



Arlington & Falls Church, Virginia

Arlington Soccer Association

www.arlingtonsoccer.com

- ☆ Recreational Soccer
- ☆ Teen Soccer
- ☆ Travel Soccer
- ☆ Street Soccer
- ☆ TOPSoccer
- ☆ Soccer Plus
- ☆ Coaching Education
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November 3, 2010

Arlington County Board
Arlington County Manager
Arlington School Board
Arlington Superintendent of Schools

Dear Arlington County Officials:

A few days ago, the Arlington Soccer Association (ASA) presented Arlington County with a check for \$46,968.00, representing the unprecedented \$8 youth sports player fee imposed by the County beginning with the current fiscal year.

We anticipate that following our Spring season, ASA's families will have paid nearly \$90,000 to Arlington County this fiscal year for the privilege of playing soccer in Arlington's parks and other recreational facilities.

With this new fee have come some important issues that require the attention of the County Board and/or the County Manager, and in two instances, the School Board and/or School Superintendent. These include (1) mis-application of the player fee to City of Falls Church residents; (2) unreimbursed collection costs incurred by youth sports groups; (3) Arlington Public Schools' failure to build two much-needed soccer fields included in school plans; (4) mis-allocation of the County's only youth-sized synthetic field at Barcroft Park; and (5) re-assignment of ASA playing fields for dog oriented events.

1. Mis-application of Player Fee to City of Falls Church Residents

ASA includes in its recreational soccer program teams formed by the Falls Church Dept. of Parks and Recreation. Falls Church registers those teams in its own registration system; provides practice space for those teams on its own fields; and provides game fields roughly proportional to the number of teams it fields relative to Arlington teams.

Notwithstanding these facts, Arlington's Dept. of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources (DPRCR) has mandated that ASA collect the \$8 per player fee from the Falls Church players registered on Falls Church teams.

We cannot believe the County Board intended to apply an ARLINGTON player fee for support of ARLINGTON fields to families living in the City of Falls Church, playing on



teams organized by the City of Falls Church, and playing on Falls Church fields simply because they play in a league with Arlington teams. The legality of DPRCR's interpretation is dubious at best, and it has imperiled ASA's relationship with the Falls Church teams, who have long played in our recreational league.

ASA requests that the County Board and County Manager direct DPRCR to cease requiring ASA to collect the player fee from City of Falls Church residents playing on City of Falls Church recreational teams, and direct DPRCR to refund monies so collected this Fall.

2. Offset of Collection Costs

ASA has found that it incurs a small, but not insignificant, incremental cost for collecting the player fee on behalf of Arlington County. Most of our families pay their fees by credit card, and our credit card processor—like all credit card processors—charges ASA by the amount collected. Since we are collecting more money, the processing fee is higher than it would be without the player fee. The player fee is costing ASA roughly \$.20 per transaction, or a total of \$1,077.98 this Fall. That does not include the significant additional staff time of ASA spent processing the fees.

We request that the County Board make an allowance of up to 2% of the fees collected to offset the out-of-pocket costs of youth sports groups in collecting this new fee.

3. APS Failure To Build Two Fields

As you all are well aware, the number of children living in Arlington County has increased significantly and is forecast to continue rising for a number of years. This increase has also been felt within ASA. In the past three years, enrollment in our recreational soccer program has increased by 547 players, from 4,176 in Fall 2008 to 4,723 in Fall 2010 (excluding those registered directly with the City of Falls Church). To put that in perspective, based on the average team size in ASA, that is roughly 34 new teams in two years. To schedule that many additional teams for games requires roughly two new fields at a time when we are already severely squeezed for adequate field space.

The County had plans to build two new rectangular playing fields as part of its ongoing school renovation program, one at Kenmore Middle School and one at Washington-Lee High School. Arlington Public Schools, however, bungled the plan. In both instances, APS officials refused input from DPRCR on the design and specifications for the fields, and in both instances what we have now is a large open space full of weeds, instead of a usable playing field. Arlington County is simply too compact, and space at too much of a premium, to allow such a gross mis-allocation of resources.

We request that APS provide funds to remediate the fields at Kenmore and W-L, and working in consultation with DPRCR, make them usable to satisfy the exploding demand for rectangular field space from the active sports community in Arlington County.

4. Mis-Allocation of the Barcroft Youth Field

At present, Arlington County has only one synthetic youth-sized soccer field, which is at Barcroft Park. This field is ideal for use by ASA's 9-12 year old recreational and travel soccer teams, but ASA has been severely limited in its use of that field because it has instead been designated as a "community" field to be used primarily for unscheduled activities. Unfortunately, the community field designation at Barcroft has meant that this youth-sized synthetic field is used primarily by *adults*, many of whom are from nearby Alexandria.

ASA is not asking for exclusive use of the Barcroft field, but we would like to have it for regularly scheduled games on Saturdays and Sundays, as well as for make-up games (due to weather cancellations on grass fields) on occasional evenings. With more than 6000 players, ASA *IS* the community in Arlington, and ASA's youth players should have better access to this youth-sized field. There are plenty of other venues available for adult play by community members.

5. Children Before Dogs

This season, ASA has twice been kicked off fields it uses on Saturdays due to events scheduled for DOGS. In one case, ASA's popular pre-school soccer program was rescheduled from Lacey Woods park in favor of a "Dogtoberfest" activity; in the other, we had to reschedule all games at Tuckahoe Park for a "Dog Fitness Day." Needless to say, kid fitness should be a higher priority than dog fitness. These fields had been assigned to ASA months before we were informed the dogs would have priority. When we have to move games and other scheduled activities it creates real problems. Not all our families have email, and not everyone receives their emails in a timely fashion, so there is always confusion with such changes. To have to change schedules due to activities for dogs is insulting, especially when ASA parents are now paying \$90,000 per year to play in Arlington, while dogs have their own parks that their owners are not paying anything for.

ASA requests that the County Board and County Manager establish a policy that no activities for animals may be scheduled on playing fields assigned for soccer during the seasons designated in ASA's Memorandum of Understanding with DPRCR.

CONCLUSION

We at ASA, one of the largest volunteer organizations in Arlington County—serving more than 6,000 children per season—thank you for your consideration of the issues outlined above. I, as ASA's President, and members of ASA's Board and staff, are willing to meet with you to further discuss any of these issues and to provide you with additional data to the extent it would be useful.

Yours very truly,

Ken Bass
President, Arlington Soccer Association

Cc: Director, DPRCR