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OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC # 215-2010

LETTER TO COMMISSION

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CITY CLERK'S OFFICE

TO: Mayor Matti Herrera Bower and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE: July 29, 2010

SUBJECT: Parks and Recreation Department Managed Fields Practices

The purpose of this LTC is to respond to the various emails you may have recently received from residents expressing concerns about the use of park fields to play soccer, and more specifically, to address correspondence received by your offices regarding a recent occurrence where city staff asked users to leave the fields they were playing on. The resident's email explained a situation where adults, children and families were requested to vacate North Shore Park field while they were having a friendly pick-up game.

Upon receipt of the complaint, Parks and Recreation Administration along with on-site parks and recreation staff at North Shore Park investigated the incident. It was determined that the game was halted as adults had started an organized soccer game, set up goal posts on the field, without receiving a permit or rental authorization. This group of adults had previously been asked to leave the field on prior occasions and was always given alternative sites that the City allows for unregulated play. The players had acknowledged that they were playing on a field that needs authorization prior to play and left when asked to do so.

As a standard practice, North Shore Park, Flamingo Park, Normandy Park and Fairway Park require a permit and rental agreement for field use and there is signage displayed at each field advising potential users accordingly. The rental agreement guarantees the user the right to use the field for their own use, in some cases using city property such as goal posts, and lining of fields for out of bounds lines, hash marks, etc. These fields are also used for the City's athletics programs, both intramural and traveling teams. When unauthorized use of these fields for organized play is identified, the users are politely requested by staff to please vacate the field, and users are also provided with other city field alternatives for them to play on. These alternatives include parks such as Polo, Crespi, Tatum and Stillwater that do not require a rental permit for organized play.

Organized play is not necessarily defined solely as a league, but rather, includes groups of 20 or more users that play on a regular basis. If a group wants to restrict the field for their own use, they must rent and obtain a permit. A few children or a parent and a few children kicking a ball, playing catch or hitting on the baseball fields is not considered organized play and are allowed to play at North Shore Park, Flamingo Park, Normandy Park and Fairway Park.

In addition to the open use fields at Polo, Crespi, Tatum and Stillwater, the Parks and Recreation Department also instituted an "open play" period which permits open and free play (soccer, flag football etc.) on managed fields, including Fairway Park on Friday nights and at Normandy Park on Sunday's. The "open play" period allows the field to be used, on a first come, first served basis; however, it must remain open to the entire resident population and not restricted to any one group. The "open play" period has proven to be very popular and widely used.

The purpose of managed play and rental permits at North Shore Park, Flamingo Park, Normandy Park and Fairway Park is to ensure the fields are well-maintained and are in safe condition for children and adults to play on. The Parks and Recreation Department has found a workable balance by permitting rentals, managing unorganized play, scheduling city-organized programs and having scheduled open play. This balance reduces the on-going need for intense maintenance, including the replacement of worn sod and closing the fields for extended periods for restoration as well as the cost of the rehabilitation.

Past history has proven that uncontrolled use of any single field will cause rapid deterioration of the playing surface resulting in the extensive loss of the sod, ruts, holes and exposed dirt areas. If unregulated play is permitted, by anyone, at anytime, our fields become extensively damaged, unsafe to use and very expensive to constantly rehabilitate.

The Parks and Recreation Department strives to respond to most resident field use concerns immediately. The Commission and Administration have also received emails from groups that do rent our fields for organized soccer play stating that the fields are not always in good condition. To address these concerns, field use by these groups is rotated.

It should be noted that the requests and need for additional playing field space continues to increase as our demographics change. At this time, the demand for fields exceeds our available resources. We anticipate that one of the solutions to assist us in this challenge is the artificial turf included and approved for the Memorial Field in the Flamingo Park BODR. This field will not address all the demands for field access but it will permit far greater use of the field without the need for extended maintenance and closures for rehabilitation.

Please advise if you have additional questions, comments or concerns.

JMG/ JG/HF/KS/JM
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c: Hilda Fernandez, Assistant City Manager
Jorge Gomez, Assistant City Manager
Kevin Smith, Parks & Recreation Director
Julio Magrisso, Assistant Parks & Recreation Director

Field	Value
Email Address	merky211@aol.com
Name	Jean Campos
Subject	Parks and Recreation
Message	Dear Commisioner, My name is Jean Campos, and I have lived in Miami Beach for many years. Today I was a bit disappointed in a situation that occurred at our Miami Beach park where families, friends, and local kids come to play in the field and enjoy their summer vacation. While at North Shore Park Youth Center located at 531 72nd st at about 7p.m , a city worker came on the field with a pick-up truck to kick off all the people who were playing soccer. We were told that because it was an organized event we can not play on the field. To my knowledge my family, and a group of local kids playing a soccer game is not an organized event. I do not know what the law is on this situation, but I thought this was a public park. Was it because we were playing soccer? Because I know that other people play softball, or even basketball at public parks whether in Tatum park, Flamingo Park, or Fairway Park, and those are also organized by friends who just want to come out and play. What I think is ironic is that July is "Parks and Recreation Month" and yet we were not allowed to play in our park. The city of miami beach's mission statement says " We are commited to providing excellent public service and safety to all who live, work, and play in our vibrant, tropical, and historical community". All the families that come to the parks, and the kids that are kept off the streets want to play and be active, and they can not. I was speaking to the other families who were also kicked off the field, and they were very upset. I think this needs to be brought to your attention. I want to keep the families, and friends who want to play with there kids, and who also keep the local kids off the streets and doing something positive like playing sports in our public parks. I really appreciate your time and you can e-mail me back with any questions or concerns, or answers to this situation. Thank you,