

# SoccerPlex gets a new lease on life

■ Expanded playing times,  
more county oversight  
part of amended deal

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The County Council unanimously approved an amended lease Tuesday for the SoccerPlex at the South Germantown Recreational Park.

The amendments to the lease come at a time when the facility, on 166-acres of county land, seeks to boost revenue by expanding playing times.

This latest amendment to the lease allows the foundation that runs the premiere facility to pursue approvals for adding new fields, including lighted fields and artificial turf fields. The lease also adds more county oversight.

The 40-year lease between the county and the Montgomery Soccer Foundation was approved by the Planning Board on May 25 and sent to the council for final approval. This is the third time the lease, which was first signed in 1999, has been amended.

The Planning Board will next consider field use guidelines that will include user fees and indoor facility use fees. The board will review and comment on the allocations and fees for each calendar year, according to the lease.

The maximum number of games allocated to any one club will be set at 600 games per season — the same

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amount that Montgomery Soccer Inc. requested for fall 2006 and spring 2007, according to a July 21 letter from MSF president Ken Solomon to County Councilman Steven A. Silverman (D-At Large) of Silver Spring.

"Some folks may have preferred a more formula-driven process, but [that could create a] financial dependence on one organization," Silverman said during Tuesday's council session.

MSI representatives suggested during a public hearing in June that the field use be based on the percentage of players in each club. If a club has 70 percent of the soccer players in the county, for example, it should be allocated 70 percent of the field-use times at the SoccerPlex.

Despite opposition from MSI (the county's largest soccer club) and several others, the lease keeps a provision that gives upcounty clubs preference. The amended lease defines upcounty as areas north of

Shady Grove Road to the Frederick line and from Laytonsville to Poolesville.

Clubs that are longtime users were also given preference, including MSF's newly formed Soccer Association of Montgomery, which will merge with Germantown-based Seneca Sports Association in the fall.

Also new to the lease are several conditions that are meant to provide greater oversight to the facility, which has struggled financially since opening its 19 premiere fields five years ago.

MSF must provide the county with quarterly income statements and updated year-end income projections. It must also report to the Planning Board annually, during a public hearing, on its financial performance, activities and adherence to the lease. The newly formed advisory committee, which reports to the foundation and will be comprised of field user groups, can also report to the board.

The amended lease also calls for the Planning Board to appoint a voting member, not necessarily a member of the board, to MSF's governing board.

Finally, hours of operation are being changed to state that all games and events can begin after 8 a.m. and must end by 11 p.m. However, warm up and setting-up and taking-down activities can begin after 7 a.m. and must conclude by midnight. Hours for any activity at the Discovery Sports Center and at the Championship field will be from 7 a.m. to midnight.

The council is also considering a \$142,450 appropriation to reduce game fees for teams that have a majority of members from Montgomery County.

County Executive Douglas M. Duncan (D) included a \$100,000 community grant in his proposed budget, which was deferred so the council could discuss it along with the SoccerPlex lease.

Game fees would be reduced by \$50 for the 2,849 games that will be played in the fall 2006 and spring 2007 seasons under the appropriation, according to a memo from the council's legislative analyst, Marlene L. Michaelson.

A public hearing on the proposal, which would be added to the county's budget, is scheduled for Sept. 19.