



**NANAIMO LADYSMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
BUSINESS COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC MEETING  
INFORMATION SHEET**

DATE: October 9, 2024  
TO: Business Committee  
FROM: Mark Walsh, Secretary-Treasurer and Kelsey Bakewell, Maintenance Manager  
SUBJECT: Gabriola Island Elementary Playfield

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### **Background**

On September 25, 2024, the Board of Education passed the following motion:

That the Board of Education of School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) direct staff to provide a report to the next Business Committee on the play field at Gabriola Island, including the current state and required areas for improvement.

This Information Sheet provides a brief history, current state, and strategy moving forward for field maintenance.

### **Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

The District has worked collaboratively with the public and partners for decades to maintain a useable playfield with the primary focus on providing an outdoor learning space for children, and to operate as an extra-curricular playfield for the community.

In recent history, the Gabriola Soccer Association has been the only authorized rental for the field, however it is used by the public on occasion. The playfield at Gabriola Island Elementary is one of several public/private outdoor park and recreation areas on Gabriola Island with useable playfield space.

#### **Maintenance**

The District has 30+ sites with playfields, all being maintained by the Grounds department. In parallel with competing priorities, Grounds staff does their absolute best to maintain all of these playfields and keep them in varying conditions that allow for safe and educational places for children, as well as functional spaces for the community.

Playfields typically require regular maintenance of the irrigation systems, where applicable, as well as top dressing, overseeding, aeration, fertilizing, and mowing. Due to the number of fields in the District, and the resources available in Grounds, not all of this work is completed on every field, every year. Fields are typically assessed and addressed as required and as staff are available. The majority of this maintenance is restricted to the spring/summer/early fall months. Similar to City of

Nanaimo outdoor playfields, the fields are typically closed to rentals and community groups in the winter months, as the weather is not conducive to grass growing and fields are unable to recover from hard use.

Gabriola Island Elementary playfield is no different than other fields in the District. Regular maintenance is among the same priority as the other schools in the district, with slightly more difficulty due to the remote location. The District currently employs a local staff member to maintain the lawn mowing over the summer months, and regular Grounds staff attend to the field as required throughout the year.

The playfield was closed to rentals over the summer and winter months of 2023 and summer 2024, as efforts were made to improve the quality of the field from previous over-use. By the end of summer 2024, the field was in excellent shape and ready for use. However, over the course of September, after repeated over-use, the field is already showing signs of wear and tear.

### Strategy

The following has been communicated between the Maintenance Department, Rentals, the Principal and partners:

- The school field is an outdoor classroom, first and foremost.
- The District would likely close the field in winter months to prevent excess wear and tear.
- Maintenance was committed to monitor the field weekly for condition and use.
- Aeration, top dressing, overseeding, fertilizing, and regular mowing are Maintenance items to be done.
- The District will provide rental use 3 times per week to the Gabriola Soccer Association (during periods the field is open).
- The District has been made aware of unauthorized usage and will be monitoring use.

Due to past over-use causing major damage to the field, the Maintenance Department has instituted limitations be put in place to 3 days of use per week to allow the field time to recover. This strategy will continue.

We note that the District will raise the possibility of future partnerships with the RDN, however, that will not impact immediate access.

### Conclusion

Rentals have implemented an agreement with partners to reflect the strategy above, in an effort to maintain a useable playfield for the Gabriola Elementary students, while providing a recreational space for the community. The limitations in the strategy were put in place to allow for the field to have an opportunity to “recover” from use and to provide time for staff to maintain and mow. In the past, over-use has made this field condition non-optimal, to the point of closure, and increasing maintenance and operating costs.

The playfield is expected to be closed to recreational activities outside of school hours during winter months, as the weather is not conducive to grass growing/repair, causing significant damage to the field and major maintenance budget and labor requirements in spring.