



PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

PRC 25-12
October 20, 2025
Regular Business

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	PRC 25-12: Athletic Field Use Review and Discussion	☒ Discussion Only
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Receive report and provide input.	☐ Action Needed: ☐ Motion ☐ Recommendation

STAFF:	Ryan Daly, Recreation Manager Jeremy Jasman, Recreation Coordinator
EXHIBITS:	N/A

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda bill is to present an update on athletic field usage since the implementation of the Parks and Recreation Commission endorsed 2022 [Athletic Facilities Allocation and Use Policy](#).

- The Recreation Division manages access to a diverse inventory of 26 athletic facilities/amenities across four parks and three elementary schools.
- Recreation Division staff dedicate approximately 1,500 hours annually to scheduling and allocating athletic facilities, maintaining user communication, and coordinating access and facility needs.
- Booked field hours have increased 45% since adoption of the policy in 2022.
- The existing three-tier, seven-sub-tier allocation framework requires significant administrative and review time.
- The changing landscape in youth sports is beginning to blend the lines between “select” teams and recreation-based teams.
- Some user groups have shared confusion regarding priority status and guaranteed access.
- Achieving the right balance between desired field times and efficient field allocation remains a central challenge.

BACKGROUND

The Recreation Division is responsible for the reservations of City managed athletic fields at 26 athletic fields/amenities across four parks and three elementary schools. These facilities accommodate a variety of athletic usages for all ages including soccer, baseball, boys and girls’ lacrosse, ultimate frisbee, softball, track and field, football, and flag football.

The City’s inventory of athletic fields/amenities includes:

- (9) grass multi-purpose fields
- (4) dirt/grass youth baseball/softball fields
- (3) synthetic turf multi-purpose fields
- (2) synthetic turf infield/grass outfields softball fields
- (1) synthetic turf softball field
- (1) synthetic turf t-ball field

- (1) synthetic turf full-size baseball field
- (1) dirt/grass full-size baseball field
- (2) batting cages
- (2) concession stands

Policy Development

City staff developed the current [Athletic Facilities Allocation and Use Policy](#) through extensive communication and collaboration with athletic field users. The goal was to create a policy that ensures consistent, equitable, and transparent access to athletic fields.

In December 2021, staff held an introductory virtual meeting via Zoom, inviting all athletic field users from the previous three years. During this meeting, participants reviewed the existing field application and allocation process and were informed of the City's intent to update the Field Use Policy. Following this, in April 2022, staff distributed a draft version of the updated policy to field users for review and feedback.

In [May 2022](#), staff presented a revised draft that reflected both staff and user input. After further review and discussion during a Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) meeting, the City formally adopted the updated policy, renaming it the Athletic Facilities Allocation and Use Policy.

This updated policy was the product of extensive engagement with athletic field users and was designed to promote equitable, transparent, and efficient allocation and management of athletic field resources.

Key components of the current policy include:

- Supports cost recovery and diverse community use.
- Three-tier system based on residency, organization type, and recreation focus.
- Prioritization of youth and recreation-based organizations with 75% or more Mercer Island residents.
- Emphasis on fair access, safety, and responsible field stewardship.

Reservations

Annually, Recreation Division dedicate approximately 1,500 staff hours toward reviewing field use requests, allocating field time, communicating between user groups, and coordinating field-prep schedules and specialized maintenance. To support the reservation process, staff establish and communicate dates for priority booking periods. The priority booking period is the time frame in which any organization desiring field access may submit requests for the established season.

The procedure staff utilize to schedule fields is as follows (seasonally):

1. Notify all user groups who have booked in previous years about the upcoming priority booking window.
2. Collect booking requests by the identified submission deadline.
3. Organize all submissions by tier and sub-tier for review.
4. Allocations are entered into the recreation facility booking software, staff issue tentative rental agreements with a deadline for confirmation or requested changes.
5. Open online bookings for the remainder of the season.

Over the past year staff have implemented several strategies to improve communication and strengthen relationships with user groups by:

- Providing weekly field prep reminders, monthly invoices and hosting an end-of-the-year meeting with the user groups.
- Providing multiple reminders leading up to each priority booking window.
- Sending out field availability notices to user groups after cancellations occur.

- Improving coordination with Mercer Island School District to align maintenance schedules and field availability.
- Developing data tracking methods to support detailed reporting on trends in field use, participation, and facility demand.

Efficiency and ease of access have been key factors guiding staff toward operational improvements. Some of the most beneficial improvements implemented in the last two years are:

- Acceptance of requests through online submittal process (CivicOptimize).
 - Reducing e-mail and phone-based reservation requests.
 - Creating a uniform process for ease of staff review.
 - Establish consistency and structure for process.
- Consolidated booking windows.
 - Combining three seasonal periods (Spring, Summer, Fall/Winter) into two (Spring/Summer, Fall/Winter).
 - Extending booking windows for easier game and practice scheduling.
 - Reducing staff time spent on priority bookings.
- Implemented self-service online field bookings.
 - Enabling real-time availability viewing and instant booking.
 - Minimizing back-and-forth communication.
 - Reducing administrative workload.
- Optimized scheduling and rental stacking.
 - Minimizing gaps between reservations.
 - Increasing usable field time and scheduling flexibility.
 - Maximizing field utilization.
- Expanded use of reporting and data analysis.
 - Expanded reporting tools to track usage trends.

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

Since implementation of the updated [Athletic Facilities Allocation and Use Policy](#) in 2022 athletic field bookings have increased annually. This increase is attributed to various factors which include ease of access to booking, a staff focus on promoting available times, online booking availability, and proactive scheduling.

Over the past three years, staff have observed changes in sports participation. The emergence of new sports, new teams, and organizations; along with a growing demand for athletic field access from both residents and non-residents. While youth and recreation-based organizations have historically met the needs of athletic participants, new trends are beginning to shift the amateur sports landscape. Increasingly, new teams and smaller organizations, adult leagues, and expanding high school sports have provided more diverse options for traditional service providers, increasing demand on facilities.

Staff are committed to a process of continuous improvement, striving to maximize access to athletic fields and meet community needs through the regular review of related policies. In addition to responding to local demand, staff recognize the value of expanding field use opportunities to generate additional revenues by hosting tournaments and accommodating non-resident organizations.

Tonight, staff will present an overview of athletic field usage trends from 2022 to 2025, identifying areas of success and opportunities for refinement.

Outcomes between 2022 and 2025:

- The number of field contract holders increased by 115% — from 46 to 99.
- Total field hours booked increased by 45% — from 7,930.50 to 11,482.25 hours.
- Tier 1 usage accounts for 83% of total hours — 31,103.25 hours
- Tier 2 usage accounts for 8% of total hours — 3,401 hours
- Tier 3 usage accounts for 9% of total hours — 3,144.25 hours
- Top 3 resident user groups:
 - Mercer Island Boys and Girls Club
 - 2022: 1,853.50 hours
 - 2023: 1,855 hours
 - 2024: 2,008.50 hours
 - 2025: 2,404.75 hours (*as of 10/1/25 report*)
 - Mercer Island School District
 - 2022: 1,908.75 hours
 - 2023: 1,829.25 hours
 - 2024: 1,905 hours
 - 2025: 1,586.50 hours (*as of 10/1/25 report*)
 - *Note: MIHS baseball and softball teams did not make it far into the post-season in 2025, resulting in reduced field usage.*
 - Mercer Island FC
 - 2022: 1,743 hours
 - 2023: 1,854 hours
 - 2024: 1,806 hours
 - 2025: 1,775.50 hours (*as of 10/1/25 report*)
- Since October 2024, 12% of all bookings have been completed through the self-service online booking option.
- Off-season use has risen modestly; reflecting flexible scheduling, expanded outreach, and increased access to synthetic turf fields.

Current Challenges & Opportunities:

- Complex tier structure: The current system includes three (3) tiers and seven (7) sub-tiers, requiring extensive staff review time.
- Emerging group types: Growth in “select” teams challenges existing recreation-based definitions.
- Public understanding: The current policy format blends principals, a tiered approach, and other considerations. Many users equate priority status with guaranteed time, creating mismatched expectations.
- Optimization vs. Equity: Balancing desired access with optimal field utilization.
- Seasonality: More sports are offering year-round programming and seeking year-round field time.

To assist in promoting discussion, staff have developed some key questions for PRC contemplation:

1. Tier Simplification: The current three-tier model with numerous sub-tiers requires significant administrative time.
Would the Commission support simplifying or consolidating user categories? If so, what criteria do you feel are important in establishing priority?

2. Evolving Definitions: As “select” community teams increase (those which may cut players), *should staff adapt the definition of “recreation-based organizations” to better reflect and enable resident participation despite organization type?*
3. Allocation Criteria: *Should priority tier guarantee all requested times, or should staff maintain flexibility to optimize field schedules for the greatest community benefit? Should staff continue using multiple criteria (residency, age, type, participation level) when evaluating access, rather than relying solely on age and residency?*
4. Scheduling Efficiency: Staff have enhanced scheduling efficiency and field utilization by stacking user groups, enabling greater access and participation, but impacting specific requests.
Does the Commission support this practice? Should it be better defined established in a policy update?
5. Cross-Field Flexibility:
Would the Commission support a policy statement which allows staff to schedule groups to alternate fields when it allows multiple users to participate (e.g., relocating soccer to Homestead to accommodate baseball at ICP)?

NEXT STEPS

Following tonight’s discussion, coupled with Commission input, staff will be conducting a survey and soliciting input from user groups to better understand satisfaction with the current policy and procedures. Staff will utilize information gained through this engagement, to develop updates to the current policy and procedures.

Staff anticipate returning to the PRC in January seeking endorsement of policy updates and anticipating these updates would become effective in March 2026 in time for implementation during the Fall/Winter 2026 priority booking window, which opens in July 2026.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive report and provide input.