



**New York City Council
Committee on Parks & Recreation Oversight Hearing
Athletic Field Permit Process**

April 30, 2018

Testimony By: Liam Kavanagh, First Deputy Commissioner

Good morning, Chair Grodenchik, and members of the Parks & Recreation Committee. I am Liam Kavanagh, First Deputy Commissioner at the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. Thank you for inviting me to testify today regarding the Parks Department's athletic field permit process.

At NYC Parks, our mission is to offer resilient and sustainable parks, public spaces and recreational amenities, for present and future generations. Making our athletic facilities available to the public is a significant way in which we fulfill that mission, as is the care and maintenance of those facilities. We are the steward of over 1,000 athletic fields and over 4,000 athletic courts. The agency issues approximately 8,300 athletic field permits annually, which represents just over 900,000 hours of playing time.

It is our agency's responsibility to provide athletic permits to hundreds of schools, youth leagues, and adult recreation leagues throughout the City for use of fields all over New York City. Our athletic field permit holders are as vast and varied as the population of New York City-- approximately 1,000 youth leagues, 400 schools enrolled in the Public School Athletic League (PSAL), an additional 400 schools affiliated with leagues other than PSAL, and 600 adult leagues, all hosting games and practices of a wide variety of competitive sports. We are proud to share that the agency has made significant strides in recent years, making the athletic field permitting process less cumbersome, more transparent, and more equitable for our users.

Our initial efforts were in the form of technological improvements to the underlying framework for our permit system. In 2012, we worked closely with the Mayor's Office of Citywide Event Coordination and Management and the New York City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, in an effort to transition from a permitting system largely based on paper, to a web-based permitting system. Alongside a coordinated outreach effort to our permit holders, we conducted a comprehensive endeavor to map and compile attribute data for every single athletic field and court under our jurisdiction. The creation of this geospatial mapped dataset served as the basis for our online permitting system, which became known as the Citywide Event Management System, or CEMS.

While CEMS is a Citywide permitting system that serves many of our agency partners, we worked diligently to ensure that our online permit system was customized to meet the specific needs expressed by our users. We are the only City agency that uses CEMS while maintaining internal control of the public-facing application process. Our Digital Media team at Parks serves as the steward for our public-facing application system, which allows us to easily respond to changes in the system's content and layout, helping us be more responsive to our permit holders. Since 2014, we have been fully utilizing CEMS for all special event and athletic Parks permits issued to the public.

In conjunction with our move to a new permit system, we updated our athletic permit rules and regulations, to better reflect our mission of transparency and equity. We conducted listening sessions in all five boroughs, and held a public hearing before adopting new rules in 2012. Consistent with our mission to provide free and accessible opportunities for youth activities, our rules codified a long-standing practice of prioritizing youth league permit requests over requests submitted by adult leagues, and giving priority to applicants who have held a given permit in the previous season. Through our current permit distribution process, we grant priority for field permits first to youth leagues, followed by official school leagues such as PSAL, then returning applicants (including adult leagues), and then lastly, all who apply



within the optimal season request period. Further, we established a winter permit season for asphalt and synthetic turf fields, created a permit for teams to conduct practice sessions in addition to competitive games, and responded to the demand for year-round sports by creating out-of-season permits.

Our revised rules and permit priority guidelines established well-defined application periods and expanded seasonal play to accommodate growing demand. For context, in 2017, we received close to 11,000 permit requests, 76% of which were able to be accommodated. NYC Parks makes every effort to fairly accommodate as many requests for fields and courts as possible for each season. To give you a sense of the demand for athletic fields, displayed here are some overview maps that outline some of those trends. As you can see, we receive thousands of permit requests, many of them for the same fields and times, and we make every attempt to distribute permits equitably. We do all of this in close coordination with our Parks Enforcement Patrol, to ensure that permit rules are being followed, confirm that groups are using their permitting time appropriately, and minimize instances of permitted time going unused.

In an effort to be more transparent and provide more access to our fields, we continue to be proactive in our efforts to continually improve the permit application process. We work closely with our Digital Media staff to respond to feedback we receive from our users regarding new and creative ways to improve user experience through the online application system. For example, on our website, we provide updated athletic facility usage reports that the public can access to determine what fields are currently permitted and what fields may be available.

It is clear to us that New Yorkers are passionate about living active, healthy lives. From soccer in the Bronx, flag football in Brooklyn, roller hockey in Manhattan, cricket in Queens and youth baseball on Staten Island, our ballfields are put to use every single day in every corner of the city. Simply put, the demand for fields can often outweigh the supply that we can offer, but we make every effort to accommodate as many requests as possible. We are proud of the steps our agency has taken to make the permitting process for athletic fields more accessible, transparent, and equitable. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today and for all of your continued advocacy for our city parks. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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