

Memorandum

To: Carrboro Board of Aldermen
Chapel Hill Town Council
Hillsborough Board of Commissioners
Mebane City Council
Orange County Board of Commissioners
Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Board of Education
Orange County Schools Board of Education

From: Intergovernmental Parks Work Group
Alice Gordon and Barry Jacobs, Conveners

Date: September 23, 2008

Subject: Community Use of School Facilities for Recreation

At several previous meetings of the IP Work Group (in particular November 28, 2007 and April 24, 2008), we have discussed a topic of great relevance to all recreation providers, school boards and the general public – the longstanding issue of whether additional community use of school facilities for recreation can be achieved.

This is a complex, yet important topic that has often been discussed with little resolution. The IP Work Group would like to offer the following guiding principles for the consideration of our elected boards:

GUIDING PRINCIPLES GOVERNING COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOL FACILITIES FOR RECREATION

Underlying Assumptions

1. There are not enough gyms (especially full size gyms), ball fields and other recreational facilities available for use in Orange County. Allowing public use of school facilities maximizes taxpayer benefits in using these facilities.
2. Both school systems have a long history of working with the public recreation agencies where possible. A shortage of available gyms and fields puts considerable pressure on the school facilities that are available.
3. It is acknowledged that students must have priority for facility use during school hours.

4. There is a public health aspect to providing recreational opportunities at schools, since allowing for public use helps promote healthy lifestyles for children and adults.

Key Issues

5. Though students must have priority during school hours, it appears that opportunities exist for both organized public use and individual use after school hours and on weekends. There could also be different policies for indoor and outdoor facilities (e.g., access to restroom facilities).

6. Because of the high volume of activity by interscholastic teams at the middle school and high school levels, coordinating the use of facilities (gymnasiums, fields) and activities with elementary schools would appear to offer the most opportunity. Jurisdictions and the school systems should continue to explore opportunities for co-location of facilities in the design of new schools and renovations to older schools, with the financial participation of appropriate entities/other jurisdictions. (For additional information on the co-location of facilities, please see the attached document, "A Memorandum of Agreement for Providing Coordinated Site and Facility Planning, along with adopting resolution approved by Town of Carrboro on May 23, 2000.)

7. A way to balance the need for schools to cover the costs of facilities use and the need for public access should be developed. One approach might be to eliminate or at least lower usage charges for government and nonprofit use, after determining an "actual cost" basis. Another approach is to allow the using parties to secure oversight by designating a person within the organization to take responsibility for opening and closing the facility. It is acknowledged that there might be marginal cost increases associated with this additional use, not already covered, that would need to be addressed.

8. Opportunities for limited individual access to school facilities that are often gated and closed should be examined, mindful of the need for the security and safety of the facilities.

9. Criteria utilized for facility use decision-making may need to differ from school to school. However, there should be an overall expectation that facilities will be available for public use under specified conditions.

Examination of Current Policies

10. Policies that govern community use (both organized and individual) of school facilities for recreation should be re-examined in light of these underlying assumptions and key issues. The purpose of this examination should be to change current policies so as to increase the use of school facilities by the general public while continuing to meet the program and financial needs of the

schools, and also to establish clear and consistent decision-making policies for facility use.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PARKS WORK GROUP

1. Each elected board should endorse the ten GUIDING PRINCIPLES GOVERNING COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOL FACILITIES FOR RECREATION, stated above.
2. Each board should authorize its staff to participate in the re-examination of current policies, as stated in guiding principle #10.
3. After taking action, each elected board should forward to the IP Work Group the results of their action.

We hope that you will be willing to approve the IP Work Group recommendation. After the elected boards have responded, and if they approve the recommendation, the IP Work Group will coordinate the re-examination of the policies governing the community use of school facilities for recreation, and forward their recommendations to the elected boards.

We would be glad to discuss the guiding principles further or provide additional information, if desired.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on this important subject.

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Steve Stewart, Carrboro Town Manager
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Intergovernmental Parks Work Group
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