



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Parks Sports Field Maintenance and Fees

Date:	November 21, 2013
To:	Parks and Environment Committee
From:	General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	P:\2013\Cluster A\PFR\PE24-120613-AFS#17596

SUMMARY

This report provides information in response to a City Council request to report on improvements to sports fields in 2013. The report outlines the steps that Parks, Forestry and Recreation has taken to improve the relationship with sports organizations, enhance their ability to provide timely feedback on sports fields and fees, and deliver broader sports field and turf improvements. These improvements have been the result of increased staff training, allocation of staff and resources to sports fields, an increase in field repairs and an enhancement of fields through the Integrated Plant Health Care (IPHC) Program.

The report recommends the implementation of the Council approved sports field permit fee increase for children and youth for class A, B and C fields for the 2014 sports permit season. The report also outlines future plans for improving sports fields through ongoing consultation with the Sports Organization Reference Group, implementation of the Sports Field Playability and Responsibility Guidelines (See Appendix B) and reclassification of sports fields in 2014 to align with maintenance standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:

1. Council endorse Parks, Forestry and Recreation's achievements to date on the service levels requested as per City Council approved Item EX21.8, and its continued efforts to improve sports field conditions;

2. Council authorize the General Manager to implement the sports field permit fees (including HST) for children and youth organizations for the 2014 season as follows:
 - \$6/hour for A fields
 - \$4/hour for B fields
 - \$2/hour for C fields;
3. Council endorse the 5% discount for non-profit, resident permit holders booking seasonal permits for 16 consecutive weeks or more, as identified in the Sports Field Playability and Responsibility Guidelines (Appendix B), if the new sports field permit fees outlined above are approved; and
4. Municipal Code Chapter 441, Fees and Charges be amended as necessary to include the new sports field permit fees for children and youth organizations.

Financial Impact

At its meeting of July 11, 2012, through the report "Outdoor Sports Field Provision, Maintenance Standards and Fee Structure", City Council approved the introduction of proposed sports field permit fees for children and youth organizations to be phased in over two years, with the 2013 rates being set at: \$3/hour for A fields, \$2/hour for B fields, \$1/hour for C fields (including HST); and the rates for 2014 set at \$6/hr for A fields; \$4/hour for B fields; \$2/hour for C fields, conditional on implementation of the sports field improvement plan and achieving the sports field maintenance standards. The Parks permit revenue target for the new fees is \$0.85 million for the 2013 and 2014 operating budgets.

Accordingly, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation 2014 Operating Budget, currently under consideration, includes revenue estimates corresponding to the recommended increase of child and youth sports field permit, after-tax fees of \$6/hour for A fields, \$4/hour for B fields and \$2/hour for C fields, for a total estimated revenue increase of \$0.425 million.

Sports field turf improvements were achieved through efficiencies gained with the reallocation of resources within Parks operations. These reallocated resources were applied to the creation of dedicated sports field crews.

The inclement weather allowance, which is part of the updated Sports Field Playability and Responsibility Guidelines, has an estimated financial impact of \$0.02 million, as non-profit, resident sports field permit holders will be entitled to a 5% discount if they book seasonal permits for 16 consecutive weeks or more.

The above noted financial impacts are recommended to Council for consideration as part of the 2014 Operating Budget Process. The Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

On January 17, 2012, City Council approved new fees in the 2012 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget for children and youth groups permitting sports fields

(see: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.EX14.1>).

At the March 5, 2012 meeting of City Council, Member Motion MM19.3 (<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.MM19.3>) was adopted, which directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report to the April 10, 2012 City Council meeting on:

- i. a process for offering relief to those having financial difficulty complying with the new fee structure for sports fields permits;
- ii. the establishment of flexible payment plans for 2012 to provide them with the opportunity to continue their regular season and raise the necessary funds to pay their 2012 fees; and
- iii. the development of a process for notifying groups in advance of fee changes in the future.

On April 10 and 11, 2012, City Council considered the report, "Children and Youth Permit Fees for Sports Fields" (item CC22.6) (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/cc/bgrd/backgroundfile-46330.pdf>), which recommended the implementation of an interim system for 2012 to offer relief to those having difficulty paying the new fees. Council deleted the recommendations contained in the report, and directed that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation report to the June 12, 2012 meeting of the Executive Committee on various issues concerning sports field fees. The Council decision can be found here: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.CC22.6>.

Executive Committee, on June 12, 2012, received a report on Outdoor Sports Field Provision, Maintenance Standards and Fee Structure (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-47867.pdf>) which recommended new, lowered sports permit fees for children and youth for 2013, along with a process for improving partnerships between the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division and sports organizations to develop a new field classification system, an inclement weather policy and improve the quality of sports fields. The recommended fees were as follows:

- \$6/hour for A fields
- \$4/hour for B fields
- \$2/hour for C fields

Based on this report and a meeting summary of the Toronto Sports Council (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-47868.pdf>), City Council, on July 11, 2012, directed that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation, in co-operation with sports organizations, establish a partnership to: improve sports field quality through a review of the classifications system and usage statistics; conduct a maintenance standards review and seasonal audits; clarify roles for sports organizations; review weather and block booking policies; develop and communicate an implementation plan; establish a Sports Organization Reference Group and report back to Council following the 2013 season (<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.EX21.8>).

Council also approved the introduction of phased in sports field permit fees for children and youth at the after-tax rates of \$3/hour for A fields, \$2/hour for B fields and \$1/hour for C field for 2013. The 2014 fees were set as follows: \$6/hour for A fields, \$4/hour for B fields and \$2/hour for C fields, contingent on implementation of sports field improvements and maintenance standards.

Sports organizations were sent a letter on November 8, 2012 to advise them of these fee increases and invite them to work in co-operation with PFR on improving sports field maintenance (see Appendix A). The lower 2013 fees were implemented at the start of the 2013 sports permit season.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

During the 2012 Operating budget process there were no permit charges for local children and youth permits for outdoor sports fields that are A, B and C category. While the absence of sports permit fees allowed open access to sports fields for a range of groups across income levels, it also resulted in block booking practices that limited the permitted use of sports fields by other groups. Block booking resulted in fields being unused during many periods of the season.

As well, during the 2012 Operating budget process, staff identified that other Ontario municipalities charged child and youth permit fees for similar sports fields. The recommended 2012 Operating Budget, approved by Council, included hourly fees (including HST) for children and youth permit fees as follows:

\$12/hour for class A fields
\$8/hour for class B fields
\$6/hour for class C fields

Revenue of \$1.5 million was anticipated for the 2012 Operating Budget, anticipating a 30% reduction in field use from 2011, due to a reduction in block booking practices. With the adoption of the Operating Budget, a letter was sent to children and youth permit holders indicating the new fees, with subsequent permits and invoices sent to these sports organizations.

The new charges came as a surprise to many organizations, who were concerned about the timing of the new fees and the impact on their organizations. These concerns prompted Council to reconsider and lower the fees and directed Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) to work with sports organizations to review both the sports permit fees and condition of the sports fields. This process has helped forge a new working relationship between staff and sports organizations to collaboratively set the stage for future decisions concerning sports permit fees.

COMMENTS

Communication and Partnership with Sports Organizations

Since November 2012, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division has worked collaboratively with sports organizations towards establishing an implementation plan for sports field improvements over the 2013 sports season.

At a meeting held on Nov. 29, 2012, agreement was reached to establish a Sports Organization Reference Group (SORG) and three subcommittees: the Permit Issues Committee, Maintenance Standards Committee and Capital Improvements Committee, to be comprised of interested representatives from sports organizations and PFR staff.

As follow-up to this meeting, committees were formed and terms of reference were developed. Moving forward, Parks staff continued to meet with SORG and the Permit Issues Committee and Maintenance Standards Committee from January to September, 2013, when the terms of reference for the subcommittees were fulfilled. The intention to convene a Sports Fields Capital Working Group was altered since PFR will be undertaking consultation on a Facilities Plan, which will be sufficiently comprehensive to include feedback from sports organizations on capital improvements for sports fields.

Some of the work undertaken by PFR staff with SORG and the two subcommittees includes:

- Approved new Integrated Plant Health Care (IPHC) Standards for sports field maintenance developed by the City's Parks Turf Committee
- Developed a framework with associated templates for sports field auditing to capture deficiencies in a variety of features, including lighting, irrigation, fencing, bleachers and evenness of the playing field
- Developed drafts of the Block Booking Policy, Inclement Weather Policy and Cancellation Policy
- Approved the Sports Field Playability and Responsibility Guidelines

The Sports Field Playability and Responsibility Guidelines (Appendix B) were created to replace the Cancellation Policy and Inclement Weather Policy, outlining the roles and responsibilities of both PFR staff and user groups in maintaining the safety of users and the quality of sports fields.

The development of these new Guidelines also led to joint agreement on the

abandonment of the Block Booking Policy. There was mutual recognition that new, increased permit fees would prevent existing block booking practices by sports groups. It was also agreed that seasonal permit holders, categorized as non-profit residents, who book 16 consecutive weeks or more, would receive an automatic 5% inclement weather discount off their total permit fees. This is the estimated time that games are typically rained out.

The fee reduction affords committed seasonal groups with an opportunity to book additional time for rescheduling games. While this may translate into a financial impact, the reduction in maintenance costs related to field damage are anticipated to offset these costs.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to work with SORG into the future to review potential partnership opportunities, deal with sports field issues as they arise, and obtain input on the 2014/2015 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Facilities Plan. With ongoing efforts to improve sports field conditions, PFR will continue to work and consult with SORG on future fee increases.

Strategy to Improve the Quality of Sports Fields

In considering strategies to improve the quality of sports fields, it was identified that other municipalities, such as Hamilton, Richmond Hill and Markham, have significantly higher fees, but also have sports facilities that differ markedly from those in Toronto. The quality of their fields is much higher, partly because they have dedicated sports field crews and often have sports complexes that house multiple fields in one location. This allows these municipalities to permit specific fields, rotate fields when required, and allow fields to lie fallow for rest and rejuvenation. Fields are more strictly regulated and fully fenced, preventing the entry of dogs, cars or unpermitted groups.

Internally, the Parks Branch established a specialized Sports Field Committee to review maintenance standards and enhance the skills and expertise of staff maintaining sports fields. Four forepersons, with experience in sports field maintenance best practices, were hired to lead sports field maintenance crews for four City districts.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation also sent 25 staff to the Sports Association Field Day in 2012 to learn about new trends in sports field maintenance. Four Park Supervisors were given one month training in February 2013 at the Turf Manager Short Course at Guelph University, and they were assigned as the district leads for sports field turf maintenance. Additionally, 20 frontline staff attended the Ball Diamond Grooming Course by the Ontario Parks Association in April 2013 and the Greatest Show on Turf in October 2013. The four sports crew forepersons will be attending the Turf Manager Short Course in February 2014.

Integrated Plant Health Care (IPHC)

Beginning in 2013, through the reallocation of budget resources, dedicated crews for

sports field integrated plant health care were established in the Parks operation. The crews focussed on delivering a new IPHC Maintenance Program (see Appendix C) based on the Sports Turf Association's best practices. The program has established standards which indicate the number of times each field classification (Premier, A, B or C) is to be mowed, fertilized, aerified, overseeded and topdressed during the sports field season. The Program has also improved the height of cut on A, B and C fields by lowering it from 3 inches to 2.5 inches.

In 2013, Parks staff also began taking soil samples from sports fields to conduct soil texture analyses. With this data, every outdoor sports field can be placed within one of the classifications, and IPHC maintenance practices can be refined for each individual field.

A Mobile Daily Activity Sheet Pilot was implemented through the assignment of computer tablets to each of the sports field Forepersons and Supervisor leads. The tablets were used to track daily implementation of the IPHC Program. The data generated was used to adjust service delivery as ongoing feedback and information was received.

The IPHC Program has dramatically improved the quality and playability of the City's turfed sports fields through increased frequency of turf cultural practices from 1,225 applications in 2012 to 3,790 applications in 2013 (see Appendix D), representing a 309% increase. The IPHC Maintenance Program will continue to set the benchmark for sports field improvements, with the recognition that lasting improvements to sports fields will require a multi-year process of improving the health of the underlying soils.

Maintenance and Capital Improvements

For state of good repair work, Parks staff received, from sport field permit holders, a list of deficiencies from the initial pre season audits and began the work of correcting them. This work continues through the remainder of the fall season and into 2014, and includes infield top-ups, fencing, bench and lighting repairs. Some repairs could not take place until the completion of the 2013 season, as they would have necessitated the cancellation of permits. It is important to note that extensive storm damage on July 8, 2013 delayed sports field repairs, primarily in Etobicoke York, due to the reallocation of resources for storm damage repair across the park system.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation has a Capital plan to design and install artificial turf fields at a pace of one location every two years. This will relieve pressure on natural turf fields and extend the playing season for any such field. Artificial fields will also increase field permit availability, as artificial fields do not need to be rejuvenated seasonally in the same way as natural turf fields.

Sports Field Classification and Maintenance Standards Review

In reviewing the existing sports field classification and maintenance standards, Parks staff recommended that field classification criteria be based on consistent and defined factors

and conditions linked to maintenance standards. The resulting new Sports Fields Classification/Rating Standards (see Appendix E) were endorsed by SORG, with mutual agreement that field classifications should be aligned with the quality of the fields.

Sports field reclassification will be completed following the 2014 playing season to allow for in-depth evaluation of each field. The timing of reclassification will give permit holders a clear idea of the cost of permitting their fields in advance of booking their 2015 season. Reclassification may result in an increase or decrease in permit fees, depending on the field.

Pre and Post Season Field Conditions Audits

One of the key tools used in sports field assessment in 2013 were the pre and post season audit of sports field infrastructure. The audits were created by the Maintenance Standards Committee, approved by SORG and distributed by PFR Customer Service to all Sports Field permit holders. The pre season audit was released in April 2013, and the post season audit was released mid-September 2013.

A total number of 120 pre-season audits and 44 post season audits were completed for baseball diamonds and sports fields. Parks staff have been using the audits to prioritize repairs and maintenance. In total, Parks staff have been successful in addressing 259 of 720 issues highlighted in the audits, with another 165 repairs scheduled for the spring of 2014. These include, but are not limited to, repairs of irrigation systems, baseball infields, benches, bleachers and fences.

Utilization Statistics and Sports Field Capacity Assessment

Current field utilization statistics were obtained from Parks, Forestry and Recreation Customer Service. The statistics were analyzed and sorted by usage and used to determine permit thresholds of play, or field capacity, to ensure that long-term, safe and sustainable natural turf surfaces can be achieved.

This concept of field capacity is key to Parks, Forestry and Recreation's efforts to improve, maintain, and sustain turf quality through the IPHC Maintenance Program. The success of the sport field maintenance program is based on respecting established play thresholds (hours of permitted use) developed by the Sports Turf Association. When fields are used beyond these thresholds, the resulting damage can require major renovation and reconstruction (see images 1, 2 and 3 below).

Image 1: Overuse of Howard Talbot Park Soccer Field in Summer of 2011



Image 2: Resodding of Howard Talbot Park Soccer Field in November 2011



Image 3: Condition of Howard Talbot Park Soccer Field in Spring 2013



Permit hours can be managed, with consideration given to:

- Reducing permits, if required, to maintain field quality
- Increasing permits, where possible, while maintaining quality

Roles, Responsibilities and Contributions of Sports Organizations

Sports organizations typically volunteer time, resources and sometimes funds to maintain fields, and they believe that their contributions should be reflected in their permit fees. Some clubs, primarily baseball groups, engage in block booking in order to undertake maintenance to augment City maintenance standards.

The responsibilities of sports organizations are to abide by permit conditions. Additional responsibilities were clarified through consultation with SORG and adoption of the Set-up Allowance Standards within the Sport Field Playability and Responsibility Guidelines. Under this guideline, contributions by sports organizations will take the form of improvements they might make to sports facilities beyond current and evolving maintenance standards set by the Parks Branch. Additionally, their role will continue to include the ongoing submission of ideas and suggestions through SORG concerning maintenance standards and permitting.

New and Future Improvements

The Division's Customer Service Unit has made improvements to the permit process by posting a list of available sports fields on the City's web site, with daily updates (see <http://www.toronto.ca/parks/prd/facilities/sportfield-rentals.htm>). This provides

transparency and allows sports organizations to view consistently updated field availability, so they can plan throughout the season as their requirements change. This further guarantees equal opportunity to permit space, following the initial allocation of permits, and should generate additional revenue for the Division. Parks staff will ensure sufficient time is allocated for maintenance, as will seasonal sports permit groups.

For 2014, an improved, web based, pre and post season audit is being developed for sports organizations to ensure that user feedback continues to guide Parks sports field maintenance priorities. Parks has also prioritized the purchase of new turf maintenance equipment, including topdressers, overseeders, ball diamond groomers and aerifiers to gain efficiencies and quality maintenance improvements.

In February 2014, four additional parks staff will attend the Guelph University Short Course on Turf to increase staff capacity to better manage sports fields. These staff will add to the existing complement of Parks staff already trained in sports field maintenance.

Conclusion

As per the City Council decision on July 11, 2012, PFR has been actively pursuing improvements to its sports fields in 2013, with significant success recorded in improved field conditions, and positive feedback received from sports groups, as a consequence. Parks, Forestry and Recreation anticipates cumulative improvements to the health of its sports field turf, soil and infrastructure as it continues to address deficiencies and focuses on sports field and turf improvements in the years to come.

It is with this in mind that PFR is recommending implementation of the Council approved sports field permit fees for children and youth organizations of \$6/hour for A fields, \$4/hour for B fields and \$2/hour for C fields, as is presently in the 2014 PFR budget plan before Council for consideration. This change is expected to result in a revenue increase of \$0.425 million, less the estimated \$0.02 million discount for seasonal booking discounts.

Moving forward, PFR looks forward to a continued strong working relationship with SORG and other sports groups. The Sports Organization Reference Group has clearly indicated that it supports the increase of sports permit fees, if the corresponding revenue is used to augment the funds for sports field management. Sports field reclassification will be undertaken in consultation with SORG, and any future increases in sports permit fees will also be made in consultation with them and with City Council approval.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Letter to Sports Organizations

Appendix B: Sports Field Playability and Responsibility Guidelines

Appendix C: IPHC Maintenance Program

Appendix D: Comparison of Turf Cultural Practices from 2012 to 2013

Appendix E: Sports Fields Classification/Rating Standards