

LWCF Restrictions and Maintenance Strategies for the Willard Soccer Complex

Why the Parks Department Cannot Sell the Soccer Complex

The Willard Soccer Complex is legally bound by the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act, Section 6(f)(3). This is a deed-level encumbrance that runs with the land in perpetuity.

Once a site receives LWCF assistance:

- The land is permanently dedicated to public outdoor recreation
- The site must remain open to the public
- The obligation never expires, regardless of how long ago the grant was received
- Ownership changes do not remove the restriction

Parks cannot sell, repurpose, or close the property for non-recreational use.

What the City Cannot Do

The Parks cannot:

- Sell the property for private development
- Convert it to commercial or non-recreational municipal use
- Close it to the public to reduce maintenance
- Allow it to fall into disrepair to the point it becomes unusable
- Use it for storage or non-recreational buildings

Doing any of the above would violate federal LWCF requirements.

The Only Way to Dispose of LWCF Land

The only legal way to dispose of LWCF property is through a federal “conversion” process requiring:

- Approval from Missouri Department of Natural Resources and the National Park Service
- Replacement land of equal or greater value
- Environmental review, appraisal, surveys, and federal legal approval
- The replacement land then becomes LWCF land in perpetuity

This process is extremely expensive and rarely practical for small cities.

The Practical Question

How can Parks reduce the cost of maintaining the property while keeping it compliant as public outdoor recreation land?

Changes That Reduce Maintenance Costs While Remaining LWCF Compliant

LWCF requires outdoor recreation space, not pristine tournament-quality soccer fields.

Parks can:

- Convert irrigated turf to low-maintenance native grasses or prairie
- Remove irrigation systems
- Reduce mowing to a few times per year
- Maintain only one or two playable fields and convert the rest to open meadow
- Add a simple walking trail loop to increase public use
- Remove high-maintenance infrastructure such as goals, benches, striping, and turf care
- Rebrand the site as a passive recreation area for walking, pickup play, frisbee, and open use
- Partner with schools, volunteers, or youth sports groups for limited maintenance

All of these options remain fully LWCF compliant.

Bottom Line for Decision Makers

The soccer complex is not a financial liability because of soccer.

It is a financial liability because it is being maintained like a tournament sports complex when federal law only requires it to be outdoor recreation space.

The City of Willard cannot sell or repurpose the site, but it can redesign the site to be inexpensive, passive, public outdoor recreation land while remaining fully compliant with LWCF requirements.