



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY

STAFF REPORT

To: Council

File No.: 7900-00

From: Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Date: October 11, 2023

Subject: Sports Field Strategy and Allocation Report Back

PURPOSE: To provide Council with information on the outcomes of the Comox Valley Regional District's Sport Field Strategy and secure approval for the City of Courtenay to initiate an allocation policy review and update on behalf of the region, including consideration of the City of Courtenay acting as a central booking agent for all sport fields in the Comox Valley.

BACKGROUND:

In Fall 2021 the Comox Valley United Soccer Club (CVUSC) made delegations to local municipal governments and the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD). At the October 28, 2021 Council meeting it was resolved:

THAT in response to the Comox Valley United Soccer Club's delegation during the September 27th, 2021 Council meeting, Council direct staff to conduct an analysis to maximize the use of existing outdoor playing field space in Courtenay, including the Bill Moore Memorial Park.

Following the delegations, the inter-municipal recreation leadership group came to consensus that an update to the CVRD's 2008 Sport Field Study was required to understand the demand on local sport fields and any changes in projections that may have occurred since the study was completed. As such, to confirm sport field demand and usage, prioritize strategic initiatives, and identify sites that could support an additional artificial turf field a comprehensive field assessment was launched by the CVRD in partnership with the local municipalities in March 2022. The Sports Field Strategy (Attachment 1) was presented to the CVRD Recreation Commission in February 2023.

DISCUSSION:

Comox Valley Sports Field Strategy

The Comox Valley is unique in that the majority of field sport groups access fields and amenities across the region and are not tied to specific municipalities in either participant or facility location. As such it was critical that any review of field allocation, usage, and facility condition consider all local governments in the Comox Valley as well as School District 71 (SD71). The resulting regional Sports Field Strategy provides information and recommendations to guide Council and staff decision making (i.e. project priorities, resource allocation), identify opportunities to enhance facility inventory, and provides guidance on key topics and issues (i.e. artificial turf needs, allocations, user fees, etc.).

The purpose of the Sports Field Strategy was to: 1) assess the current state of sport fields within the Comox Valley, 2) identify focus areas and priorities for capital investment, and 3) identify opportunities to optimize how the sport field inventory is managed.

Through research, analysis, and community engagement, including a public field user survey and meetings with sport field groups, the following key findings were established:

- User satisfaction levels with sport field inventory and associated amenities differ significantly between summer (“dry”) and winter (“wet”) months.
- Utilization analysis suggests that sufficient overall capacity exists within the sport field inventory, however a relatively small number of fields accommodate the majority of program-based bookings.
- User groups have specific desires for enhanced fields and support amenities. Overall there is strong support for focusing on improvements that enhance field functionality, increase usability year-round, and improve user experiences.
- Opportunities exist to improve data collection, management and analysis capabilities. This information can help better inform capital and operational planning.
- Trends and population growth forecasts suggest that participation numbers will continue to increase.

Based on the key findings and review of regional, provincial, and national trends and leading practices, the following strategy outcomes were recommended:

1. Enhance and standardize data collection methods.
2. Utilize the refreshed sport field classifications as a guideline for operational and capital investment in the sport field facility inventory.
3. Target capital investment in sport field infrastructure towards a focus in maximizing the quality of sport field infrastructure and adding functional capacity:
 - a. Consider adding a second artificial turf surface
 - b. Develop a new baseball hub site
 - c. Add lighting and washrooms / changerooms at 2-4 sites over the next 10 years
 - d. To meet potential long-term needs, begin planning for a new multi-field site
4. Develop a new approach for sport field bookings and allocations based around clear standards of play.
5. Advance efforts to actively promote spontaneous and unstructured sport field play.
6. Create a more streamlined and cohesive sport field system in the region through aligning planning and policy, shifting bookings responsibility to a single entity, and inviting the Village of Cumberland into the sport field service.

While leadership for implementation of some of the strategy outcomes lives with the CVRD, some can be implemented by individual municipalities and others require inter-municipal collaboration. The inter-municipal recreation leadership group is in active discussion regarding the implementation of the recommendations.

Utilization of Available Capacity

The Sports Field Strategy includes an analysis of utilization of available capacity of all sports fields within the Comox Valley, including on SD71 property. While there appears to be sufficient supply within the current available inventory, it is important to note that there is a large discrepancy in the intensity of the bookings on a field by field basis, noting that referenced booked hours in the strategy do not include daytime use by schools. The analysis also demonstrated that while only one field is at or over capacity (Bill Moore), a relatively small number of fields appear to accommodate the bulk of available utilization based on the data provided. There is a demonstrated significant demand on Bill Moore Park to accommodate a high volume of winter season use. Further details on utilization and capacity can be found within the report.

Allocation Policy and Administration

The Sports Fields Strategy includes two recommendations specifically related to allocation and administration:

- Recommendation #4: Develop a new approach for sport field bookings and allocations based around clear standards of play; and
- Recommendation #6: Create a more streamlined and cohesive sport field system in the region.

Best practice guidance from Sport for Life¹ recommends that access to publicly provided recreation assets be allocated based on clear rationale that supports physical literacy and Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) principles. As such, the Strategy recommends that allocation be done based on standards of play that are aligned with Sport for Life's Long-Term Development Model that each National Sport Organization in Canada is required to follow at provincial and local levels. This approach will enable allocation to occur based on need, not historical access, and will help to advance equity in sport development as well as make best use of sport infrastructure. Updating the allocation policy will bring the region's approach in line with national sport organization expectations regarding standards of play and will reinforce the adoption of these standards at the local level.

As there is inconsistency in the Comox Valley regarding usage fees for sports fields it is also recommended that the allocation policy review include implementation of consistent fees and charges in an equitable and transparent way. Improvements to sports fields fees and charges, including consideration of implementation of a youth minor sport fee, has been shown to reduce block booking and no shows (freeing up underutilized field space), more equitably distribute the costs associated with sports field provision among user groups, and enhance financial contribution to the administration and maintenance of sports fields. Implementing effective fees and charges policies will also contribute to addressing Strategy Outcome five (5) to actively promote spontaneous and unstructured sport field play through the reduction of blanket bookings and increased access to sports fields for the general public.

The Sports Field Strategy also identifies the opportunity to enhance and improve service to sports fields user groups through increased collaboration and partnership between the local governments and SD71. This includes a recommendation that all field bookings be administered through a single point of contact and implementation of aligned allocation and fee policies across the region. This is in recognition of the fact that most sports field user groups and participants are accessing fields across jurisdictional boundaries. Additionally, a centralized approach to field booking would also address strategy outcome one (1) in the Sports Fields Strategy to enhance and standardize data collection which can help inform capital planning, operational decision making, and equitable allocation of field times.

Courtenay currently allocates sports fields based on historical use and long-term usage agreements associated with fieldhouse agreements. In addition to the City's own sport fields, Courtenay administers the booking and permitting of SD71 school fields located in Courtenay and the processing of permits for the Vanier artificial turf as directed by the CVRD. Comox administers field bookings on behalf of SD71 for fields located in Comox. The vast majority of sports fields (including SD71 facilities) in the Comox Valley are in Courtenay (41) and Comox (24).

¹ Canadian Sport for Life, <https://sportforlife.ca/>

The inter-municipal recreation leadership group has come to a shared consensus that the City of Courtenay is best positioned to take on the role of the centralized allocation and booking function for sports fields in the Comox Valley. This is due to the already large inventory of sports field facilities administered by Courtenay, as well as our organizational structure within Recreation and staff preference for Courtenay to take the leadership role. Additionally, as Courtenay has completed the work of and adopted a Fees and Charges Framework, staff are already planning to undertake work shortly to update sports fields fees and charges, as well as recommend allocation policy updates as per the strategy. Staff are recommending Council support this initiative and approve City of Courtenay staff to take a regional leadership role and initiate work on the development of a new sports field allocation policy, including fees and charges, and examine the work required for Courtenay to become the centralized booking and administrative function for Comox Valley sports fields.

Staff from the Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland, and CVRD will be approaching their respective Councils and Boards this fall to seek endorsement for this approach and approval to initiate work. Should all local government partners agree a consultant would be procured to conduct the following activities beginning in early 2024:

- Lead the development of a new allocation policy based on clear standards of play and best practices
- Work collaboratively with staff and sports fields user groups to address needs and create a collaborative committee in support of the work
- Provide recommendations on the implementation of consistent fees and charges across the Comox Valley in line with the benefits-based approach articulated in Courtenay's Fees and Charges Framework
- Draft partnership agreement requirements for the local government partners, including recommendations on roles and responsibilities, financial impacts and cost recovery for the City of Courtenay in taking on the centralized role, and any other relevant items identified by the parties
- Support implementation of the new allocation policy and centralized administration function, if approved by Council

If approved by Council to proceed with this work, local government staff would work collaboratively with sports fields user groups on the aforementioned items. All policies and recommendations would then be brought back to each respective local government partner for consideration and approval, following which the partners would enter into agreements to begin implementation based on Council direction.

The central booking and allocation administration function is not meant to replace local control or responsibility for parks, sports fields and amenities. The scope of work for the City of Courtenay, if approved, is to implement a regional allocation and fees and charges policy on behalf of the local government partners once approved by each jurisdiction. Local governments will retain responsibility for park maintenance, improvements, special events, and other applicable policies and bylaws.

Should any of our local government partners choose not to proceed with this work following receipt of the updated policies and recommendations, the work will still be of significant benefit to the City of Courtenay as Courtenay will be able to proceed with implementing an improved and equitable sports field allocation policy and updated fees and charges that align with Courtenay's Recreation Fees and Charges Framework.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

Official Community Plan

Parks and Recreation Objective 5, “partnerships are in place to achieve parks and recreation objectives,” identifies the following policies:

- PR 27: Seek out partnerships to achieve the goals and objectives of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan including, but not limited to working with:
 - o SD71 to increase access to school facilities after hours for community uses and City programs
 - o Non-profit and private sector organizations to expand sport and physical activity options, and expand recreation opportunities for all residents
 - o Neighbouring jurisdictions and other government agencies and community groups, to coordinate recreation and park services and to consider alternative service delivery methods including maintenance agreements

Staff’s recommendation for the City of Courtenay to take a regional leadership role to establish a shared allocation and fees and charges framework for sports fields in the Comox Valley directly responds to this objective and demonstrates our work toward implementing policies in the OCP.

Courtenay Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Courtenay’s Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) was adopted by Council on September 30, 2019. It includes recommendations regarding sports field facilities and usage within the City of Courtenay. Feedback received through the PRMP engagement process is similar to that heard in the Sports Field Strategy. The PRMP makes the following recommendations regarding sports fields in Courtenay:

- 3.3.2: Explore opportunities to collaborate with SD71 on school site improvement projects that can also serve the community, such as another field upgrade.
- 3.3.3: Work with others in the region to explore potential locations for new sports amenities including the following:
 - o A ball diamond complex
 - o Another synthetic turf with lights
- 3.3.4: Explore opportunities for sports field users to expand their hours of use
- 3.3.11: Add and upgrade the following amenities as part of park development:
 - o More or better sports fields as the population grows and in partnership with other jurisdictions in the Comox Valley
 - o Upgrade existing washrooms as needed

The consistency of recommendations in the PRMP with the Sports Field Strategy demonstrates the need for regional and local investment in sports field amenities and policies across the Comox Valley. Implementation of the PRMP is ongoing and a prioritized implementation strategy will be presented to Council at a future Council meeting.

Recreation Fees & Charges Framework

Courtenay’s Recreation Fees and Charges Framework was adopted by Council on June 27, 2022 and staff were directed to begin implementation of a benefits-based approach to fees and charges in recreation. Included in the framework is an analysis of sports fields fees including a comparison with other municipalities. Recommendations include applying the benefits-based approach to sports field fees, introducing “Minor” fees, and aligning field and diamond fees. Staff will be presenting to Council on implementation of the Recreation Fees and Charges Framework for indoor spaces at an upcoming Council

meeting. Staff will align implementation of the Recreation Fees and Charges Framework for sports fields with work on the sports field allocation policy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The estimated cost of procuring a consultant to develop a new allocation policy, including fees and charges recommendations and implementation plans, is \$35,000 based on similar work conducted in other municipalities. Courtenay staff have been in discussion with CVRD staff and will be submitting a request through the CVRD Recreation Commission grant service function for the full amount of funds for Courtenay to take on this work on behalf of the region.

The Recreation, Culture, and Community Services department does not currently have the administrative resources necessary to take on a centralized allocation and booking function on behalf of the region. The outcomes of the consultant work will include an options analysis and recommendations for the City of Courtenay and regional partners to consider in the implementation including an assessment of resources required and funding models for consideration.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Administration of Courtenay's allocation and fees and charges policies are within the core duties of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services. Development and implementation of a new allocation policy with updated fees and charges is part of staffs 2024 work plan and included within the short-term priorities of the PRMP.

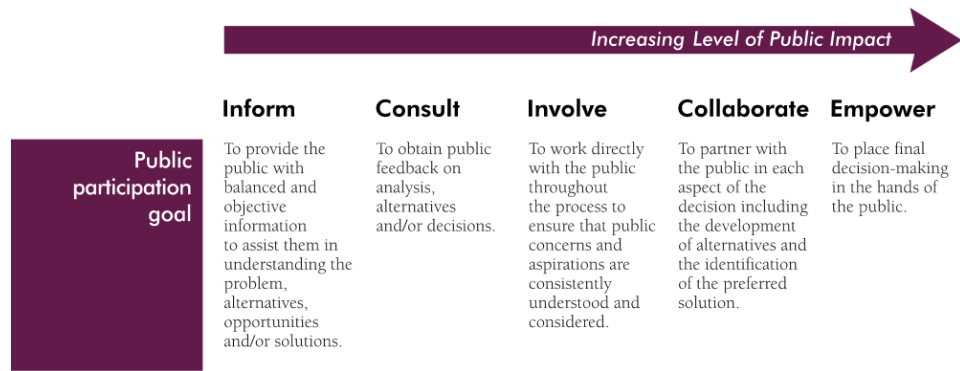
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Parks and Recreation - Optimize active public spaces to respond to density increases and increased park use
- Parks and Recreation - Review recreation programs and engage with community on current and future needs, changing demographics
- Good Governance - Explore and establish a partnership approach with SD71 on mutual interest topics: active travel and traffic planning, shared facilities, community use of schools, climate, reconciliation, child care and youth engagement

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

As significant community engagement, including a public survey and direct engagement with sports fields user groups, was conducted to support the development of the Sports Fields strategy as well as Recreation's Fees and Charges Framework, the renewal of the allocation policy will focus on informing the general public while directly involving impacted sports fields user groups based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



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OPTIONS:

1. THAT Council receive for information the Comox Valley Regional District Sports Field Strategy and direct staff to initiate work on behalf of the region to develop a new sports field allocation policy and centralized booking function for the Comox Valley and to report back with recommendations.
2. THAT Council receive for information the Comox Valley Regional District Sports Field Strategy.
3. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Comox Valley Regional District Sports Field Strategy

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