



PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Item 3
May 5, 2022
Regular Business

AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION

TITLE:	Athletic Facilities Allocation and Use Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Discuss the proposed policy, move to endorse the policy, support staff establishing and reaffirming procedures.	
STAFF:	Ryan Daly, Recreation Manager Dave Setterlund, Recreation Coordinator Chris Delaune, Recreation Facilities Supervisor	
COUNCIL LIAISON:	Craig Reynolds	
EXHIBITS:	1. Field Use Policy 2. (Draft) Athletic Facilities Allocation and Use Policy	

SUMMARY

The City's Strategy for the Mercer Island Community and Event Center and Recreation Programs and Services (Reset Strategy) calls for updating existing or developing new policies to ensure that the Recreation Division's actions are consistent with the Reset Strategy.

The City currently has a *Field Use Policy* (Exhibit 1) guiding the allocation of athletic fields for various sports and by various users. This staff report provides the Commission with a recommended update to that policy. Staff believes that the updated draft policy now titled, *Athletic Facilities Allocation and Use Policy* (Exhibit 2), will continue to provide needed boundaries and parameters for facility use and continue to permit sufficient flexibility for staff to respond to evolving facility, community, and user needs.

This draft policy seeks to build on the current policy to achieve the following:

1. Encompass a broader range of athletic amenities such as batting cages, concession stands, courts, and other athletic play surfaces and potential future amenities.
2. Recognize the need to provide opportunity for new and emerging users and sports.
3. Provide a focus on policy elements, and to assign procedural elements and park rules to supporting documents.

User Group Engagement

- Daily – Staff engages current athletic facility users regarding reservations and suggested enhancements.
- December 16, 2021 – Staff conducted an introductory meeting via Zoom inviting all athletic field users from the past three years to discuss the athletic field application and allocation process. At this meeting users were notified of the intent to update the existing Field Use Policy.
- April 12, 2022 – Staff shared the draft policy with athletic field users and solicited input.

Input was received from users largely focused on priority categorization questions, as well as procedure-oriented items such as adherence to application deadlines and blanket booking. Blanket booking is when an organization requests and books more time than they need. This often leaves fields vacant without enough time to rebook to another field user. This is challenging for users who desire more field time. Some off-Island and regional groups also expressed a desire to receive more field time.

History of Field Allocation Policies

In 1991, the Ballfield User Group (BUG) was established to coordinate use schedules, provide feedback to department staff, communicate and educate group members around field maintenance and scheduling conflicts, and act as a “sounding board” for Parks and Recreation staff. This group consisted of a specific group of field users.

A ballfield study was conducted in 2007 to inventory existing ball field assets and survey users to assess current and future uses. The purpose was to identify and recommend changes related to current ball field scheduling policies and protocols. The findings from the study led to a 2008 update of the BUG policy.

In 2015, the City met numerous times with stakeholders to discuss a reasonable system for field allocation. These meetings led to a new approach to field allocation prioritization that embraced all users in a rational and transparent process, rather than the historical recognition of a handful of user groups. A formal Field Use Policy was adopted in 2016 (Exhibit 1) and is currently being applied.

Issue/Discussion

Scheduling athletic facilities can be a challenging process, with many factors, multiple groups engaged in various sports, and all users competing for space at limited facilities. This updated policy describes how various groups will be prioritized for scheduling purposes for athletic facilities and utilizes the following principles as a guide:

- Be benefits-focused
- Support diverse uses
- Be equitable and fair
- Reflect good stewardship

The updated policy retains a tiered system of priority and will now apply to all outdoor athletic facilities, rather than just ballfields. The addition of the guiding principles will ensure that the priority access mechanism reflects the values of the Recreation Division, while also establishing consistency among all City

Recreation policies. The removal of procedural elements will provide policy focus. Park rules, guidelines, and procedures will be provided in supporting documents and within the application process.

Key Policy Questions

As the Parks and Recreation Commission reviews this policy, Staff encourages the Commission to focus on these policy questions and implications:

- Who should receive priority access to rent facilities?
- Should use by any one user be limited to accommodate other users? (Example: Should a youth football club be guaranteed to use every ballfield every fall if requested and having top priority?)

Procedures

Many of the challenges around scheduling have been attributed to staff and user groups alike failing to adhere to established expectations and processes. Over time, deviation from standard procedures led to inefficiencies on the part of staff and limited accountability of some user groups. Though the Commission is not being asked to advise on specific procedures, staff seeks to carry forward the Parks and Recreation Commission's support of staff work to establish and reaffirm procedures which deliver:

- Clear user expectations
- Communicate and execute clear booking processes
- Booking efficiency in accordance with the Athletic Facilities Allocation and Use Policy
- Provide accountability to staff and users alike

Next Steps:

Once the policy is adopted, staff will work to:

- Communicate the policy to user groups
- Distribute clear and concise procedures that communicate expectations to users
- Implement the policy to guide operations and decision-making for fall 2022 and beyond
- Staff will revisit this policy and will make recommendation to the Parks and Recreation Commission to improve as necessary

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) Discuss policy questions and recommended policy.
- 2) Move to endorse the Athletic Facilities Allocation and Use Policy.
- 3) Move to support staff establishing and reaffirming procedures for athletic facility allocation and use.