

March 2, 2010

Hon. Jay Fiset
Hon. Barbara Favola
Hon. Mary Hynes
Hon. Walter Tejada
Hon. Chris Zimmerman
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Room 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Youth Sports Player Fee

Dear Msrs. Fiset, Favola, Hynes, Tejada and Zimmerman,

I am writing on behalf of the Arlington Soccer Association (ASA), which provides soccer programs for more than 5000 Arlington children in conjunction with the Arlington Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources (PRCR).

You were previously copied on a letter we sent to the Acting County Manager, Barbara Donellan, on January 27, 2010 concerning a proposal by PRCR to initiate a youth sports player fee as part of the County's fiscal 2011 budget. As we had hoped, the Manager did not include the player fee in the balanced budget she submitted to the Board. However, the Manager did include a player fee of \$8 per player per season in a list of "Tier II" revenue options submitted to the Board. At its February 20, 2010 meeting, the Board voted to advertise the player fee as part of its tax and revenue package for 2011.

ASA is mindful of the economic realities facing Arlington County. You should know, however, that as part of the Manager's budget reductions, she eliminated a stipend of approximately \$22,000 that ASA has received from PRCR for many years. In the current fiscal year, PRCR also shifted an additional \$25,000 in costs for field lining to ASA. In combination, those reductions in support of ASA's soccer programs will shift approximately \$10 per player in costs to the families who participate in our programs. Those additional costs will be reflected in increased fees in we must charge those families beginning with the Fall 2010 season.

The Manager's budget contains additional reductions in PRCR services that will affect ASA, including significant cuts in field mowing and maintenance. We are also seeing increased fees from PRCR for various programs we operate, including new charges for field lighting at night; a higher percentage of revenue share to PRCR for summer soccer camps we operate; higher fees for the Gunston Bubble (the only indoor soccer space in Arlington County), and increased expenses for our Spring soccer

tournament. All of these added costs will have an impact on our operating budget over and above the \$10/player mentioned above.

You may not be aware of the full scope of our activities in support of youth soccer in Arlington County. In the current fiscal year, ASA has a budget of more than \$2 million. We run two seasons (Fall and Spring) of recreational soccer leagues; a year-round travel soccer program; a teen program for high school students; summer and holiday camps; a program for pre-school students; an after school program for academically challenged students in economically disadvantaged elementary schools; a program for disabled children; winter and summer “drop-in” programs; and numerous clinics, camps and other programs throughout the rest of the year. Some of those programs are offered at no cost to participants, and all of them provide financial assistance to families in need. **In fiscal 2010 ASA provided more than \$150,000 in financial assistance to our families.**

In contrast, Arlington County’s support for our programs is relatively small. According to an analysis prepared by PRCR, it provided \$161,756 in support of ASA’s recreational and travel soccer programs in fiscal 2010. That amount is mostly for field maintenance and PRCR personnel involved in allocating facilities. With the elimination of the stipend previously provided to ASA, that figure will drop to \$139,902 (a reduction of 14% on top of last year’s transfer of \$25,000 in costs to ASA), and that’s before the other budget reductions and fee increases that will affect ASA. In short, Arlington County’s support of ASA’s programs in 2011 will be less than 7% of our more than \$2 million budget, ***and will be less than the amount of financial assistance we provide to our families.***

Requiring ASA families to pay the fee would raise approximately \$80,000 (5000 players X \$8 X two seasons), and thus reduce the County’s contribution by another nearly 60% (\$139,902-\$80,000). With elimination of the stipend, that would be a greater than 70% reduction in support to youth soccer in one year, far exceeding the cuts in any other program or service supported by the County.

In light of these facts, we urge you to reject the \$8 per player youth sports fee contained in the revenue and tax package advertised by the County. Imposition of that fee would add yet another \$8/player to the increases already likely to be put in place for Fall 2010. Aggregate increases for all these items (including this potential \$8 fee) could be upwards of \$30 over the current \$110 per player annual fees (paid over two seasons) for Recreation teams. Such a sharp increase in the cost of youth soccer would likely have an adverse affect on participation levels in our programs.

The County Board needs to seriously consider the level of support it is going to provide to youth sports in Arlington. Just one year ago, the Board adopted a policy proposed by PRCR that youth sports were sufficiently important in our community to justify a 35% subsidy from taxpayers. The plain fact, however, is that taxpayer support of the direct costs of such programs is minimal in the current economic environment, totaling well under 10% (we’d be happy to provide you that data). In contrast, PRCR has not sought to impose fees of any kind on the users of many other park and athletic facilities in the County, including dog parks, tennis courts and general use of community centers. Arlington should accord its children at least the same level of support as its dogs.

Imposition of a youth sports player fee (which in reality is a tax because it is not dedicated to youth sports and goes into the general fund) would also adversely affect families currently not receiving financial assistance, but struggling economically. Many of our families have multiple children playing soccer, over two seasons. For those families, the combination of fee increases is likely to total \$75-100, not a mere \$8. Please don't penalize those families—and especially their children—to make up for revenue for other County offerings.

At a time when childhood obesity is on the rise, we would also ask you this question: why would Arlington impose a tax on the largest anti-obesity program for children in the County?

Since the Acting County Manager's proposed budget does NOT include the youth sports player fee as part of her base balanced budget, rejecting the fee will not require the Board to find the revenue somewhere else.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours very truly,

Ken Bass
President, Arlington Soccer Association