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4 March 2016

## **Re: New Policy for Community Tennis**

Dear Councillors and Committee Members,

On behalf of the community members at Moore Park Tennis Club we are providing our initial comments on the staff report on the new Policy for Community Tennis released February 29, 2016. Given the short time frame we have yet to be able to collect comments from our full membership.

We share the the goal of promoting tennis in Toronto. An excellent route to this goal would be to support the community club model and to guard against weakening it.

The community tennis model has served Toronto well. Hundreds of volunteers donate hours of their time and their expertise to run and care for these clubs so that citizens who are club members can, at a low cost, have access to good tennis facilities and tennis programming. Club members pay a small user fee so that community clubs can maintain facilities far superior to those at public courts, which are typically paved with asphalt. Clubs provide programs that bring high participation and enthusiasm for the sport. In the result 22,000 citizens participate in the community system.

Much of the proposed new Policy will serve to buttress the community model. For this we thank the staff of Parks, Forestry and Recreation. Some recommendations are not in the public interest or will serve to undermine the community model. This letter proposes improvements or changes in the staff report as follows.

**1) Item 1 "Public Use of Tennis Courts," (page 9 of Appendix 2, "Policy for Outdoor Community Tennis Club Operations") - community clubs are to provide 2 more hours of public hours, on all courts, for a total of 6 hours a week. We ask your committee to reject this recommendation, or return to staff for further consideration. We note that the text of the recommendation refers to "Outdoor Community Tennis Club Procedures and Guidelines" which have not been released. Council should not condition the policy on unpublished guidelines of staff: the devil will be in the details which have not been released.**

When City staff entered on the rewriting of Tennis Policy they were asked to study and compare the condition and usage of public courts to the community club courts, but they declined to do so. There are, according to the City 180 tennis facilities in the city, 62 of

which are sites of community clubs. Our observation is that the usage and quality of public courts falls well beneath that of the community club courts. There are two reasons for this, as suggested above: at community clubs

- (a) court surface is acrylic and player friendly in comparison to rough asphalt. Tennis nets are in good condition. Screens around the courts protect against wind and provide a privacy element that helps both neighbours and tennis players. Tennis balls last and are not quickly stripped;
- (b) programs for children, competitive athletes, ladies, and beginners are provided. Coaching is provided. Teams and competition are organized. Round robins for beginners and the experienced are run, along with tennis ladders and house leagues.

All this drives high levels of enthusiasm and participation at the community facilities. This demand exceeds the capacity of the community tennis facilities. We do not have enough hours and courts to satisfy the demand. This is why there are waiting lists at community clubs. It is the role of community boards of directors to allocate and mediate within the groups competing for court time. The writers of this letter have spent many years listening and adjusting amongst community club members on the subject of court time in prime hours. We can advise you that demand always exceeds capacity, so we work in a system where the competing interests make their wishes known and a peaceful compromise results.

By contrast all too often public tennis courts are not used in prime hours. The best reason is that the surface is unfriendly to the game and the nets are not kept up. The result is that members of the public do not want to play on those courts, but seek to migrate to community clubs, where they have the choice of paying a modest membership fee. The report is most flawed when it says that public courts are asphalt because they are used for dog running, and skateboarding. We do not allow dog runs and skateboarders on our hockey rinks, indoor malls and council chambers, so too there would be no need to allow good tennis courts to go to waste.

We strongly recommend rejection of the staff recommendation of 2 more hours of public play:

- (a) these 2 hours will take away time from kids programs or team events or round robins, or ladies play;
- (b) community tennis boards are not allowed to allocate or mediate between general members, kids, competitive players and the general public;
- (c) the scheduling of the 2 hours are said to be specified in the "Outdoor Community Tennis Club Procedures and Guidelines" document which was not circulated: do not allow Staff to write the real rules into this document after the event, as we may find that all community club programs are impacted;

(d) better to put acrylic onto the 120 public facilities around the City, so that the natural wishes of members of the public to play on good tennis surface is satisfied.

If the city wants to promote better and equitable access, it would do better to promote the creation of new community clubs. A well run club, charging a low membership fee, would be able to substantially improve and protect its facilities. This is one of the benefits of the community model. Another benefit, of course, is to build communities rather than encourage people to scour the City in order to find one of the few 62 community clubs. Clubs should be better distributed. Our modest 5 court facility has members from over 20 wards – showing the lack of good facilities/ clubs in many wards.

**2) Community Tennis Club Membership Fees (page 6 of Appendix 2, “Policy for Outdoor Community Tennis Club Operations”). The committee should require clarification of the concept of an administrative fee for new members.**

The new policy seems to have replaced community clubs’ initiation fee with a possible administrative fee for processing new members. Given that old members will often have to have their files updated and payments taken, this policy is disingenuous. There is no good reason to charge new members and not old members an administrative fee.

On the other hand, there are very good reasons to charge initiation fees. One reason is that this fee represents the new member’s contribution to the club’s existing capital fund. A well-run club will save a portion of its members’ fees each year in order to cover expenses like court resurfacing. Returning members have contributed to this fund repeatedly; new members contribute with their initiation fee.

The new Policy requires clubs to maintain a capital reserve fund. Typically tennis courts cost \$10,000 each to resurface. A properly managed community club with 5 courts should have a capital reserve of \$100,000 for all purposes contemplated by the Policy. On average each club member may have invested up to \$250 in the reserve fund. It follows that initiation fees for new members should seek some contribution towards this fund. Currently at our club the initiation fee (perhaps the new administration fee?) is \$60.

An initiation fee also nudges members towards commitment and loyalty to what, with luck, is their local club. If they stick with a club, there will be no need to pay another initiation fee. Club members are not just buying a service but making a commitment and forging ties to their community. As the clubs are run by volunteers, this ethic of commitment is important. Without the work of the hundreds of volunteers on the boards of community clubs, tennis in Toronto would be a shadow of itself.

**3) Item 5 under "Communications/ Complaint Handling" (page 10 of Appendix 2, “Policy for Outdoor Community Tennis Club Operations”). Community Boards are the proper bodies for the self discipline of members, subject to possible appeal to a City tribunal.**

There have been some suggestions that the City wishes to restrict a Club's ability to censor a member's behaviour or even terminate membership in the case of repeated refusal to abide by club rules. It is hard to know what the city wants to do here as the City's Suspension and Ban Policy does not yet seem to have been circulated. Again the devil is in the details, which have not been published. Council should not approve this.

Consider the following (rare) problems that community clubs deal with:

- (a) the member who hits another with a racket;
- (b) the member who bullies and intimidates, and refuses to give up the court when time is up;
- (c) the member who uses foul language, particularly in the presence of children.

The Policy properly requires that Clubs have a discipline policy. We recommend that discipline be left to Club and board management. We could consider a possible appeal procedure to a City tribunal. It is a mistake to restrict the authority of boards of directors to a nominal suspension: that would bring the bullies back to the courts and not serve the good of all.

**4) Hours of Play. The key community request was for a 7:00 am start time. Staff agree to this new start time (see Appendix 5), but the start time is not found in the Policy. We recommend that the Policy ratify this start time. We recall that for 10 years staff felt the old Policy required a 8:00 am start time (even though it did not quite say this). Thus clarity of start time in the Policy is needed.**

Generally the courts are in full daylight at 7:00 am from May to August. But they have been empty at this hour for years, despite great demand from tennis players. There is no reason to prohibit tennis players from playing at this hour (bearing in mind that the City Noise Bylaw permits construction, lawn mowing, tree cutting, and other activities at this hour).

**5) Page 10, Tennis Clubs are required to “maintain any existing clubhouse in good state of repair.” Council should return this new requirement to staff as it has not been costed, and club budgets and capital reserves do not contemplate this.**

“Good repair” means shingles, electrical plant, window systems, plumbing etc. We doubt that staff and the Division really intend the clubs to pay these costs, but that is what the new Policy requires. Arguably, clubs can be financially managed so as to collect fees and maintain reserves for this purpose. However the current fee levels make this impossible.

**6) Page 5 use of clubhouse outside of permitted dates without express permission is prohibited. This should be sent back to staff for further review and discussion.**

At our park we have insured the facility and used the facility outside of permitted dates for well more than 40 years. Typically the facility is freshened up, painted, upgraded, and maintained outside of the permit dates. Additionally the board of directors has met at the club outside of permitted dates. All of this has been with the knowledge of City staff and the City is protected by full insurance cover. Bear in mind that the City now requires clubs to maintain the Clubhouse in good repair (see 5 above). This cannot be done without proper access. The community tennis club has long preserved and treasured our building that was once a gift to our community. We feel that this proposal has been made without true understanding of the partnership between Moore Park Tennis Club and the City.

We thank the Councillors for their interest in improving tennis in Toronto. We would be pleased to discuss this subject further.

Yours,

Fiona Miller



Past President

Moore Park Tennis Club

Lawrence Pick

[Lawrence Pick, City Liaison, MPTC](#)

Vice President