

December 3, 2021

To:

Nicole Banks, Commissioner, Newton Parks, Recreation & Culture
Park and Recreation Commission

CC:

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller
Jonathan Yeo, COO
Program and Services Committee
Finance Committee

From:

The leaders of Newton's Youth Athletic Programs

Subject: Fees for Grass Athletic Field Permits used by Newton's Youth Athletic Programs

We the leaders of Newton's Athletic Programs are writing this letter to:

1. **Reject the current proposal to charge "Per player fees" to youth athletic programs** without first addressing the specifics of **how maintenance currently funded directly by Soccer, Little League and Softball will be incorporated into the fee model**. Tier 2 fees cannot be set in a vacuum from all the other related inputs.
2. **Voice our concerns that the current structure to arrive at decisions regarding athletic fees and facilities does not give legitimate representation of the programs that are directly impacted**. The decision making process has been delegated to a three person sub-committee made up exclusively of members of the Park and Recreation Commission who were appointed, not to represent the athletic programs, but to provide ward level representation. Establishing a fee structure without the athletic programs having any voting privileges is literally "Taxation without representation".

Problem Summary

Since September 2019, five meetings have been held between Park, Recreation and Culture and Newton's Youth Athletic programs to discuss new fees for their use of grass fields. Newton's Youth programs that are "Tier 2" (100% residents) do not currently pay any fees for use of grass fields. They are charged \$50/hr for lights (with exceptions for Little League) and \$50/hr for turf field rental.

There have been two models presented, pay by hour or pay by player. After two years of discussions, **the models presented have not been adjusted to account for any feedback provided by the youth programs**. The proposed "pay by player" model is unchanged since it was first presented by youth soccer in 2019. The only budget analysis provided is an estimate of what each program will pay.

Unanswered Questions

It would be irresponsible to approve the new fee model without first addressing the following items that are still not accounted for.

1. **How does the model account for the approximately \$90,000 that youth programs are already paying directly to turf contractors for field maintenance?**
2. How does field use by NPS get accounted for? NPS is one of the largest users of municipal fields. With the new school schedule NPS is the sole user for many fields now Monday through Friday. Field availability for many youth programs has declined due to the 3:45 PM dismissal.
3. What is the actual cost to maintain each type of field (multi-purpose, Little League, Baseball, Softball)? If we don't know this, how can we establish equitable permit fees?
4. If the "pay by player" model is adopted, what impact does that have on the current charges for \$50/hr to rent turf fields? Each hour a player uses a turf field is one less hour on a grass field so this is a "double fee". Little League and Softball cannot rent turf fields so the charge only applies to some of the programs creating an equity problem. The Youth Soccer programs already pay \$100K per year to rent fields at Fessenden.
5. How do fees for lights align with the new model? Exactly what is the current fee structure (it's not published) and what should it be?
6. What should the rental fee for non-Newton groups (tier 4, 5) be to use grass fields and why are we even permitting grass fields to non-Newton groups? The hourly amount Newton currently charges is well below the actual cost to maintain the fields. Excessive use by non-Newton groups (such as for profit soccer clubs) of the football field at Highlands resulted in its quality deteriorating to the point of requiring it to be closed mid-season.
7. What enforcement will be done to ensure that field use is only done by permitted users? Youth programs continue to subsidize the dozens of adult games that take place weekly on both turf and grass fields.
8. How will PRC report on use of funds? There is currently no reporting on the use of the fees that are collected now from youth groups and non-Newton groups.

Background: Maintenance Currently Paid By Youth Programs

Multiple youth programs (Newton Girls Soccer, Newton Youth Soccer, Newton Little League & Newton Girls Softball) currently contract directly with Turf Management companies to maintain municipal fields that they use. **These contracts are a result of Newton's long standing inability to properly maintain fields and the youth programs' desire to improve field conditions for residents. Programs took the initiative to "pay their own maintenance fees"**. Over time, these practices should diminish as PRC increases both their budget and ability to achieve higher quality fields. In the short term however, the level of maintenance that is paid for directly is significantly higher than Newton is able to provide even with the recently increased maintenance budget. Newton simply does not have the funding to provide high quality fields at this time.

Proposal to Account for Premium Maintenance

With the new fees, programs that continue to maintain fields directly, will be “overpaying” for the fields they maintain. Through both their turf management contract and new fees. It’s in Newton’s best interest to develop a “win-win” model that enables programs to pay more for premium maintenance, but avoid “over paying”. Improved field quality is not only good for the athletic programs, but all residents who use Newton’s fields. With respect to soccer, the same fields are permitted out to NSHS, Girl’s Lacrosse as well as camps and adult use.

In order to enable programs to continue making additional payments for premium maintenance, we are proposing a model where programs that pay to maintain fields will get credits equal to the cost saved by Newton to do the equivalent work. In this model these groups will **PAY MORE** for field maintenance through both direct contracts and fees.

The table below demonstrates how this model would work for Youth Soccer.

	Current Model	Win-Win Model	Current Proposed Lose-Lose Model
1. Weeks Park Premium Maintenance	\$35,000	\$35,000	0
2. Tier 2 Fees paid by Youth Soccer	0	\$48,000	\$48,000
3. Fee Credit to Soccer	0	-\$19,250	
4. PRC Weeks “Standard” Maintenance	0	0	-\$19,250
Weeks Field Quality		Higher Quality	Lower Quality
Net Funds to Newton	\$35,000	\$63,750	\$28,750
1. Funds paid by Youth Soccer (NYS & NGS)			
2. Fees to be paid by youth soccer to Newton			
3. Credit for maintenance performed			
4. Cost for Newton to maintain Weeks if soccer does not			
Weeks Credit Calculation			
Total Acres Maintained	5.5		
Cost Per Acre	\$3,500		
Credit	\$19,250		
Tier 2 Fee Estimate, Youth Soccer			
Total Players	2400		
Seasons	2		
Fee per player	\$10		
Total Fees Paid	\$48,000		

In the win-win model, Newton's athletes benefit from higher quality fields. The net difference of the fee credit is off-set by the elimination of expense Newton would incur if they had to maintain the fields through their own budget.

In the lose-lose model, Newton pays for the maintenance AND residents get lower quality playing fields. The overall net benefit to Newton's residents is less than half the win-win model.

FAQ

How will the credits be determined?

PRC will determine the "expected cost of service" for each field type (Little league, multi-purpose, soft-ball, base-ball) and that value will be used to calculate the credit.

If Newton gives credits, doesn't that reduce the funds available for field maintenance?

No. The reduction in fee revenue is the same as the elimination of expenses for Newton so the net result is zero. With the additional funds, programs are essentially electing to "pay more fees". Residents benefit from higher quality fields.

What happens if the per player fee goes up?

Increases to the per player fee will have no impact on the fee credit.

What about programs that do their own maintenance using volunteers?

Little League and Softball do some of their own maintenance. Further analysis is required to account for this specific case. Programs that use multi-purpose fields are not reasonably able to do field maintenance with volunteers due to the scale of work required.

Isn't it better for Newton to do ALL field maintenance

The goal should be to move to this model. Today however, we have years of different arrangements that Youth programs have developed to solve their immediate problems with field quality that Newton has been unable to address. While they do not follow any standard, they have resulted in HIGHER QUALITY fields for our residents. That is a good thing.

There needs to be a transitional plan from where we are today to where we should be in the future.

Field Maintenance Paid & Performed by Youth Programs

Park	Infield Prep	Mow	Seed, Fert, etc.
Soccer			
Weeks Park (2 11v11, 2 7v7)			\$35,000
Sub-Totals			\$35,000
Soccer Total	\$35,000		
North LL			
Lyons Park		\$3,970	\$1,225
Cabot	\$4,600	\$3,970	\$1,225
Murphy (Albemarle)	\$4,600	\$3,970	\$1,225
Roche (Albemarle)	\$4,600		
Pierce	\$4,600		
Lower Falls (Hamilton)	\$4,600		
Sub-Totals	\$23,000	\$11,910	\$3,675
North LL Total	\$38,585		
SouthEast LL	No data available		
Newton Girls Softball			
Cole	\$4,500		\$750
Cold Spring	\$4,500		\$750
Emerson	\$4,500		\$750
Sub-Totals	\$ 13,500		\$ 2,250
Softball Total	\$ 15,750		
Grand Total	\$ 89,335		
All expenses per year			

Respectfully Submitted,

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President, Newton Youth Soccer

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Director & Past President, Newton Girls Lacrosse

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