

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.

All of us have the shared goal of working together to improve the condition of our fields. We are grateful for the many years of "time, treasure and talent" that so many people from our leagues have poured into the fields. We're excited to take another leap forward with significant capital investments and increased funds in our operating budget from the City as well as funding from fees, comparable to peer communities, from regular users.

The goal of enacting a fee structure is for the Department to have funding to perform more turf improvement work. We are knowingly setting the initial fee at a low rate to get us started and we know that this level of funding will not allow us to perform more work at every single field. If a group wants further work done on a particular field that would exceed what PRC will be investing, we will gratefully work with the group if it is willing to contribute additional funds to assist in the effort.

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".

We will continue to work closely with our leagues and continue to incorporate your ideas and needs in our decision making. Fees are set by Departments and we are committed to keeping the sport groups at the center of these discussions as we have for the last 18 months. We have worked closely with you to take input and assess potential options.

#### 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.

We have had many fruitful discussions with athletic group leaders to analyze different fee structures and to determine the most appropriate one. The Fields Committee was leaning toward recommending a pay-by-hour model but after listening to feedback, they now think a per-player fee is the better structure. The per-player rate is "unchanged" because the number of players in each league still has the same estimated participation level. The Department's budget data has been shared and discussed with the groups, and we have discussed what the target goal is to raise in funds to increase funding to be able to better maintain fields. Importantly, the Fields Committee meetings have not been only about fees but have also included discussion on field improvements. Every project in our 5-year strategic plan has support from a group to move forward such as Burr Elem., Oak Hill Middle, Albemarle, Forte, etc.

Importantly, the City has also significantly increased funding for fields maintenance in the PRC operating budget.

#### 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?

PRC has discussed with the leagues in many forums that we will work with the groups to ascertain how best to manage the work that groups have been doing and that this is why the fee structure is starting with a low initial rate. We are planning that PRC will be taking over some of the maintenance in the first year and some will initially stay with the leagues. We will work closely with you each step of the way and in subsequent years on specifically who is doing the maintenance work and at what levels/amounts/costs.

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

Athletics programs are an essential part of our community and the school's education plan; they are part of the City and funded by the City. There is no plan to transfer charge NPS for field use as we discussed at the last meeting. We are excited to be moving forward multiple projects across 6 parks to increase the number of multipurpose fields and installing new/replacing light systems to expand evening play availability.

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?

We know that every field every season has unique needs and thus unique costs. The cost to maintain grass might appear to be standard on a per blade basis, but we must factor in myriad variables that can impact the health and quality of grass including soil composition, soil compaction, field draining ability, hours of use, number of players per use, and the type of play. Another large cost impact factor is field irrigation. Irrigated grass comes with costs such as more frequent mowing, irrigation system repair and maintenance, and actual water costs. All of our rectangular fields are varied in size, as are our softball outfields and baseball outfields and infields. Rather than measure square footage of grass coverings on a field and measure these many variables to determine the cost for each specific field (which seems to be more appropriate for a per-hour fee), we found most groups preferred to instead implement the per-player fee. This is what a vast majority of the surrounding communities we surveyed prefer as well. In the submitted letter from the 7 signers, you note: "It's important that we take the time now to setup a structure that every program can endorse." A formula with so many variables seems near-impossible to get full group consensus on (and we note that no proposal has been submitted with 100% support to PRC in the 4 years since the topic came before the Commission). However, we vow to review any policy proposal that is put forward with the agreement of the Newton Tier 2 leagues, inclusive of all multipurpose and ballfield groups. In the meantime, we should move forward and implement this simple, straight-forward fee that is as equitable as we may be able to achieve given the many variables involved.

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.

Playing on synthetic turf is an attractive option for some and an hourly rate applies. (We know diamond field groups do not have a choice to play on turf fields as Newton doesn’t have any.) Turf fees were discussed last spring and there was no pushback from groups on the recommendation to increase the turf fees. If the groups want to include turf in their per player fee, then the cost will greatly increase and we will need to assess how turf time is allocated amongst the rectangular field groups. Likewise, if we were to eliminate the turf fee, we would allocate equal time to each rectangular field group, unless all groups preferred that turf time be assigned based on the number of participants each group has. If a recommendation with 100% buy-in from all rectangular groups is proposed for turf use/cost, PRC vows to review the proposal. We will, of course, weigh the proposal against the impact it may have on our ability to maintain the fields, as is clearly important to the groups and the City. We believe the \$50/hour rate is significantly lower than what other venues who rent turf to sport groups charge.

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?

Light fees are \$50 per hour as this funding will help with the costs of programming, operating, and maintaining them. With improvements moving forward, light systems will be specific to a single field, meaning a group using a field under the lights will be required to pay the light fee. This fee has been in place for years and is included in our Field Use Policy.

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.

Tier 4 groups can have as much as 64% of its users being Newton residents. We also host Tier 5 programs, some of which have full resident participation. (Tier 5 is essentially the same as Tier 3/4 except the business is set up as a for-profit entity.) Going forward, field time will only be provided to these groups and businesses if the time is available and if the field is deemed to be capable of handling the additional use.

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.

Part of the purpose of the new fee is to contribute toward a staff member(s) from Parks, Recreation and Culture to be more readily available for enforcement. The cost for this staffing is anticipated to be paid in part from the following sources: Tier 2-5 fees, revenue from our recreational programs (e.g., tennis), and possibly PRC’s operating budget. We have heard widespread support for this program and you have eloquently spotlighted the issue we have with non-permitted groups using the fields on weekends. I think we all agree that this is best done by Parks staff rather than NPD.

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.

We will track the use of the funds transparently. The Department is responsible for maintenance. We track the work that we do.

#### 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.

As our Department assumes more field work and expands our turf management work, the per-player fee will increase. This has been discussed a lot at the Fields Committee meetings.

#### 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...

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.

PRC appreciates that high school baseball fields must be maintained to a higher standard than a t-ball field and that there are other fields that are of particular importance to our sport leagues where they play their more competitive games and matches. PRC is committed to continuing to work closely with groups about their needs and factoring this into turf maintenance decisions. Our fields can be thought of like the Gath Pool or our recreational programs, a mix of revenues contribute to the overall budget. For example, for Gath Pool, we have some budgeted City funds and some membership/admittance fees. This is the practice of our peer communities as well.

For fields, we have a mix of Department funding from the City, field rental fees, and some other funds such as CPA money. We absolutely take community input into decision making on where/how much to allocate resources. We do not want a fee structure where a league does "more work" as a donation on

their preferred field and then asks for an abatement or credit from their fees as this results in another field having less funding and thus work deferred.

#### 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.

As has been stated in the above responses, we simply do not support a “credit system;” this is not the direction the Department plans to go in. Each field is unique, and each season is unique. We do not have any standard and equal fields, with the exception of the 3 synthetic turf fields. We are willing to work with groups who wish to donate further funds for the purpose of additional improvement work.

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

We are proposing a transitional plan right now: a low initial fee in the first year while the Department begins to take on grass work that has been handled by funding from the leagues via private agreements between sport groups and contractors. We truly appreciate your continued contributions to the discussion and decision making and your thinking and proposing alternative options. We are listening and we are thinking carefully about all these suggestions. In the end, PRC is dedicated to all the many fields and all the many users of them. We are responsible for every field, ones that groups sometimes use and others they don't. We are also responsible for every field the Soccer leagues use, not just the one that Soccer has so generously and lovingly invested additional funds toward (Weeks). We will continue to assess proposals and we trust that you understand that we have a citywide perspective, for all players and all fields, and an important consideration is how alternative proposals help our overriding goal of tending to all fields.