

Letter from County Board Chair Katie Cristol, sent Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2018

Dear Peter and Kari,

On behalf of the County Board majority, I am writing in response to your request to pull the Diamond and Rectangular Fields Level of Service components out of the draft Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP) update and to conduct a separate working group, post-PSMP adoption, that would study field utilization and make recommendations on levels of service and identify fields for possible removal.

First, thank you again for your patience. As I wrote last week, I hope to underscore that the delay reflected how seriously we considered your requests, and the number of conversations and analysis that each Board member wished to conduct about your proposals before arriving at our conclusions.

Now that we have been able to complete our own review, I'm writing to communicate that a four member majority of the County Board has decided not to pursue these proposals for an alternative process for the Public Spaces Master Plan Update. Board Member John Vihstadt feels differently, preferring to remove the Level of Service component from the remainder of the PSMP update process, and initiate an additional community engagement process, focused solely on the methodology of determining field utilization, to determine which methodology, or blend of the two methodologies, is most appropriate.

The other three Board members and I would like to share our thoughts about why we came to a different conclusion on the best way forward, and provide some next steps and context for how some of the broader concerns you've raised are being addressed or can be addressed in the future.

### *Level of Service Methodology*

The population-based level of service (LOS) model used by the staff and confirmed by the Board earlier this year in a work session provides an industry-accepted and broadly-used planning tool. We appreciated the chance to engage with an alternative methodology, a utilization-based approach, that you brought to our attention. This indeed is a valid way of looking at County resources. However, the Board majority saw two challenges with changing to a utilization-based approach. One challenge is that the number of assumptions that must be agreed upon by different stakeholders to generate a usable model; assumptions about not only the current but future popularity of different recreational activities, and about extrapolating future demand from current and past trends. The other challenge is that the population-based LOS model already has been socialized with the PSMP's many affected stakeholders, and has provided the basis for community engagement over the past two years.

For these reasons, four Board members have agreed that the approach of the population-based Level of Service is the more appropriate one for our community, where different stakeholders

have widely divergent assumptions about future utilization. We will not be pursuing the recommendation to create a working group to further assess a utilization-based methodology.

My colleagues and I want to emphasize, however, that the Level of Service estimates are 1) subject to ongoing review and 2) not determinative but rather one of many factors that will guide future public spaces decisions.

First, the first draft of the PSMP, posted in summer 2017, included a recommendation to review and update the Level of Service estimates periodically after the plan's adoption. Board members remain committed to this premise and when reviewing the final draft, we will ensure that this recommendation clearly lays out our expectation as to how the five-year review of the Level of Service estimates will occur and factor in five-year look-back data at utilization.

Secondly, the LOS numbers in the PSMP are not “destiny,” but rather one measure of many that we - and future County Boards - will draw on regarding public space investments during site plan reviews, parks maintenance capital projects and master plans, operating budgets and Capital Improvement Plan updates. Other factors we will consider include other recommendations in the PSMP; guidance from adopted sector plans; guidance from other Comprehensive Plan elements, and outcomes from public engagement.

#### *Improving Field Management Practices*

During our briefings with you, you brought to Board members' attention some excellent questions and points regarding management of the County's field resources and whether they are being appropriately utilized. We brought raised these to staff and wanted to in turn share some of the recent steps taken to improve problems with effectively managing diamond fields in particular:

While the PSMP update has been occurring, DPR also has been taking steps to better manage the opportunity for use of fields by the broadest possible cross-section of the community. As you noted in your presentation, in 2015, staff retained the consulting firm GreenPlay to help create a Field Allocation Policy for affiliated youth and adult sports leagues. In this iterative process, DPR and the leagues have been piloting the approach over several seasons. As you noted, the GreenPlay study showed that some fields that had been assigned to teams were not being used. The allocation policy currently being implemented is designed to end that practice and ensure that the leagues are using the full amount of field time they have been allocated, weather or emergency permitting.

Also, in Spring 2018, DPR completed an overhaul of the field classifications and converted 21 fields from “Permit Only” to “Permit Takes Priority.” This change means that when fields are unscheduled, members of the community who are not participating in organized leagues will have access for casual use. With this change the County now has 77 Permit Takes Priority Fields and 13 Permit Only Fields.

Finally, consistent with the recommendations you shared with us, the final draft PSMP will recommend converting fields to synthetic turf and adding lights to increase usage of existing fields and require fewer new fields to be built.

*Next Steps*

The final draft of the PSMP is expected to be available for public comment by the end of September. We encourage you to continue to participate in the POPS public processes, as you have to date.

Thank you for your thoughtful analysis and engagement with us, and again, for your patience with our response.

Best regards,  
Katie