



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: August 26, 2009

TO: Park and Recreation Commission

FROM: Recreation Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Youth Sports Organizations' Request to Utilize Passive, Neighborhood and Community Parks for Sports Programming

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission receives a report regarding the request from youth organizations to utilize various parks for active sports programs and provide direction to staff.

DISCUSSION:

Background

Each year beginning in late summer youth soccer groups and youth football leagues begin organizing and preparing to start their sport seasons. These groups are typically American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO), Santa Barbara Soccer Club (SBSC), Police Activities League (PAL) Junior High School soccer league, Youth Football League (YFL), YMCA flag football league and the City of Santa Barbara's Parks and Recreation Flag Football League.

Sporting fields in Santa Barbara are well utilized and in high demand. The reservable fields managed by the Sports Office include: Santa Barbara School District fields which include La Cumbre, La Colina and Santa Barbara Junior High School, and the City fields at Chase Palm Park, Ortega Park and Dwight Murphy soccer field. Additionally, many youth sports organizations schedule practice time at local elementary schools through the school district office.

As the youth sporting season approaches there are hundreds of requests for practice and game fields for youth soccer and football. In addition to the increased need by youth sports programs the fields are also heavily used by year-round adult soccer leagues. The Parks and Recreation Department, the Sports Office in particular, has historically worked very closely with different user groups in order to provide fair, equitable access to the limited number of field spaces.

Over the years some youth and adult soccer organizations have had a history of using City parks on a drop in basis for practices instead of paying a rental fee to utilize City sports fields. While youth sports practices are not prohibited in parks by the Municipal code per se, they are prohibited

“when such activity unreasonably interrupts the normal use of that facility or creates any unreasonable risk of harm or danger to any person, or will likely cause damage to any personal or public property on or in any City park or beach.” (MC 15.16.220)

The Department has discouraged this use in past years due to overuse of certain park turf areas and conflicts with and complaints by other park users. Adult soccer is prohibited in certain parks as a result.

Request and Potential Solution

AYSO has communicated the need for their organization to schedule practices at as many parks and athletic fields as possible considering the thousands of youth players looking for places to play. After a meeting with representatives from the organization, Department staff has agreed to reconsider allowing youth sports organizations to practice at some designated neighborhood and community parks this fall. Passive Parks would remain off-limits to organized team practices. No fee would be collected, no permit would be required, no practice area would be identified and park use would be first come, first served basis. AYSO has agreed to limit the number of teams practicing in any given park and limit those teams to the youngest of players (8 years and under) to help prevent extensive damage to park turf with overuse. This program would be done on a trial basis this fall and would be reviewed in January 2010.

Staff has determined that the following list of neighborhood and community parks would be most appropriate for drop-in youth sports practices this fall.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are small parks that serve a limited geographical area and local population. These parks would be available for youth sports practices.

Bohnett
Eastside Neighborhood
Escondido
La Mesa
Los Robles
Plaza Vera Cruz
Stevens
Willowglen
Pilgrim Terrace

Community Parks

Community parks are multi-use parks where special, pre-arranged activities and functions occur. These parks would be available for youth sports practices.

Chase Palm
Oak
Ortega (permit required)
Shoreline

Neighborhood parks Hilda Ray, Sylvan and Sunflower and Community parks Alameda, De La Guerra Plaza, Plaza del Mar and Skofield are not included in this list as staff determined that their size, topography, and/or lack of available turf is not conducive to sports play.

The Department also has numerous athletic fields (both City and School District fields) that are available for a fee. City softball outfields could be made available for soccer practices before evening softball games begin. Dwight Murphy soccer field and Ortega Park would also be available to rent. All of these areas are a reasonable \$14 per hour charge for youth games and practices. Fees collected from the rental of these sports fields help offset the increased cost of turf maintenance in these heavily used areas.

Conclusion

With Commission direction, staff will move forward with implementation of this trial program. Staff will monitor park use and will follow up with the appropriate youth sports organization should there be any complaints from other parks users or extensive damage to park turf and/or park property. Adjustments will be made to the list of available parks if necessary. Staff will return to the Commission in January 2010 with an update on the status of the program.

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