



Edwin M. Lee, Mayor
Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager

To: San Francisco Recreation and Park Commission

From: Phil Ginsburg, General Manager
Dana Ketcham, Director of Permits and Property Management

Date: May 18, 2016

Subject: Overview of San Francisco Youth Soccer

BACKGROUND

At the March 2016 Recreation and Park Commission (the “Commission”) meeting, several speakers came forward during public comment to express concerns about the status of the permitting of fields for youth soccer teams in San Francisco. At the meeting, Commission President Mark Buell asked Department staff to prepare a memo to the Commission discussing the permitting of youth soccer teams and addressing the specific concerns raised in the meeting.

In May 2007, the Commission authorized the Department to adopt a Field Allocation Policy which includes standards for allocating fields and for when to authorize new programs. The policy, which was last amended in 2010, was first developed following numerous public meetings, presentations to the Recreation and Park Commission and a presentation to a Joint SFUSD Board/Board of Supervisors Committee meeting. (The Field Allocation Policy is attached as Exhibit A.) Staff has continued to follow those policies with the goal of providing field access to all San Francisco residents. Our Department is proud of its efforts to give more kids an opportunity to play. Since the spring of 2009, participation in youth soccer has doubled. We have added over 300 new teams and 5000 new youth players. Overall, youth soccer in San Francisco now touches 12,000 kids a year, and we are accommodating approximately 650 youth teams in the spring and over 900 teams in the fall. Baseball and other sports have seen similar increases. Because of permit system changes implemented since 2009 and because of our partnership with the City Fields Foundation and the youth soccer community, we have been able to add nearly 90,000 hours of annual play and practice time to our field capacity.

Despite the extra field capacity created, demand continues to outpace our athletic field supply. Leagues and clubs continue to add new teams, and existing teams are seeking additional hours of field time for practices and games. We have no *new* field projects in the pipeline, and next fall we will actually see a short-term decrease in field capacity because of some long -planned field renewals that are expected to





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improve field conditions but not increase hours of play. Unrestrained demand has increased tensions between our Department and some soccer organizations.

Youth soccer's recent surge has also resulted in some internal growing pains between soccer organizations. While youth soccer was at one time made up of individually run recreational teams or small clubs managing a few competitive teams, over the past seven years "big clubs" have emerged. In 2009, there were approximately 55 teams in competitive clubs with the largest two clubs, Mission and Viking, having 22 and 14 teams, respectively. In 2016, approximately 276 teams were in competitive clubs with several clubs managing over 50 affiliated teams. These clubs, many of which charge \$1000 or more per player have begun to compete for talent. Frequent conflicts over practice time, field allocations, and the "right to travel" have emerged between clubs who want to advertise that they offer more than other clubs.

Historically, the Department has provided fields to our partner leagues, San Francisco Youth Soccer League (SFYS) and Mission League (Mission) and not directly to teams or clubs. Big clubs now want more direct control over fields. With competitive and financial pressures on the rise, governance battles and political posturing by the grown-ups have stolen focus from youth soccer's core constituency; our kids. While SFRPD has no authority or control over SFYS internal matters, we have offered our partnership in identifying best practices to ensure youth access to soccer regardless of skill, neighborhood or ability to pay.

This memorandum offers a detailed and comprehensive overview of youth soccer in San Francisco and will cover the following topics:

- A. Current SF Youth Soccer Programs and Differences Between Leagues and Clubs**
- B. Department Process for Allocating Fields**
- C. Unique Challenges Associated with Competitive Travel Soccer**
- D. Response to Specific Allegations of "Unfairness" Raised in March 2016 Commission Meeting**
- E. Moving Forward – Developing Best Practices for Youth Soccer Administration**





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DISCUSSION

A. Current SF Youth Soccer Programs and Differences Between Leagues, Clubs and Teams

There are a variety of programs available in San Francisco for youth to participate in soccer games using San Francisco Recreation and Park Department fields. Most programs are run by leagues, clubs and teams.

- **Leagues:** Leagues provide the overall structure for youth soccer. Leagues register and process teams; they create and administer schedules; set rules; ensure teams meet SF residency requirements; set minimum training requirements for coaches and process background checks; and arrange for referees and field monitors. There are several different types of leagues:
 - **School Based Leagues:** School based leagues consist of teams formed at the school officially through the school rather than individual parents signing their children up for a league. There are four types of school based leagues offered in San Francisco:
 - **High School Leagues:** Run by SFUSD or private schools. Practices and games are weekdays (except in winter there are weekend games). Each school has one Varsity and may have a JV team. Some play in Fall, some in Winter and some in Spring. High School leagues are increasingly moving to the winter.
 - **Middle School Leagues:** Run by SFUSD and private schools. Practices and games are weekdays. Each school usually has no more than one boys and one girls team. Boys play in the fall and girls play in the spring.
 - **Bay Area Scores:** This school-based program combines soccer and literacy and serves kids who cannot participate in more traditional youth soccer leagues because they do not have the resources to get to practices. All games are at a central location on Saturdays. Teams are in grades 3 through Middle School. This relatively new program started over 10 years ago that the Department strongly supports.
 - **CYO Soccer:** Run by Catholic Youth Organization. Practices are weekday and games are weekends. Teams in grades 3 through 8 and schools may have more than one team from a particular school. Boys play in fall and girls play in Winter.





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- **Youth Soccer Leagues:** Youth soccer leagues are open to any San Francisco resident child. Locally, participation in leagues is administered by three¹ different organizations: San Francisco Youth Soccer (SFYS), Mission Soccer League (Mission) and Viking Microsoccer. There are four different programs offered by them:
 - **Micro Soccer:** This is for players ages 7 and under. Small fields and small sided games. Only 6 games a season. This league has been historically run by Viking Soccer Club.
 - **Recreational Soccer:** This is for players ages 6 to 14. Most of these teams are school or neighborhood based. Rules exist to guarantee minimum playing time per player and no running up the score. Most of these teams have volunteer coaches but some have paid coaches or are part of soccer clubs. These are all SF based teams and schedules are run by SF based leagues (SFYS in fall and spring and Mission in the summer).
 - **Prep League:** This is for players 7 to 14 who want a more intense level of soccer. Teams are generally formed by tryout but some of the teams are school or community based. Most of these teams have paid coaches and are part of clubs. These are all SF based teams and schedules are run by SF based leagues (SFYS in fall and spring and Mission in the summer)
 - **Regional Travel Leagues:** This is for players 9 to 18 who want a more competitive experience. Travel teams play other teams from outside SF and games are scheduled by regional (non-SF based) organizations, most typically **California Youth Soccer Association's Cal North Soccer League (CCSL)** or **US Club Soccer's Northern California Premier Soccer League (NorCal)** . Historically, teams wishing to play at this level must have earned the right to travel based on their competitive results in the SF-based Prep Leagues. Teams are registered either by SFYS or Mission but schedules are run by administrators outside of San Francisco.

Clubs and Teams: Leagues are comprised of teams that are either independent or organized and administered by clubs.² Clubs form and manage teams within their club structure and enter them into leagues. Clubs typically hold tryouts and players are accepted and placed on teams within their club based on age and ability. Several clubs in San Francisco provide team formation in underserved areas and combine it with other youth services (Mission, Jamestown, Good Sam). Clubs often run tournaments, camps and clinics. While many independent teams still exist, over the past five years here has been a phenomenal growth in the number of teams

¹ San Francisco Police Activity League (SFPAL) ran a spring league until 2015.

² Teams can be school-based, neighborhood-based, community-organization based or club based. Teams can also be formed with individual or groups of individual players.





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participating as part of soccer clubs. Exhibit B shows this growth and Exhibit C shows the number of clubs and the variety of teams that they have.³

B. Department Process for Allocating Fields

The Department allocates fields by season: Fall (Sept-Nov), Winter (Dec-Feb), Spring (March-May) and Summer (June-August). All leagues and programs desiring fields must submit their requests using an online form three months prior to each season's start and based on actual numbers of registered players and teams. Deadlines for submissions are on SFRPD's website and have been the same since 2009. By receiving all applications at the same time, the Department is able to review all requests simultaneously for maximum field efficiency and timeliness.

Once the Department receives the requests, it follows the Commission's Field Allocation Policy Under this policy, school based programs and youth programs meeting "Approved Public Benefit Standards" (see below) receive first priority. Allocations are available to all applicants for transparency.

In 2008, the Board of Supervisors amended the Park Code to add an "Approved Public Benefit" standard to the existing fee structure for athletic fields. The legislation was intended to allow organizations that meet an "Approved Public Benefit" status to use fields at a reduced cost. For youth, the cost is zero and for adults the cost is \$27 per hour (compared to the standard fee of \$75 per hour). Approved public benefit organizations also receive priorities over field allocations. In 2008 the Rec and Park Commission adopted the Department's policy for meeting the Approved Public Benefit Standard. The policy was amended in 2010 and currently provides as follows:

- **Not Generating Income:** The Applicant must be able to demonstrate that the program organizers are volunteers and that they (and their family members) are not making any money from organizing their proposed program. In addition, applicants must demonstrate that the programs are not generating profits that are used to fund other aspects of the organizations' operations or to make charitable donations. Factors to be considered:
 - Who is receiving compensation in connection with the program? Are directors and officers all volunteers? Programs administered or coordinated by paid coaches or administrators will be presumed not to meet this standard.
 - Is the program operating at a relative breakeven and what is the program doing with any excess revenues?

³ Nomenclature can be confusing. Mission serves as both a league and club. Viking Club is a club and also is the league administering microsoccer.





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- Has the program in the past followed SFRPD requirements including those regarding field clean-up, recognizing rainout closures, returning unused fields in a timely manner?
- **Benefiting Residents:** At least 90% of the participants in each program must be San Francisco Residents.
 - If the program also uses fields outside San Francisco in a proportion at least equal to the percentage of non San Francisco residents, the program will be eligible for the not for profit rate.
 - Is the program open to all in San Francisco and does it provide scholarships for those who cannot afford to pay?
 - Are participants limited to participating on one team per year?
 - Is there a nonbiased method for determining who will participate (first come, first serve, lottery)?

Virtually all of our youth field users meet the Approved Public Benefit Standards and a few of our adult field users meet the standard. (A list of approved public benefit recipients is attached as Exhibit D.)

Because our youth leagues receive fields for no cost and demand is so high, the Department has developed a method for ensuring that we only provide the fields needed to accommodate the number of teams registered. For youth leagues, fields are allocated as follows:

- **Game Fields:** We require every league to provide us with a list of registered teams (including rosters). We then provide the following:
 - Game Fields (weekends): For every 2 teams in an age group we provide 1 field
 - Game fields are allocated between the various leagues and programs to ensure equal balance of preferred and less preferred fields (synthetic vs grass) and days (Saturdays vs Sundays)
- **Practice Fields:** Each team individually submits a practice request to RPD and practice fields are allocated based on age and type of team. Amount of fields allocated is based on demand and available space with teams getting up to 2 practices per week. Historically, we have provided 2 practices per week to soccer teams ages 12 and older and to younger teams playing at a more competitive level. In the Spring of 2016, due to increased demand the Department was only able to provide 2 practices to older teams.





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Once we have accommodated youth teams, we allocate fields to adult programs. On weekdays, depending on youth schedules, adult allocations begin between 6:30pm and 7pm. On weekends, adults are scheduled around youth competition. Adult demand is high and we are often not able to accommodate all requests.

The 2008/2010 Field Allocation Policy provides a standard for the Department to evaluate requests for new athletic leagues or programs.⁴ The Field Allocation Policy provides that the Department may only allocate fields to new leagues and programs if two conditions are met: (1) the program serves a need not served by other programs, and (2) there is adequate field space or RPD can cut another program.⁵

The Department is careful about approving fields for new programs and leagues due to the limitations on fields and the desire to ensure high-quality stable recreation programs to the public. Factors include:

- Developing new programs takes considerable investment in training, equipment and insurance by the organizer, as well as appropriate care for our fields
- Is the proposed new program truly offering a different opportunity to a new group of players or will its formation undermine an existing program in good standing?
- Any new program must start slowly as they must demonstrate their ability to operate a program that meets all required rules.

⁴ The implementation of this policy was described in detail to the Commission in a Staff Report dated August 13, 2012 relating to the appeal of a denial of a permit by D1 Premier Soccer League. The Commission did not hear the appeal as it was withdrawn by the applicant on the day of the hearing.

⁵ Examples of programs that have been approved or denied for fields under this policy include:

- Bay Area Scores (program offering soccer and literacy to public school youth)- Accommodated
- Proposed new competitive baseball league – denied – we already have 3 leagues
- Girls softball and baseball – accommodated in the spring because it's a new sport
- Touch rugby – accommodated during certain seasons because it is a new sport, based on availability
- Cricket- Approved because it is a new sport during certain times of the year, based on availability
- Saturday and Sunday Night Adult Soccer Leagues at Crocker – approved as there was new capacity due to lighted fields
- Pick Up Adult Soccer – accommodated as it is a new way of allowing participants to play (they don't have to commit to a team and play every week) and there was availability
- Sunday Spanish speaking soccer league - accommodated as it serves a different demographic group and there was capacity at the field (Youngblood Coleman)
- Top Soccer (soccer for youth with disabilities) – Accommodated as it serves a different demographic group.
- New Adult Evening Bocce, Kickball and Grass Volleyball Leagues – approved as they don't use athletic fields.
- New Adult Soccer Leagues- approved in the evenings (after 7 pm) due to the increase in the number of lighted soccer fields
- New Adult Softball Leagues –denied as there is already an existing league and there is no capacity
- Baseball program for youth with disabilities – accommodated by more tightly scheduling existing baseball programs
- New microsoccer program – Denied as we have a microsoccer program and coaches can enter their teams into that program.





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C. Unique Challenges Associated with Travel League Soccer

As noted above, travel soccer is currently available for players 9 to 18 who want a more competitive experience.⁶ Travel teams play other teams from outside SF and games are scheduled by regional (non-SF based) organizations, most typically Central Coast Section League (CCSL) or NORCAL. Historically, teams wishing to play at this level must have earned the right to travel based on their competitive results in the SF-based Prep Leagues. Teams are registered either by SFYS or Mission but schedules are run by administrators outside of San Francisco. Overall, Travel Teams place significantly more pressure on existing field resources than non-travel teams do and present several administrative challenges:

- **Travel League Imbalance of Home and Away Games:** Ideally travel play should not result in increased use of fields because teams alternate playing home and away games. However, schedules are often “imbalanced” meaning that some weekends up to 80% of SF travel teams might have home games while the next weekend only 20% might have home games. This requires RPD to allocate extra fields to travel teams or risk there being no available home field.
- **Multiple Games in One Weekend:** Some of the travel leagues schedule multiple games in a weekend. RPD does not have adequate fields to accommodate a team playing more than one game in a weekend.
- **Saturday vs Sunday Games:** In order to accommodate the growth of youth teams, RPD now allocates game fields on both Saturdays and Sundays. The CCSL travel league has worked to balance games between those days but NORCAL only schedules games on Saturdays. As travel teams grow (particularly within NORCAL), recreational teams could be forced to play Sundays to accommodate travel schedules.
- **Other Play:** Some travel teams want to play in other tournaments or Cups during league play weekends. This results in the need to reschedule games or double up games in one weekend. This can be due to requests from both SF teams and their non SF opponents. In addition there is a culture of “rescheduling for convenience” due to coaching or other conflicts.
- **Decentralized Organization:** Travel League play creates extra pressure on availability of fields since play is not scheduled by an SF-based organization that can ensure that each weekend games are scheduled back to back on fields. Travel leagues provide game days (not times) and

⁶ Note there is discussion among the soccer groups to have travel soccer extend to younger age groups.





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teams set their own game times and there is a history of field allocation inefficiencies associated with scheduling and rescheduling game times.

- **Nonresidents:** Travel teams desire to be the best team possible and seek to draw in strong nonresident players to make the team better. San Francisco does not have enough fields to accommodate nonresidents on its teams.

Given the above challenges, San Francisco has had a long history of struggling with how to accommodate Travel League Soccer play. The Department's goals have always been to ensure access to fields to SF residents in a fair and equitable way. Since 2007 the Department has sought creative solutions to allow for travel play and been flexible in responding to changes and requests from the SF Youth Leagues and Clubs.

- **Pre 2007 -- No Fields for Travel Teams:** Prior to 2007, travel teams did not receive game fields at all in advance. They had to purchase fields at the last minute using the weekly walk up window⁷. They did not know if they had a field until 10 days prior to any weekend game.
- **2007 -- Travel Teams First Provided with Fields:** In 2007, the Department began to provide game fields for travel teams. Fields were allocated based on number of teams. At this point there were about 40 teams. In order to accommodate the inefficiencies in scheduling travel teams, travel teams needed to be allocated more fields per weekend than SF playing teams (about 1.4 times higher). The number of fields reserved for walk up window play was reduced from 20% to 3% and Travel teams were told that they could no longer use the walk up window for game fields. Travel teams were extremely happy with this solution.
- **Fall 2008 -- Problems with Travel Teams Developed:** Beginning in 2008, a number of issues arose with the allocation of fields to travel programs:
 - Some teams from outside SF (Marin and Daly City) were registering in SF Leagues to obtain access to SF fields
 - Travel teams were not meeting residency requirements.
 - Other cities did not provide travel fields so players came to San Francisco to play (Daly City for instance)

⁷ RPD has two ways of allocating fields. The first is based on quarterly applications by leagues and programs where we provide game fields to accommodate league play. Most of the fields are allocated in this way. The other way is through the walk up window which allows SF residents to purchase a permit for use of a field 2 weeks prior to the date of use. Currently the walk up window is intended for occasional casual play and not for league use as availability varies.





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- Coaches desired the strongest possible team and recruited players from outside SF if they were strongest
 - Number of travel teams grew exponentially with many coaches wanting to say that they were a travel team.
 - Increasing imbalance between home and away games was recognized and need to limit number of travel teams developed by the leagues.
- **Spring 2008 - New Travel Team Rules Established:** In 2008, the Approved Public Benefit Program was adopted with a focus on serving San Francisco residents. The Department worked closely with the soccer community to develop a program that would offer competitive opportunities to San Francisco kids. The following program was adopted:
 - Mission League and SFYS (Viking Club) would each organize one travel team per age group/gender. Teams must be determined based on competitive tryout to allow the best kids in San Francisco this opportunity and scholarships must be available so affordability was not an issue.
 - Travel teams limited to 2 nonresidents (later expanded to 4 for older teams)
 - RPD would support these teams with the extra fields needed since they were open to all
 - Prep League created so that teams who wanted to play competitively had an option to play in San Francisco (previously there was only recreational and travel and no option between).
 - Existing travel teams were grandfathered if they met residency requirements so that teams did not have to break apart.
 - U15 and up teams could freely travel as there was no available San Francisco based league for their play.
 - **2012-2013 - Pressure to Expand Travel Opportunities:** The above program was in place for four years. However, there was growing sentiment that two travel teams in each age group was too limited and that individual teams that did well in the Prep League should earn the right to travel. In addition, new clubs began to form and they too wanted the right to sponsor their own travel teams. A variety of meetings were held by the leagues with the various clubs and the leagues proposed a new model where individual teams could earn the right to travel based on their record in the Prep League. A key component of this from the Department's point of view was that CCSL (the only significant travel league at that time) had developed a computer model that could balance home and away games (so that extra fields would not have to be allocated to travel teams). Based on recommendations from Mission, SFYS and SFPAL (the three leagues), the Department agreed to support the following new model for travel play:





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- Teams who won the Fall Prep league would be eligible to earn the right to travel the next fall. A committee representing each of the leagues was created to review travel applications.⁸ They would review the team's record in Fall Prep League and their tournament record (which would show how the team did against other travel teams). A decision to allow a team to travel had to be unanimous. Teams who did not win Fall Prep could also apply if they could demonstrate that there was no remaining competition in Prep and if they had a sufficient tournament record.
 - The process for applications to travel was on the SFYS website (and has been since the new policy was adopted) and repeated meetings were held with all teams and clubs. Here is the link: <http://www.sfyouthsoccer.com/sf-rules-of-travel-play.html>
 - Travel teams received two practice fields per team per week for all ages.
 - Travel only started at the U10 age to avoid putting too much pressure on younger children
 - Clubs were told that to be eligible for this expanded game and travel fields allocations, they must follow abide by all practice field permits and follow all rules including not using the walk up window for extra nonleague play (so that it would be available for other residents).
- **March 2014 - Norcal Travel Play First Allowed:** Due to changes in the travel soccer world outside of San Francisco, a new travel league, NorCal, had developed that was becoming increasingly popular with many of the best teams. However, Norcal did not balance games or provide a way to verify rosters to ensure teams met SF residency rules. The travel policy was amended to allow teams to play Norcal on a limited basis (but only if CCSL no longer had a division that was competitive for them) as the Department assessed the ability of Norcal league to:
 - Balance home and away games and Saturday and Sunday games
 - Provide a method to verify rosters to ensure that kids are SF residents and not playing on more than one team.
- **2014 – Present -- Current Travel Policy:** There have been regular meetings between the leagues and clubs to discuss issues. Following the meetings, the leagues meet with the Department to discuss their requested changes and the Department has worked to accommodate them:

⁸ Rec and Park was not a voting member of the committee and only oversaw it to try to be sure the Committee was being consistent and fair to everyone and to mediate if there was a deadlock.





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- RPD supported the leagues decision starting Fall 2015 to expand Norcal play as Norcal committed to address the balance and resident verification issues. However, Norcal has not fulfilled its commitment and this remains a challenge.
- RPD supported the Leagues request to move the tryouts to January.
- **Proposed Fall 2016 changes:** There are several issues converging to make Fall 2016 particular challenging:
 - US Soccer changed the ages and field sizes for teams creating a great deal of change for everyone. The Department does not know how this will impact team numbers. In addition, numerous fields will need to be adapted to accommodate new fields sizes.
 - The West Sunset complex will be closed this fall and it accommodates a large number of games. In addition, Franklin will be closed for the month of September and as soon as it closes Garfield will be closed.
 - The youth soccer organizations have been undergoing considerable turmoil and corporate governance issues.

Since 2009, the Department's policies for travel league play have evolved to address changes in the soccer community while continuing to focus on the Department's main concerns with travel play: nonresident participation and scheduling issues. For nonresident issues, the Department believes that its approach of limiting nonresidents to 2 for younger teams and 4 for older teams has worked and its method of residency verification through the leagues has been effective. However, NORCAL does not have a process for verifying rosters. As for the scheduling issues, the Department's approach has evolved. Initially the Department's approach was to limit the number of travel teams but provide additional allocation of fields to cover the imbalance in scheduling. However, since 2014 when CCSL developed a program to balance game schedules, the Department has changed its approach. The Department provides travel teams with the same number of game fields as recreational and prep teams (one game for every two teams) and then it is up to the leagues to balance the schedule. If the schedule is not balanced, the clubs or teams will have to find alternative fields or play the game away (at the opponents' field assuming they have additional capacity).

The newest challenge is the increasing desire of certain clubs to play Norcal which has not yet been able to balance schedules like CCSL. If there is an imbalance, it will mean that teams will need to play more games away (assuming that their opponent has adequate fields) or find other non SFRPD fields. The Department's concern is that families who sign up for these programs understand that risk and that the Clubs do not blame the lack of available fields on the Department. The Department is further concerned that teams with fewer financial resources will be disadvantaged. We have asked the leagues to come





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back to us with a recommendation for how to best communicate this risk to families and address these issues.

D. Response to Specific Allegations of “Unfairness” Raised in March 2016 Commission Meeting

During public comment at the March 2016 Commission meeting, some specific allegations about the fairness of Department policies were articulated. At the Commission’s request, we respond and offer context about those specific allegations below:

- **Alleged Unfair Denial of Field Access for “SF Glens Black” Girls Team**

One speaker commented that the Glens Girls Black team was not provided with fields even though it was a very successful travel team and it had children of public servants on the team.

Context: In the Fall of 2012, the Glens Black Girls team finished 3rd in the Prep league with a 7-2 record and therefore was not eligible to travel. It chose to travel anyway and informed the leagues that they would find their own fields for games and practices outside of our jurisdiction. Under the travel policies adopted by the leagues, the team was told that if it wanted to return and receive San Francisco fields it would have to come back and play in the prep league for a year and earn the right to travel the same as any other team. (The leagues did not want to provide teams that could buy fields or had special access to fields to be treated differently than any other team in SF.) This spring the team entered the U15 age group. Since all U15 teams travel (there is no prep league), the team has been allocated San Francisco fields.

- **Alleged Unfair Right to Travel For Newly Formed “Elite” Club Teams**

One speaker spoke about the formation of the SF Elite Club and questioned how it was allowed to have a travel team and did not first earn the right to travel by first winning the Prep league.

Context: About 18 months ago – a number of the clubs (Glens, Evolution, Viking, and SF United) held discussions about joining together to form SF Elite with the goal of it being a premier program where the best players could play and get the highest level of coaching and exposure. The Department had no role in the development of this program. The program is affiliated with USF and the Earthquakes. The goal was to have it recognized as a US Soccer Development Academy Club which requires an application to and approval by the US Soccer Federation. The best ranked teams in a number of age groups (from a variety of different clubs) moved to the SF Elite program for the Fall of 2015 and changed their team





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name to SF Elite. Travel slots were earned by the individual teams transferring to the new jointly formed premier club under their own agreement.

At some point there was a “falling out” between the clubs over control of the SF Elite Program with some clubs wanting to start their own Development Academy Club. A number of the founding clubs withdrew from participation. In December 2015 the US Soccer Development Academy chose SF Elite to be its representative club and not the other clubs. This increased the tension between the various clubs and their leadership.

- **Alleged Unfair Sanctions for Permit Violations**

Speakers questioned the Department’s policy of imposing sanctions on teams that violate their permits and/or league rules applicable to soccer clubs.

Context: The Department provides equal access to fields for all teams based on the structure set forth above. Teams that choose not to follow the rules can create inequity and tension within the soccer community. Below is a description of the typical types of permit and league rule violations.

- **Practicing Without a Permit:** Certain clubs allow their teams to practice on fields without a permit. Our fields are already very crowded with as many as 4 teams sharing a single pitch. Bringing a 5th team on the pitch without a permit is too much and unfair to the teams who are sharing a small space. We have also had problems with soccer teams trying to practice on the fringes of baseball outfields (during games) creating safety issues and user conflicts.
- **Combining or Transferring Practices:** Certain clubs will combine two teams’ practices to offer an extra practice per week. This raises overcrowding and fairness issues – particularly for independent volunteer coached teams that don’t have the ability to cluster additional practices. Clubs have also tried to transfer practices from one team to another giving their more competitive teams more practices or better field space. This creates similar concerns.
- **Use of Walk Up Window for Weekend Games:** As described above, RPD has two ways of allocating fields. The first is based on quarterly applications by leagues and programs where the Department provides game fields to accommodate league play. Most of the fields are allocated in this way. A small number of our fields are reserved to cover emergency closures and to provide non-league public access to fields. Through our “walk-up” window, SF residents may purchase a permit for use of a field two weeks prior to the date of use. These fields are not intended to be used by Clubs or for league play. Clubs have attempted to end-run field allocation rules by asking individual SF





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residents affiliated with their program to surreptitiously book extra fields for the club through this process.

Sanctions for Violations: When the Department learns about a violation, we reach out to the Club and educate its representatives about the rule and the policy rationale behind it. This typically resolves the issues. However, two clubs have a history of repeat violations and sanctions were imposed.⁹

- **Alleged Unfair Denial of Approved Public Benefit Application**

A representative from the Evolution Club commented that it was unfair he was denied an Approved Public Benefit status.

Context: Since the Evolution Program Director was a paid soccer coach running a program, the Department explained that he would not be eligible for Approved Public Benefit even if he offered a “free clinic” for a few weeks. The “free clinic” was deemed inefficient to grant “approved public benefit” status

- **Alleged “Secret Lottery”**

A Glen’s representative made allegations about an unfair secret lottery.

Context: The Department has always used a lottery when two applicants have an identical field request. In this case, the identical field request was for club tryouts on the same day. The Department disclosed in advance that we would use a lottery to determine field priority. The “secret lottery” allegation was made by a representative of the Club that did not get first priority through the lottery in that instance. Going forward, the Department will allow any interested parties to witness the lottery when one is warranted to resolve identical field requests.

⁹ Evolution (now part of Glens/Evolution) teams have often been reported to practice on fields without permits and to be moving younger teams to more desirable fields where they were not eligible to practice. Violations continued despite education and warnings. As a sanction, Evolution teams were moved to lower practice priority and required to post on their website the days and times of each teams’ practices. (The Evolution Club failed to comply with the posting requirement in Spring 2016.) SF Seals have had a history of permit violations and individuals affiliated with the clubs’ teams using the walk up window to purchase extra game fields. Last spring, a Seals team that failed to meet the league registration deadline signed up to play in Norcal, a regional league with no assigned local fields (and attempted to purchase all fields through the walk-up window). The team’s parents were upset that the team did not have game fields. The Department held a series of meetings with the Seals and parents and the Director of the Seals signed a letter committing to stop that practice.





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- **Alleged Unfair Allocation of Summer Camp Fields**

A Glen's representative expressed concerns about the allocation of summer camp fields and that the Glens Club did not get enough space at Beach Chalet compared to the Viking Club for its summer camps.

Context: For summer camp allocations, the Department attempts to accommodate every group that requests field space. When conflicting field requests arise for camps, the Department provides some preference based on history (returning programs in good standing continue to get fields at the same location). The Glens and Vikings have historically used a combination of fields at South Sunset and West Sunset.

For the first time this year, Beach Chalet is available for summer camps following its renovation. However, West Sunset is scheduled to be closed starting in July for renovation and South Sunset will not be available for soccer camps at all because of an SFPUC construction project and because RPD baseball camps need to move from West Sunset to South Sunset. The Glens requested 5 weeks for summer camp for 75 participants. They requested three weeks in June and two weeks in August. Their first choice was South Sunset even though the Club was told that location was unavailable. For their June camps, the Department offered them the option of either Beach Chalet or West Sunset and they chose West Sunset. For the two weeks in August, they were given 2 pitches at Beach Chalet.

Viking Club requested 6 weeks for summer camp for 120 participants. They requested 3 weeks in July and 3 weeks in August. Their first choice was Beach Chalet. The Department allocated them 2 pitches at Beach Chalet each of those weeks. For several weeks the Viking Club and Glens are sharing Beach Chalet with each club allocated two pitches. The Glens could have had 5 weeks at Beach Chalet but chose not to do so.

- **Alleged Denial of Recreational Soccer Tournament**

A Glens representative expressed concern that the club was denied the opportunity to offer a recreational soccer tournament this spring.

Context: Applications for spring programs were due on November 15. This deadline has been the same for over 10 years and is on the Department website. The Glens submitted a request for a Recreational Tournament on January 8 requesting fields on June 4 and 5. On January 12 the Department responded to them that we could not accommodate their request because field allocations had been completed and while we had fields available on Saturday we did not have available fields on Sunday (on that





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Sunday fields are particularly constrained because of Sunday Streets which results in the closure of all fields in Golden Gate Park).

In addition, there have been problems with other recent requests by the Glens for fields for tournaments. In June 2015, they attempted to organize a similar recreational tournament and at the last minute returned most of the fields to the Department. In December 2015, they put on a similar tournament and it appears to have been successful but did not address the challenge that these teams practices ended prior to Thanksgiving and the teams were unhappy with the Department because they did not have practice fields leading up to the tournament. The Department had expressed concerns to the Glens about this issue before they organized the tournament and they promised to explain this issue to the teams but that did not happen. In February 2016, they attempted to organize a competitive cup tournament and three days prior to the tournament cancelled all of the fields. They objected to paying for the fields and in the end we discounted the cost by about 40%. In addition, the fields were empty and we had other groups that wanted to use the field.

- **Alleged Unfair Favoritism in Practice Field Allocations**

There were general allegations made that the certain clubs or groups received unfair favoritism with respect to practice field allocations.

Context: In response to this allegation, the Department produced data to examine field allocations granted based on preference by each club. (The data is attached as Exhibit E.) The data concludes that over 90% of the youth soccer teams were given at least one day with their first or second choice of fields requested. Each individual club received over 90% of their first or second choice field requests except Evolution (87%) and Viking Club (74%).

It has become clear to the Department that parents do not understand how practice field allocations are requested by clubs. Team parents do not always know what field(s) each Club's administrator has requested. Large clubs sometimes choose fields to best accommodate having a single coach cover multiple teams rather than accommodate specific time, day and location desires of their families. Clubs sometimes deflect parent frustration over field assignments to RPD rather than transparently articulating their own preferences.

E. Moving Forward -- Developing Best Practices for Youth Soccer Administration

In March 2016, the Department decided to identify an independent advisor to help us develop some recommendations to address youth soccer's growth challenges in a manner that ensures equity,





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transparency, efficiency and, most importantly, effective youth development at all ages and competitive levels. In April 2016 Philip Wright, the Assistant City Manager for West Sacramento, offered to serve as an independent volunteer advisor to the Recreation and Park Department on youth soccer. Wright has a unique background that combines extensive experience with soccer and government administration. Wright's soccer background covers all aspects of the game. He played at the collegiate and professional level and has been a Division I coach at Stanford and Santa Clara. He has coached and administered youth teams, clubs and leagues at all levels of play for over 30 years and currently serves as the Chairman of US Club Soccer. In addition to his extensive soccer resume, Wright's education and work experience makes him uniquely suitable to advise the Department. He is currently the Assistant City Manager for the City of West Sacramento and has previously worked as a lawyer, mediator and arbitrator with significant experience in facilitating solutions to complex government and community issues.

Wright has begun to engage our youth leagues and organizations, its board members, individual soccer clubs, teams and parents to solicit input and feedback from a diverse array of youth soccer stakeholders. Wright has agreed to schedule a public open house in San Francisco and will also take written comments, feedback and suggestions on how best to administer youth soccer during this remarkable age of growth in the sport.

Ultimately, Wright has been engaged for two purposes. He will be offering some general assistance to San Francisco's youth soccer community as it formulates a path forward. More specifically, he will also be offering the Recreation and Park Department concrete policy recommendations on how best to: (a) ensure that everyone has access to youth soccer regardless of skill, neighborhood or ability to pay; and (b) how to most fairly and equitably allocate our limited public resources to the youth leagues and non-profit organizations with whom we partner.

Among the detailed best practice issues we have asked Wright to explore with us and the soccer community include:

- **Fair Allocations of Field Time**
 - How best to balance a focus between recreational play where youth can learn how to be on a team and get healthy exercise and competitive play that provides more intense opportunities for youth soccer players seeking to develop at a higher level;
 - How best to protect access to our fields for a variety of sports and for San Franciscans of all ages;
 - How best to prioritize field access between sports that play in a single season versus multiple seasons;





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- How best to ensure that San Francisco youth have access to soccer training at all levels regardless of financial ability;
- How best to manage the field allocation and player development strain caused by “guesting.”
- **Transparency**
 - How best to develop a field allocation system that is more transparent to the soccer community so that all applicants for fields understand how fields are allocated;
 - How best to define the Department’s role in ensuring that quality and affordable youth soccer programs are available to San Francisco residents;
- **Evaluation of our Approved Public Benefit (“APB”) Standards**
 - How best to develop and administer ongoing standards to evaluate APB grants of free field allocations:
 - Parent Involvement
 - Scholarships
 - Financial Transparency
 - Residency Requirements
 - Use of Program Fund Balances
 - Should APB programs and non APB programs receive equal priority for field allocations?
- **Compliance with Permits**
 - What are the best methods for the Department to ensure that clubs and teams granted field access comply with permits and league rules?
 - What are appropriate sanctions for permit and league rule violations?

CONCLUSION

Despite current tensions within the youth soccer community, it seems committed to working together and with the Department to address the various challenges caused by the substantial increase in the number of teams and players, and desire by more teams to travel outside the City for competition. With the deadline for fall 2016 registration now upon us, the fall season will move forward with some minor changes recently approved by the new SFYS board of directors this spring. Any further changes to league structure and the Department’s administrative function recommended by Wright and agreed to by the Department and the soccer community would most likely be implemented for Fall 2017.

