Manager, Toronto Water to identify sites under the control of Toronto Water that could be appropriate for sports and recreational purposes and report the findings to Executive Committee and City Council by July 2012.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff undertook the following in the development of this report:

- Reviewed the submissions from sports organizations and the public to past consultation meetings and Council on this issue.
- Attended a meeting of the Toronto Sports Council on these issues.
- Implemented an online survey to gather information about the sports field needs of sports organizations in Toronto.
- Held a consultation meeting with sports organizations that permit sports fields to hear their views and gather their feedback on these issues.
- Gathered and analyzed information about the sports field classifications, maintenance standards, and fees charged in other comparable municipalities in Ontario.
- Conducted a review of the current field classifications and sports field maintenance standards.

## Background on Toronto's outdoor sports fields

The City operates 676 outdoor sports fields, including 312 ball diamonds and 364 soccer/multi-purpose fields. Of these, 99 ball diamonds and 38 fields have lights. There are over 250 sports organizations that take out seasonal permits for sports fields. The combined total membership of the organizations that use City fields for a full season is over 130,000 people. If you include groups that book fields for occasional use instead of for a full season, there are over 650 groups who permit City fields.

The 2012 fee structure for outdoor sports fields is below.

<b>2012 Sports Field Fees by Facility and Permit Holder Type</b>				
<b>Type of Group</b>	<b>Premier</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>Commercial / Private</b>	\$40.79	\$32.86	\$17.01	\$7.93
<b>Resident Adult</b>	\$40.79	\$27.20	\$13.59	\$6.80
<b>Resident Child and Youth</b>	\$40.79	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>Resident Older Adult</b>	\$40.79	\$13.59	\$6.80	\$3.40

## Key findings of consultation with sports organizations

Several key themes emerged in hearing from sports organizations through the discussion of potential new fees. These themes were echoed in the consultation process and in the comments submitted by organizations as part of the online survey. A summary of the comments submitted at the consultation meeting with sports organizations is attached to this report (Attachment 1). The Toronto Sports Council consultation meeting summary is also attached (Attachment 2).

Fifty organizations, or less than 20 per cent of the organizations who were invited to participate, completed the online survey. This included 32 baseball/softball, 12 soccer and 6 other organizations. The survey data will help inform the ongoing work with sports organizations, and the comments submitted by the groups reflect the comments made throughout the consultation as outlined below.

### On the classification of fields and facilities:

- The criteria used to classify fields should be transparent and consistent.
- The criteria should include field quality and maintenance standards, not just size, so that permit holders know what quality of field they're getting.

### On field maintenance:

- The City's fields are not maintained to a sufficient or consistent standard, and lag behind the quality of fields in other municipalities. More resources need to be invested to improve the quality of the fields.
- Some permit holders book extra hours and invest time and money to maintain the fields they permit, and this contribution needs to be recognized. Groups perform maintenance such as grooming, fertilizing, cleaning up garbage, mowing, raking, repairing fences, seeding, spreading topsoil, and weeding.

- Many sports groups are interested in working with the Parks department to identify and fix field maintenance issues. There should be a plan that addresses long term field development, short-term repair needs, and safety issues that need to be dealt with immediately.
- As part of the online survey, 70 per cent of ball groups and 30 per cent of soccer organizations indicated that their volunteers spend time maintaining the fields on which they play.

**On developing a stronger partnership with sports organizations:**

- The City should work with the sports organizations to recognize their expertise, their contributions to maintenance of fields, and the opportunities they provide to children and youth for participating in sports.
- Improved communication with organizations is critical, and in particular the City needs to better understand the way sports organizations operate in order to better support them.
- The City needs to work with groups to better understand the different issues of specific sports played on fields and dry pads.

**On fees:**

- Discussions of fees should be part of a larger discussion about improving the fields and working in partnership with sports organizations.
- A clearer understanding of the costs involved with maintaining fields would be useful. Over half of the survey respondents indicated they'd be more likely to support fees if it were clear what portion of the City's costs were recovered through fees.
- It's important to keep sports affordable for children and youth.
- Some groups supported the implementation of a fee for children and youth groups to free up additional time for other organizations.
- Others opposed a fee of any kind, which would present a barrier to participation for low-income residents.
- A majority of groups (70 per cent) who responded to the online survey indicated that they'd be more likely to support fees if the revenues generated were used to improve field conditions.

**On notifying groups in advance of fee changes:**

- The City needs to notify groups before they set their budgets and participant fees for the year.
- The online survey results indicate that organizations set their fees at various points throughout the year. In order to ensure adequate notice of any proposed new fees, groups need to be informed as soon as possible.

**On a policy for rain outs:**

- The policy needs to address not only rain, but also lightning and other conditions that make fields unplayable.
- The policy should work to prevent damage to fields when used even though the conditions are too wet.

- Field time lost to unplayable conditions should be rescheduled or refunded – and leagues need assurances that they will be able to access the time.

**On block booking:**

- The City needs to better understand how groups use the time they permit, including tournaments, rain-out dates, resting periods, and maintenance time.
- The City should work with the sports organizations to find ways of meeting the needs of all groups for field time while protecting fields from over-use, including reducing block booking, establishing resting periods for fields, and developing accurate data regarding field utilization and demand.

Many other useful and productive suggestions and comments were raised through the consultations. These suggestions will be used to develop solutions and inform the ongoing discussions with sports organizations as the process moves forward.

**Fee comparisons with surrounding municipalities**

A comparison of surrounding municipalities reveals a broad array of fee structures, rates, and permit holder categories. There are three approaches to setting fees that are common across all the municipalities that were considered, and which are useful in informing decisions related to fees.

First, all of the municipalities reviewed for this report charge some kind of fee for the use of sports fields by organizations serving children and youth. The rate and fee structures varied, but, based on this review, Toronto's zero fee for children and youth organizations seems to be unique.

The second consistent element of the fees was that most municipalities charged an additional fee for lit facilities in order to recover a portion of the electricity costs. This is a measurable direct cost that can be assigned to a specific activity on the field.

The third element that is consistent across all municipalities is the general approach to setting fees. All municipalities consider a combination of two factors – the *type of group* applying for the permit and the *nature of the facility* they are seeking to permit. The type of group included considerations such as non-profit/for profit, resident/non-resident, adult/youth, and so on. The nature of the facility included the type of sport it accommodated, the quality of the facility, its size, and a variety of other factors.

The characteristics of the group were considered when determining the level of subsidy or reduction in fee that was provided. This is consistent with the approach taken in Toronto, where the lowest rates are charged to resident groups, children and youth groups, and older adults. The factors related to the nature of the facility are generally proxy for the costs to maintain that facility. Higher quality fields cost more to maintain, and therefore higher fees are charged. The higher fee also helps to manage demand and to ensure that the field is used efficiently and for the appropriate type of play. This approach is also consistent with the approach taken in Toronto, with higher fees for Premier fields,



stepping down to the lowest fees for the fields that receive the lowest level of maintenance.

A few municipalities also considered whether the requested permit time was prime or non-prime, similar to Toronto's ice allocation system. The following table summarizes the factors the municipalities considered in setting fees.

Factors Municipalities Employ When Considering Sports Field Fees								
	Toronto	Oakville	Mississauga	Markham	Oshawa	London	Hamilton	Ottawa
<b>PERMIT HOLDER CHARACTERISTICS:</b>								
<i>Age Group</i> (Child / Youth / Minor / Adult)	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
<i>Type of Group</i> (Community Group / Non-profit / Commercial, etc.)	X	X	X			X		X
<i>Resident Status</i> (Resident / Non-resident)	X	X	X	X				
<i>Affiliation Program</i> (Membership / Preferred Rates)		X	X					
<b>FIELD CHARACTERISTICS:</b>								
<i>Surface Type</i> (Artificial vs. Natural Turf)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
<i>Lighting</i> (Lit / Unlit)		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Controlled Access</i> (Ability to lock / prevent access to field or site)		X			X			X
<i>Field Quality</i> (frequency of turf maintenance, lining/grooming)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
<i>Field Size</i> (Regulation / Adult-sized / Undersized / Mini, etc.)	X	X		X		X	X	X
<i>Field Type</i> (Diamond / Soccer / Multi-purpose / Rectangular)		X				X		
<i>Suitability of Play</i> (Competitive / House-league / Practice, etc.)				X		X	X	X
<b>OTHER FACTORS:</b>								
<i>Prime / Non-Prime Time Rates</i>					X		X	

As a result of the diversity of factors that municipalities use to determine rates, as shown in the table above, it is difficult to draw direct comparisons to fees charged in other municipalities.

The following table is the result of a detailed comparison of the rates charged in other municipalities using the fee that best compares to the equivalent Toronto field (A, B, or C) and fee category (Resident, Children and Youth). Additional fees such as hydro fees, non-resident surcharges, non-prime rates, and other fee classifications are excluded.

All fees in the table below include HST.

<b>Table: Children and youth hourly permit fees by field classification</b>								
Field Class	Toronto (Proposed)	Oakville	Mississauga	Markham	Oshawa	London*	Hamilton	Ottawa
<b>A</b>	<b>\$ 6.00</b>	\$ 6.25	\$ 7.50	\$ 11.00	\$ 5.65	\$ 7.50	\$ 15.25	\$ 8.48
<b>B</b>	<b>\$ 4.00</b>	\$ 4.50	\$ 7.50	\$ 4.10	\$ 5.65	\$ 5.24	\$ 11.00	\$ 6.89
<b>C</b>	<b>\$ 2.00</b>	\$ 2.62	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.60	\$ 5.65	\$ 1.50	\$ 2.00	\$ 5.68

\*Note: London fees are for ball diamonds. Their soccer field fees are: A - \$37.10, B – \$8.12, and C - \$4.12.

### **Lighting charge to recover electricity costs**

Most other municipalities charge a fee for the cost of lighting a field. These fees range from \$20 to \$40 per night and are intended to recover the direct electricity costs and maintenance for the operation of the lights. This report recommends exploring the implementation of a similar electricity fee for sports fields in Toronto.

### **Field maintenance cost and cost recovery rates**

Parks annual sports field maintenance costs are estimated at over \$8 million per year in and generates less than \$1.8 million per year in applicable permit fee revenue for a cost recovery rate less than 25%. PFR will be presenting a full costing and user fee review in late 2012 which will provide a more complete and detailed assessment of percentage full cost recovery for each of its user fees.

### **Sports organizations' contributions to fields**

One of the key findings of the consultation process was that some sports organizations make substantial contributions to maintaining sports fields. Just over half of the organizations who responded to the online survey indicated that they spend volunteer time and resources to maintain City sports fields. Particularly in the sport of baseball, volunteers spend a great deal of time both bringing the fields up to a safe condition for play, as well as enhancing the field condition beyond the City's stated standards.

The approach being recommended in this report is to ensure that all fields meet a minimum standard that renders the field safe and enjoyable for permit holders. The fields should meet the City's stated minimum standard, and permit holders should be able to expect fields of similar classifications to be maintained to a consistent standard. This is important, as not all groups have expressed a willingness to commit volunteer time and resources to conduct maintenance work. Consistently delivering on an agreed-upon standard of maintenance will allow volunteers to focus on delivering the sport, rather than doing grounds-keeping.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation also recognizes that there are certain activities that groups will want to have the flexibility to perform on fields themselves, such as lining. City staff will not always be available to do that work when it is needed. In those cases, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will work to support groups that wish to enhance the field through additional maintenance work. In these cases it will be important to clarify the roles and responsibilities in maintaining our fields, including what the minimum standard of maintenance is for a field, what supports the City will provide for groups who want to

contribute to increasing that standard, and what would be the sole responsibility of the permit holder.

## **Requirements for improving the quality of sports fields in Toronto**

One of the key findings of the survey of nearby municipalities was that the quality of the sports fields in those communities is generally higher. This was a central point of the objections raised by sports organizations.

There are three main, interrelated factors that contribute to the quality of a field:

1. **Quality of construction** – the type of material used to support the playing field, the soil makeup, and the quality of the drainage system all affect how well a field withstands frequent use, and how quickly it recovers from rain events to a playable condition. Sports fields that have not been constructed to these specifications cannot withstand a high level of use without sustaining substantial damage.
2. **Utilization rate** – striking the right balance between using and resting a field to allow it to recover is a key consideration. A field with better drainage and more resilient turf can be played more hours during a season than one with poor drainage. Each field has a maximum number of hours of play it can withstand and remain in a playable condition. To keep fields in good condition, they must be rested and the number of hours of use should not be permitted to exceed the field's capacity.
3. **Maintenance levels** – maintaining healthy sports field turf and playing conditions requires a regular mix of the following practices:
  - Aerating to relieve soil compaction and allow for improved water infiltration, and air movement in and out of the root zone. This creates a better growing environment for turf grasses, particularly during periods of peak demands for various sports play.
  - Topdressing to modify the root zone soil mix, reduce thatch, fill in of any surface voids to smooth the surface for a more consistent roll of the ball in play, and provide cover to improve seed germination in newly seeded areas.
  - Overseeding by mechanical slit or broadcast methods which helps to fill in thin spots in high wear areas, and maintain a strong stand of the desired turfgrass species in the field.
  - Fertilizing to feed the soil organisms, and the turfgrass for strong healthy plant growth.
  - Mowing with sharp blades at the proper height of cut relative to sports activity to reduce undue stress to the turf and thicken the stand.
  - Irrigation which prevent drought stress and establishes new seedlings or sodded areas.
  - Grooming ball diamond infields to provide consistent texture for base path running surfaces, smooths the surfaces in high traffic areas, and provides a predictable bounce and roll of the ball in play.

Increasing the maintenance levels alone will not by itself produce higher quality fields. Spending more time and money on maintenance activities will not achieve the intended effect if sports fields are not rested sufficiently to allow those maintenance activities to take hold and for turf to recover from heavy use. Attention must also be paid to assessing each field's capacity to withstand heavy use, and fields that have no drainage or were not purpose-built as sports fields should have reduced permitting and should be considered as candidates for reconstruction and drainage installation.

There are challenges to overcome in achieving the appropriate mix of these three factors. Many of Toronto's fields were not purpose-built as sports fields, and as such do not have the appropriate drainage or soil mixture to withstand the high demand they now face. A systematic audit of fields will need to be undertaken to rate the seasonal hours each sports field can withstand, and to generate a program to upgrade sports fields that require drainage and reconstruction. This in turn would require capital funding to achieve.

Even the most resilient, purpose-built natural turf sports field requires resting. Some municipalities restrict the use of their premier and "A" fields to a certain number of games per week, and others forbid the use of these fields for practices. However, restricting the utilization of fields across the system will reduce the supply of fields, which for some sports, such as soccer, are already in short supply. Without proper resting and rehabilitation, the additional maintenance investment will not result in sustained improvement of field quality. Restricting field use in many areas will also mean restricting access to the field when not being used through the use of fencing. This could be challenging in some parts of the City where fields are part of a community park, and the field area is heavily used by community members outside of permitted hours for casual park activity.

Finally, improving the maintenance level of sports fields involves additional staff time and materials, which will be accommodated within the 2013 budget targets through reallocation of resources within Parks. Sports turf maintenance also requires specialized training and equipment, which is not always available to crews conducting regular parks maintenance.

The table below outlines Toronto's current field standards in comparison with the average standard in other municipalities that were reviewed.

<b>Sports Field Maintenance Standards - Toronto &amp; Other Municipalities</b>						
	<b>"A" FIELDS</b>		<b>"B" FIELDS</b>		<b>"C" FIELDS</b>	
	Toronto	Other Municipalities	Toronto	Other Municipalities	Toronto	Other Municipalities
<b>Irrigation</b>	Yes	Yes	Some have irrigation	Some have irrigation	Not irrigated	Not irrigated
<b>Mowing Standard</b>	1-2 times per week, 3" height of cut	1-2 times per week; - Avg. 2.5" height of cut	1 time per week; - 3" height of cut	1-2 times per week; - Avg. 3" height of cut	1 time per week; - 3" height of cut	Avg. 1 time per week; - 3" height of cut (avg.)
<b>Aeration Standard</b>	1 time per year	Avg. 3-4 times per year	1 time per year	Avg. 3 times per year	1 time per year	<b>Rectangular:</b> 3 times per year (avg.) <b>Diamonds:</b> 2 times per year (avg.)
<b>Fertilization Standard</b>	2 times per year	<b>Soccer:</b> 4 times per year (avg.) <b>Diamonds:</b> 2 times per year (avg.)	1 time per year	<b>Soccer:</b> 3 times per year (avg.) <b>Diamonds:</b> 2 times per year (avg.)	1 time per year	<b>Rectangular:</b> 2-3 times per year (avg.) <b>Diamonds:</b> 2 times per year (avg.)
<b>Top Dressing Standard</b>	1 time per year	Avg. 2 times per year	None	Avg. 1 time per year	None	Avg. 1 time per year
<b>Over Seeding Standard</b>	2 times per year	Avg. 2-3 times per year	1 time per year	Avg. 1 time per year	1 time per year	Avg. 1 time per year
<b>Field Lining Standard</b>	1 time per year	Avg. - Done weekly	No lining	Avg. 2-3 times per month	No lining	Avg. 1 time per year
<b>Infield Grooming Standard (Diamonds only)</b>	2 times per week	Daily	1 time per week	Avg. 3-4 times per week	1 time per week	Avg. 3 times per week

## **A strategy for improving sports field quality**

In order to address these challenges and work to improve the quality of Toronto's sports fields, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will implement the following strategy, beginning in 2013.

### **1. Conduct a sports field capacity assessment**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will conduct an assessment of all sports fields to establish the utilization rating for each permitted sports field. This rating would be expressed as a maximum number of hours of use per season that should be permitted in order to maintain healthy turf conditions and will be based on industry standards such as those produced by the Sports Turf Association. The assessment will also identify priorities for field reconstruction and drainage installation.

Once complete, the capacity assessment will result in a more comprehensive understanding of the supply of sports fields. The assessment is expected to be complete for all field classifications by 2013.

### **2. Develop accurate utilization statistics**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will develop a system for accurately tracking the utilization of fields. Currently, sports organizations permit time that is not used for games or practices. Many use that additional time to perform field maintenance, to reserve it for

potential rescheduling of rained-out games, and to protect the fields from overuse. However, this results in the permitted hours not accurately reflecting the field utilization.

An important step in addressing this issue is to implement a nominal fee for A, B, and C fields in order to increase the accuracy of the permit information in relation to the play on the field. The fee also serves as a disincentive to use A fields for practices in situations in which there are other, lower-quality fields of suitable size that are available to be used for practicing instead. This will help reduce utilization of A fields. At the same time, the new fee will generate some revenue that can be used to support the extra maintenance that will be required to improve sports field quality.

### **3. Create dedicated sports turf crews to improve field quality**

Starting in 2013, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will deploy specialized sports turf maintenance crews, which is a standard approach in many other municipalities. These crews will not mow turf or perform other parks maintenance duties. They will be specially trained to maintain sports fields, and will focus on enhancing the turf maintenance practices outlined above, starting in 2013 with primarily A and B fields. These specially trained and equipped crews will not only improve the quality of sports field turf, they will also improve the consistency with which sports field achieve a standard of field quality.

### **Revisions to the sports field classification definitions**

The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation will work with sports field permit holders to revise and update the field classification definitions for the 2013 season in order to ensure that the definitions are transparent and understandable to permit holders and the public. The revised classification definitions will reflect the additional turf maintenance outlined in this report, as well as the field capacity rating work to be completed by the end of 2013. Once these revised definitions are finalized, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will work with permit holders to ensure that all fields are appropriately categorized.

### **Dry pads**

This report deals primarily with issues related to outdoor turf sports fields. However, the fees introduced for children and youth organizations included "dry pads." These are the concrete pads that in the winter are outdoor artificial ice rinks. The main cost related to dry pads is the clean-up after permitted uses, as well as the electricity costs, as dry pads are often used at night. Given the minor nature of the maintenance provided to these facilities during the summer, it is recommended that the permit fee be set at \$2/hour (including HST). These facilities are primarily used by three sports – ball hockey, box lacrosse, and netball – on a limited basis. This fee will be reviewed in future years as part of the User Fee Review and as part of the consideration of a fee for lighting.

### **Working in partnership with sports organizations**

One of the key findings of the consultations related to this report was that the City should work to strengthen its communications with sports organizations who permit outdoor

sports fields. Organizations also recommended steps that the City could undertake to improve the processes for responding to concerns from permit holders about maintenance and facility issues. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will be working with the organizations to implement many of these excellent ideas, including:

- Implementing a structured reference group of sports organizations who will meet regularly with Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff to raise issues and work together to meet community needs.
- Conducting seasonal field inspections or audits with seasonal permit holders to identify maintenance and infrastructure issues that need to be addressed before the start of the season.
- Improving the processes for addressing in-season sports field issues by installing signage at each facility that indicates who to contact when there are facility issues.

This group will also provide feedback to the Parks, Forestry and Recreation on the impact of the proposed new fees and discuss ways to address issues as they arise.

### **Financial relief**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation does not recommend implementing any new mechanisms to subsidize the fees of third party recreation service providers. The approach recommended in this report is to phase in permit fees for sports fields, and monitor the impact on participant fees. We could find no examples from other communities where the municipal government provided direct relief to organizations or families based on financial need. The City has no similar programs for other facilities it permits, such as arenas, pools, or community centre gyms.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to work with sports organizations to minimize the impact of the fees on the costs for children and youth participants.

### **Process for providing advance notice of fee changes**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will establish a process for notification for new fees or fees that are to be increased more than 5% over the previous year's fee. Proposed increases or new fees will be published on the Parks, Forestry and Recreation web site and through other appropriate venues in the first quarter of the year for implementation in the following year. This will allow for feedback prior to the inclusion of any new fees in the development of the following year's budget.

Notification will also be provided where possible to organizations or individuals who are affected by the proposed fee. This process will be focused on ensuring that affected individuals and organizations understand the impact of the new or changed fee, and that they have an opportunity to provide their feedback and engage in the decision-making process before new fees or fee increases are adopted.

### **Donations affecting field classifications**

Currently, the City's donations policy requires any donation valued at over \$50,000 to be reported to Council for consideration. A donation of sufficient value to change the

designation of a sports field to a higher-fee category would be in excess of \$50,000 and trigger such a report. All reports related to donations for sports field improvements will clearly indicate what, if any, effect the donation would have on the field's classification and what impact that would have on the permit fee. Council could then decide whether or not to accept that donation.

### **Inclement weather policy for sports fields**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation has developed a draft new Inclement Weather Policy, which takes into consideration some of the issues and questions raised by sports organizations throughout the discussion about user fees. Some of the key points that groups have raised include:

- The policy must address more than rain, it must also consider other weather conditions that make fields unplayable, such as lightning.
- The policy must prevent damage to fields by discouraging users from playing on fields if they would be damaged by that play.
- Seasonal permit holders are partners in protecting the quality of fields, and should be trusted to use their judgement in protecting fields from being played on when it's too wet.
- Permit times lost to unplayable conditions should be rescheduled, and in the event that no alternatives can be found, refunds should be provided.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will work with sports groups, through the new reference group, to finalize an inclement weather policy that addresses these issues and implement it in time for the 2013 season.

### **"Block booking" issues and solutions**

"Block booking" refers to the practice of some seasonal permit holders to permit sports field hours in excess of the hours actually needed to accommodate the games and practices of that organization. This practice is enabled by the fact that these permit hours are free to children and youth organization, so there is no financial incentive to limit field time to only those hours that are required.

Block booking is cause for concern for several reasons. First, it reduces the field time that's available to other organizations, including adult groups and new or growing sports organizations that are looking for additional field time.

Just as importantly, block booking results in the City collecting unreliable information about the actual utilization of sports fields. Permit data is the primary source of field utilization information (for example, a key measure is the number of hours per week a field is permitted). Block booking means that the permits issued for a facility do not reflect actual activity or play on the field, and as a result it becomes very difficult to measure or track the actual activity on the field to determine whether that field is well-used, over-used, or under-used. This is an important issue in terms of asset management – as discussed above, facility utilization must be managed in order to improve turf quality. It is also important in terms of accountability for allocating City resources in a way that



maximizes the benefit to communities. Accurate field utilization data is critical to both the sound management of sports fields and planning for future sports field needs.

Through the consultation with sports groups, there was general agreement that the City should work to ensure that sports fields are allocated equitably and efficiently so that facilities are available to groups that need it. They also agreed that there is something wrong with groups not being able to book an empty field. However, sports groups also urged the City to better understand the reasons why some block booking occurs in the first place. Many important issues were raised through these discussions that should be taken into consideration as the policy on block booking is developed rather than dismissing as driven by self-interest. Concerns addressed by block booking include:

- It provides sports organizations time to perform the maintenance on sports fields that the City does not do, such as raking and fixing holes in ball diamond infields, lining fields, and other necessary tasks to make fields playable.
- It allows fields necessary rest time in order to prevent field conditions from getting worse due to overplaying, and to protect the quality of facilities these groups worked to improve.
- The additional field time provides opportunity for practices and rained-out games.
- Since permit applications are submitted well before final player numbers are finalized, groups permit time to ensure they can accommodate additional players. There was also reluctance to return unused hours because there is no guarantee of getting that time back in future seasons.

It has also been pointed out that the City has no reliable data to indicate how widespread the practice of block booking actually is – there is no sense of how many groups are turned away as a result of fields that have been block booked. There is also little permit monitoring activity that can be used to track instances of block booking.

This report recommends a series of steps to be taken in order to address the issue of block booking in way that supports fair access to sports fields and facilitates the gathering of key data on the utilization of sports fields.

## **1. Implement sports field fees for children and youth groups in 2013**

Implementing fees for fields will have several benefits in the successful management of sports fields. These include:

- The fee will provide an incentive to sports groups to make economical choices when permitting fields, which will serve to free up some additional field time for other organizations.
- These more economical choices will also help align the permitted hours with the actual activity on the fields, which will in turn improve the quality of the data collected.
- The proposed fee structure will provide an incentive to book lower-quality fields for practices and other optional activities, reducing activity on A fields that should be reserved for games.

## **2. Collect better data regarding the unmet demand for fields**

Customer Service staff who issue permits for sports fields will develop a system for tracking requests for field time that cannot be accommodated. This will help in quantifying the unmet demand for fields, including details about when, where, and for what type of field requests can't be fulfilled.

## **3. Develop a standardized allocation formula**

In consultation with the sports organizations, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will develop a formula for field allocation. The formula will generate an estimated number of field hours required based on the sport, the number of players, and the level of play. Allocations will not be determined based on the formula, but the formula will be used to assess whether the requested field hours fall within a reasonable range of hours. Permit requests that are in excess of a range identified by the formula will be discussed with the permit holder to better understand their needs and to find potential ways of reducing their permit hours. This is a standard practice in many municipalities, and is used now for allocating ice time at arenas in Toronto.

## **4. Work with sports organizations to develop and implement a block booking policy**

Several practical ideas for dealing with this issue were raised through both the consultation with sports organizations and in discussions with other municipalities. These include publishing information about who is permitting fields online and working directly with organizations who are block booking to address these issues. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will work with permit holders to develop a policy that provides fair and equitable access to sports fields and discourages the practice of block booking by addressing some of the root issues for the practice.

## **Options for locating sports field on Toronto Water properties**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff provided Toronto Water with a set of minimum dimensions for the location of a soccer pitch. Toronto Water reviewed their inventory of sites and concluded that there were no locations of suitable size or configuration to host any additional sports fields. Many sites are already operating as parks, and others have either sensitive infrastructure or are required to meet facility needs.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Jim Hart, General Manager

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Summary of Participant Feedback – Consultation Meeting May 17, 2012

Attachment 2: Toronto Sports Council Field Permit Meeting – Meeting Summary

## **City of Toronto Outdoor Sport Field Consultation Meeting Thursday May 17, 2012**

### **SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK**

The following is a summary of the comments provided to Parks, Forestry and Recreation by participants in the discussions at the sports field consultation session on Thursday, May 17, 2012. The consultation included facilitated small group discussions in response to each of three questions:

1. *What can the City do to meet a standard of maintenance that ensures a safe and enjoyable experience for all users on its sports fields and facilities?*
2. *What can the City and sports organizations do to support fair access and maximize the use of our sports fields for all groups?*
3. *What can the City do to support a strong partnership with sports organizations throughout the City?*

Participants also provided written responses to one question that was not discussed:

4. *Do you have any other advice for the City on the issue of sports fields, facilities or partnerships with sports organizations?*

Participants were asked to write their comments and responses to each question on a response sheet and submit them to the facilitators. Below is a summary of participant comments for each question that has been edited to reduce duplication of the comments while ensuring that all comments are reflected.

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#### **Question 1: What can the City do to meet a standard of maintenance that ensures a safe and enjoyable experience for all users on its sports fields and facilities?**

- Organizations and volunteers should have more details about service levels
- Sports groups should be able to work with parks staff to determine standards and service levels by creating a working group
- The City should provide volunteers with the equipment to maintain the fields themselves i.e. shovels, wheel barrels, tractor, turf liner, red clay etc.
- “The Fixer” for the Toronto Star would be an interesting idea for sports fields
- PFR is behind with technology i.e. Interactive maps similar to other municipalities would be great
- Artificial turf in parks shouldn’t exist

- Volunteers need to be better recognized, as they provide free services however, the City puts up barriers to access the right people
- Resources need to be equitable in all neighbourhoods
- Train parks staff to better use equipment
- Raise property taxes to pay for kids sports fees; earmark revenues
- Create fundraising strategies with organizations like Jays Care and MLSE
- Create a maintenance plan (short and long term). Short term for small field upkeep and long term for major work and new field development
- Have in place an annual maintenance plan for each field developed in conjunction with sports groups to work out schedules and needs
- An audit is needed involving the City and sports groups; pre season and post season to all facilities to ensure safety of playing fields
- Create a community development model that will build partnerships with sport groups
- Complete inventory and plan where demand is identified for improvement to fields
- Insufficient resources; lack of maintenance staff, commitment and security
- Insurance to cover problems / accidents on field
- The city of Seattle provide grants to local groups and communities who provide "x" amount of hours of volunteer work in exchange for money
- Annually replace grass in goalie area of all soccer fields
- Improve field drainage
- Provide better access to washroom facilities
- Improve lighting and timers
- Improve trash collection
- Provide groups with storage and locks for equipment
- Dry pads require less maintenance than fields. Why are high rates being charged?
- Provide a 24 hour on-call number to deal with and address issues. Also provide a parks supervisor list with contact info
- Additional fees but no added service
- City staff bodies should be concentrated at facilities where there are no (or not enough) passionate volunteers to do the maintenance.

**Question 2: What can the City and sports organizations do to support fair access and maximize the use of our sports fields for all groups?**

- Improve process of sports groups contacting the right staff at the City of Toronto
- Improve the level trust between leagues trading off fields amongst one another
- Increase access to info re: usage of fields and sports groups using the field

- Create an opportunity for new groups to access field time
- Increase access to TDSB fields and use these
- Develop a relationship with sports groups that fosters an understanding of how they operate and function as an organization – Assign staff as a liaison
- Implement an on-line booking system similar to the one used for arena ice
- Plan regular meetings that reflect the overall budget and communication requirements to groups
- Co-ordinate with sports governing bodies, such as the TSC to review access and alternatives to accommodate a group's needs
- Improve and upgrade fields
- Increase permit fees - Increase in fees will ensure groups use what they book
- Giving up time in a block booking - Am I in danger of losing the spot permanently?
- Foster an opportunity for permit holders to share and transfer field space amongst themselves
- Operating dates and maintenance do not mesh with groups' timelines
- Better use of park monitors
- Ensure a cushion for rainouts and field maintenance in the seasonal schedule.

**Question 3: What can the City do to support a strong partnership with sports organizations throughout the City?**

- Create a consistent level of standards for all fields
- Parks Manager's should assess and create a list of improvements and use leagues as a resource to determine what they are
- Determine which fields are below the minimum standard and make improvements to these ones first
- There is a perception that parks staff are lazy and only work 1 hour during a 8 hour shift – Improve communication between staff and groups
- Increase maintenance at facilities i.e. dumpsters attached to baseball dugout are emptied, but not cleaned and sprayed
- Assign a staff person to liaise with sport groups and TSC. Schedule regular meetings to identify issues, needs and trends – Create a working group
- Create a community development model that will increase communication, collaboration and cooperation amongst staff and groups
- Develop stricter guidelines to determine a group's true "non-profit" status
- Start a grant program that allows the money being raised, to go back to sport organizations to improve the fields themselves
- Take 50% of the new fees and put it back into the fields

- Assess if the demographics have changed and if there is a demand for one sport over another
- Increase access to other types of sports on sports fields i.e. field hockey
- Review issues around financial relief, equity, rain policy, prime and non prime hours, hydro rates, A,B & C grades, block booking and storage
- Phase in fees
- Parks receives money versus general account.

**Question 4: Do you have any other advice for the City on the issue of sports fields, facilities or partnerships with sports organizations?**

- Parks staff are working hours where nothing goes on (start at 6am when kids don't arrive until 9am, this makes no sense)
- Difficult to determine how low income kids will receive subsidies
- Sponsors could help with kids who can't afford to pay – e.g. Jumpstart
- If we charge parents more money they will want immediate results, which won't be possible – therefore increasing taxes is better
- Waive fees for 2013 and keep talking next year
- It will be difficult for families with a lot of kids to pay the increased fees in membership
- Some leagues raised fees in anticipation of the City's fee increases - Use this money to buy new equipment instead
- The City needs a commitment to expanding the public inventory of fields/diamonds and other sports facilities in line with the growing population and changing demographics
- Need to coordinate with other major field owners i.e. TDSB, TCDSB, private schools and Downsview Park
- Establish a well communicated consultation process
- Establish the funding model from the collaboration to support enhances capital and more significant management
- Plan, training for staff and needs specific to local families
- Planning capital with a direction to use a multi-use complex
- Don't make all the decisions based on a deadline of June 12, 2012
- The report may determine more work to be done - Take advantage of this opportunity to get it right now
- Charge fees based on a groups financials and what they can afford to pay
- Priority neighbourhoods should be taken into consideration
- Many (or most) sport organizations should be seen as "experts". They should decide when fields should be opened (i.e. spring time), closed (i.e. fall time), closed due to weather concerns. These groups are passionate and can easily be trusted to "do the job right". These groups should also be asked to provide a "wish" list and "need" list at the end of every season.