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CITY OF LOS ANGELES
Department of Recreation and Parks

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TO: BOARD OF RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSIONERS

FROM: ELLEN OPPENHEIM, General Manager
Department of Recreation and Parks *Margie Matthews for*

SUBJECT: MUNICIPAL SPORTS SOCCER -- PERMITS AND FIELD USAGE

The Department's Municipal Sports Section recently evaluated their soccer field use data for 2001, which indicates an overall increase in the demand for soccer play that exceeds current field availability. To effectively deal with the demand versus availability issues, the Municipal Sports Section is currently exploring the option of creating a Soccer Task Force to develop a citywide soccer policy with an emphasis on providing the best soccer playing fields and programs for youth and adults. In order to achieve this goal, staff intends to implement a system to address three key issues: the development of playing fields of the best quality by pursuing excellence in soccer field re-conditioning and maintenance; investigation of effective utilization and control of multipurpose athletic fields, designated soccer fields, and stadiums; and, the establishment of regional Municipal Sports Soccer Advisory Boards.

The Municipal Sports Section issues permits for approximately 94 recreation facilities providing field use for adult and youth agency-operated sports programs. Within the 94 recreation facilities, there are approximately 98 multi-purpose fields, 60 multi-use ball diamonds, 38 soccer fields (which include 3 soccer stadiums) and 2 regulation baseball diamonds.

Current field use statistics are as follows; however, the figures do not account for region organized play at the recreation centers or for agencies not permitted by the Municipal Sports Section:

- 48 organizations utilize 38 soccer fields, which comprise approximately 1,205 teams total, and more than 24,500 individuals.
- Approximately 36% of the players are adults and 64% are youth.

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- Permitted groups per Region:

Region	No. of Agencies	No. of Soccer Fields	Estimated No. of participants
Griffith-Metro	24	8	5,500
Pacific	3	2	660
Valley	21	28	18,500
ALL	48	38	24,660

During peak usage (Monday through Friday from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) the demand for soccer fields are highest in the Valley and Griffith-Metro Regions, averaging 650 individuals per field for year round usage.

There is increasing demand for new agency soccer permits and the extension of existing agency permits due to an increased interest in the sport and expansion of current programs. The Valley permitting office reports that they turn away approximately 8% of all soccer permit applicants and the Griffith-Metro permitting office turns away approximately 45% of all soccer permit applicants due to lack of field availability.

The increased demand for soccer venues and the periodic closures of the existing 38 soccer fields for restoration or repair has initiated an increase in the number of requests to use multi-purpose fields at recreation facilities citywide. In most cases, agency permitting at recreation centers is temporary and originates from members of the community. However, issues involving neighborhood sovereignty have hampered permitting efforts. Community concerns such as an increased need for parking, increased noise, diminishing turf, and other problems associated with increased usage have been expressed. Presently, Brand Park, Penmar, Queen Anne, Costello, Pan Pacific, Bellevue, Van Ness, Jim Gilliam, Pecan, Downey, and Toberman Recreation Centers have reported neighborhood sovereignty issues and are now periodically monitored by the Municipal Sports staff and the Park Rangers.

The Valley and Griffith-Metro Region soccer fields are currently permitted beyond their maximum play tolerances recommended by the grounds maintenance staff responsible for the restoration and maintenance of the turf. As the demand for soccer venues continues to grow, the Department must find creative and acceptable ways to address these challenges. The Municipal Sports Section is considering the implementation of the following practices to mitigate the overuse of the existing fields and improve turf conditions:

- New soccer field projects should be given the highest priority and support. Currently, new soccer fields are planned for the Pacific Region at the Field of Dreams Complex in San Pedro and in the Valley Region at Hansen Dam.
- The addition of lights at the John Ferraro Fields in Griffith Park will help extend the time of play; similar projects should be considered for other unlighted facilities.
- Explore the possibility of using synthetic surfaces (artificial turf) for soccer fields, which would reduce the need for continued maintenance while extending the time of field play.
- Agencies should be allowed no more than 9 months of continual permitting or two 5-month permits, in combination with the following turf refurbishment programs:
 - Extend the health of the turf by rotating fields - taking one to three fields out of play for a minimum of 30 days. The initial phase of this program is now in effect in the Valley Region at the Balboa and Whitsett Complex.
 - Develop additional limited field use arrangements. A single field complex such as the Griffith Soccer Stadium is experimenting with an agreement between the facility caretakers and the Griffith-Metro permitting office to keep the field turf in premier condition by limiting agencies to a maximum of 4 days of use each week. The three days of rest and maintenance has kept the turf in good condition with 90% coverage.

Although turf management procedures provide noticeable improvement to the quality of the playing surfaces, the drawback to any turf refurbishment and soccer field rotation program is that it inhibits, rather than provides for, increased usage. This would also put the Municipal Sports Section staff in the position of issuing additional soccer permits for recreation center multipurpose fields to accommodate soccer programs displaced from fields under renovation. This would exacerbate a situation that is already sensitive for communities adjacent to many of our recreation centers.

While the implementation of the above practices will not totally address the tremendous demand for soccer in Los Angeles, they provide affirmative steps toward maintaining high quality fields and balancing the tricky issue of field availability.

This Informational Board Report was prepared by Charles Singer, Municipal Sports Section.