From: Missoula Softball Board
To: Grp. City Council and City Web Site
Subject: Proposed Field Use Fee Increase
Date: Monday, January 24, 2022 5:36:44 PM

Missoula City Council Members:

The Missoula Softball Association (MSA) is adamantly opposed to raising the user rental fees for use of Missoula Parks & Rec (MPR) managed facilities.These proposed increases significantly increase the MSA operating costs, a huge detriment to running our adult slowpitch softball leagues. As a not-for-profit, our goal is to provide opportunity for the softball community across Missoula, western Montana, and beyond including all of Montana and the Northwest. Each year our budgets are set to break even while providing top quality opportunities to play in leagues, tournaments, and events keeping our community active. Our largest expense in our budget every year has always been the costs of renting the facilities from MPR - roughly 36% of our overall operating budget (in 2021). Since the opening of the new Fort Missoula complex/fields, MSA has had to shift to fundraising from local businesses to offset these additional costs for our players/teams, which we are not fully able to offset and therefore have to increase fees for our leagues/tournaments for our teams/players. We've experienced considerable attrition of teams/players since the new fields opened, when a dramatic fee increase was introduced. In 2017 fees were $77.50 for one field a night for our leagues and with the opening of the new fields in 2018, those fees increased to $125. And in just 5 short years, we're looking to pay $165.75 - more than double the fee we'd previously paid in 2017. We've also seen a dramatic shift in tournaments leaving these brand new facilities seeking out other alternatives that are more sustainable in the long-run. A brand new complex should be doing just the opposite - enticing new users and drawing out-of-town events.

We ask that MPR not look at just increasing fees to offset increasing costs. In the end, MPR needs to make money. But if no one can afford to use the facilities, then the number of users will continue to decline. With continued decline, the fees collected by MPR will continue to go down. If the reaction is to continue to increase fees to offset the budget, this model will continue to drive users away and will not gain additional funds as desired. Look into ways to bring more users to the facilities. More users and more rentals = more money (economy of scale).

Two other items to address that are related to tax payer and user fees of the Fort Missoula softball fields:

1. MSA requests that MPR unlock the Fort fields 1-5. These fields are paid for through tax payer money, and the only individuals that can use these facilities are those that pay additional money to participate through organized leagues. There should be accessible to all. Previous concerns by MPR were raised about vandalism, an issue that all MPR facilities face but all other facilities are not locked. While many folks do pay to play in our leagues, our entire community is not provided the opportunity to go out and play ball with their children on these new facilities.

2. Are site facilitators necessary full time on league nights at Fort Missoula? This is an added cost, to which the old Fort fields and McCormick (currently) do not have site facilitators. We understand the desire to lock gates or have an MPR representative available, which could be

satisfied by the concessions staff currently in place. Are there site facilitators at all MPR managed facilities? Is this an added and unneeded expense?

We urge the council to reconsider this proposed fee increase. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Laura Verhaeghe
MSA Board President