

Letter to District 68 School Board

Date: September 11th 2024

From: Gabriola Soccer Association, Concerned Parents and Ratepayers

Subject: Management and Allocation of Field Time and Investment in Field Maintenance

Simple Request: We request a time in your upcoming public meeting, Wed, Sep 25, 2024 6:00pm - 9:00pm to present the following: To begin, we respectfully request proper access to the Gabriola School field. Additionally, we are willing to participate in the management of the field if necessary, recognizing that the district may have limited resources available for Gabriola. We would appreciate communication on the above prior to presenting at the board meeting...

Dear Members of the District 68 School Board and various Stakeholders,

I am writing on behalf of the Gabriola Soccer Association to address several pressing concerns regarding the management and allocation of field time and the upkeep of the facilities we have heavily invested in. Our association has a long-standing commitment to fostering youth soccer in our community, and we believe it is crucial to bring the following points to your immediate attention:

1. **Ineffective Management of Field Time:** Over the past three years, the allocation and management of field time have not been effectively handled. This has resulted in scheduling conflicts and reduced opportunities for our association to conduct practices and games, significantly impacting our ability to serve the youth in our community. We need our field returned with fair access. We have been very fair in our requests and expect a balanced approach to field time allocation.
2. **Impractical Time Constraints:** The current time constraints imposed on our use of the field are neither practical nor well-considered and do not actually serve to assist in the upkeep of the field. These restrictions hinder our ability to effectively plan and conduct our programs. We request an immediate discussion to address these constraints and to develop a more workable schedule that meets the needs of all stakeholders.
3. **Significant Financial Investment:** In good faith, the Gabriola Soccer Association – Gabriola Recreation Association and the Community in general have invested thousands of dollars into the maintenance and improvement of the soccer field. Despite this substantial contribution, our community's needs have not been met with the high quality of consideration we expected. Our investments were made with the understanding that they would be matched by a commitment to equitable and fair usage policies.
4. **Responsibility for Timely and Consistent Upkeep:** The decision made by the Board several years ago not to grant Gabriola Elementary the opportunity to become a community school places an added responsibility on the Board to ensure timely and consistent upkeep of our grounds. As stewards of these facilities, it is imperative that

the Board upholds its duty to maintain the fields to a standard that supports our activities and the broader community's use.

5. **Awareness of RDN Conversations:** We are aware of ongoing conversations with the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) regarding the management of the fields. However, in the meantime, it is crucial to support our growing community, which lacks the same access to recreation and sports facilities that other taxpayers in the district enjoy. Our community deserves equitable access to well-maintained facilities to support the health and well-being of our residents.

Report on Field Conditions for Next School Board Meeting

It is imperative that the next school board meeting includes a report on the current field conditions. This report should detail the state of the field, identify areas requiring immediate attention, and outline a plan for necessary improvements. Transparent communication and data-driven insights are essential for informed decision-making and for gaining the support of all stakeholders involved.

We urge the District 68 School Board to recognize the importance of these issues and to engage in a constructive dialogue with the Gabriola Community. Our goal is to find mutually beneficial solutions that support the continued growth and success of our community. We look forward to your prompt response and a collaborative effort to resolve these concerns.

Stakeholders Involved, Consulted or Aware:

- Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN)
- District 68 School Board
- Gabriola Recreation Society
- BC Parks
- Islands Trust
- PAC Gabriola School
- Chamber of Commerce
- Phil Barkhouse
- Gabriola Elementary School
- Superintendent District 68

Sincerely,

Glenn Murphy, Darcy Bolton, Jesse Capon

And,

The GABRIOLA SOCCER ASSOCIATION

Further notes: **A Wider Vision (for context)**

A Parent-Led Initiative for Improved Field Access

A parent-led initiative has recently highlighted the pressing need for improved field access. The initiative underscores the importance of fair and equitable allocation of field time, reflecting the growing demand for soccer activities within our community. This grassroots movement stresses the urgency for the District 68 School Board to reconsider and optimize the current scheduling to better serve our youth and support community engagement.

Insufficient Current Infrastructure

At present, our infrastructure is insufficient, with no full-size field available on the island. The existing school field, measuring 90 x 50 yards, does not meet the standard dimensions for a full-size soccer field (100 x 50 yards). This limitation significantly impacts the quality of training and competitive play, placing our community at a disadvantage compared to other regions with better facilities.

Need for Five Fields in Good Standing

Our community's soccer programs and other programs are expanding, more than half our school population takes part, necessitating the availability of at least five fields in good standing and to represent the equivalent access to recreational space Vancouver islanders enjoy... The current infrastructure falls short of meeting these requirements, hindering the potential growth and development of our youth sports activities. Adequate field availability is crucial to accommodate the increasing number of participants and to ensure the successful execution of practices, games, and tournaments. In comparison, the per capita access to sports fields in Nanaimo reflects a much higher level of access, underscoring the disparity in recreational resources available to Gabriola residents.

Establishment of a Field Development Subcommittee

We have created a committee with the exact focus of procuring our fair share of field resources focused on field development, led by parents and community members. This subcommittee would work collaboratively with the District 68 School Board and other stakeholders to identify key issues, propose solutions, and oversee the implementation of improvement projects. A dedicated group with a clear mandate will ensure that our field development goals are met efficiently and effectively.

Addressing Other Community Issues

Beyond field access and development, there are additional issues that need to be addressed to enhance our community's recreational experience. These include the lack of refereeing practice opportunities and off-leash areas for dogs, as requested by the Gabriola Garden Club.

Addressing these concerns will contribute to a more inclusive and functional recreational environment for all residents.

Vision for a Comprehensive Multipurpose Center

Our long-term vision includes the development of a comprehensive multipurpose center to serve the diverse needs of our community. This facility should encompass:

- A gymnasium
- A swimming pool
- A dog park
- Multiple soccer fields
- A gardening center
- Indoor and outdoor activity areas
- Changing rooms
- Pickleball courts

We believe that such a facility would greatly enhance the quality of life on Gabriola Island, providing a central hub for sports, recreation, and community activities.