

On Oct 8, 2023, at 15:30, Robert Pepi <bobpepi@aol.com> wrote:

Mayor Simmons, Police Chief Timothy Shaw, Board of Representatives President Jeff Curtis and Parks & Recreation Commission Chairman Paul Newman:

On behalf of the Stamford Youth Soccer League and other properly permitted users (youth and adult) of the West Beach Turf facility, I am writing to ask you to address an issue that has become increasingly problematic for us and has led to safety concerns for our coaches and players.

This safety concern generally comes in the form of unpermitted adult soccer players who come to use the facility and then dispute the need to leave when our permitted teams arrive to use the fields for practices or games. We have no issue with Stamford residents using the fields...it's a City park. However, this should be a very simple equation-you show your City permit and the non-permitted folks leave in an agreeable fashion...but it consistently doesn't pan out that way.

To be clear, we work very closely with the sanctioned, Stamford, adult soccer leagues. They are never any problem whatsoever in this regard. In fact, they themselves have sometimes also had issues with these intruders. The problem folks are often not even Stamford (or Connecticut) residents when it comes to the weekend. (Especially Sunday morning.)

On weeknights the issue usually revolves around high school age pickup players or adults who resist leaving when they are asked.

We have had coaches and other adults and kids **physically threatened, robbed, spit at and screamed at** both during the weekday practices and before weekend games.

Calling 911 usually gets us an officer in about 20 minutes. The officers are great but the concern is that by the time they arrive the damage will have been done. When adults physically threaten our coach - 20 minutes is too long.

We understand that our police officers may have other commitments during those times and that their response may be necessarily delayed or preempted.

We have resorted to hiring extra duty police officers at the start of each season in recent years hoping to set a pattern with these intruders early in the season so that they realize that they will not be able to use the fields whenever they want to and they will just stop coming. To that end we have spent about \$5,000 in each of the spring and current fall seasons.

When Stamford had a vibrant Parks Police force, we did not have these safety problems. Officer Gould would schedule someone to swing by during the pertinent times and we never had any safety issues. We know that he is now alone.

Is it possible that the time has come for a different approach to the ongoing safety issues in the City parks? I'm told that the City has posted a job for a Parks Police person and that, despite many months passing, has not had a bite. My understanding is that, in terms of job requirements, a candidate must be an ex-police officer. Should we consider having parks officers who are not expected to be trained to make arrests but to act more as "eyes and ears" for the police department - while issuing tickets when needed? That would potentially open the range of candidates.

Or maybe the least expensive approach for the City is to reimburse the non-profit leagues for clearly defined extra duty police expenses? In that scenario, the typical yearly costs would likely be far, far less than the cost of just one parks police officer.

Or what if the police safety expenses were credited against our annual indoor gym bill which is accrued each winter?

Just throwing out ideas so that we might come up with a long-term solution to a dangerous problem.

Can we please work on a solution together?

The folks listed below represent other Stamford community organizations who join us in this effort. We invite a conversation so that together we can find a solution that prevents a tragedy.

Thanks for Your Interest,

Bob Pepi
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SYSL Executive Director
Stamford Youth Soccer League
Stamford Adult Soccer League
Stamford Italian Soccer League
Stamford Coed Soccer League