



## The Corporation of the District of Saanich

# Report

**To:** Mayor and Council  
**From:** Suzanne Samborski, Director of Parks, Recreation & Community Services  
**Date:** April 27, 2026  
**Subject:** 2026 Outdoor Sports Field Strategy  
**File:** 2150-20/OSFS

---

### RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the Draft *Outdoor Sports Field Strategy*.

### BACKGROUND

On September 25, 2023, Saanich Council adopted its 2023-2027 Council Strategic Plan, which included initiative 2.3.4, "Undertake a Parks Field Use and Allocation Strategy" in its list of Community well-being initiatives. This process and Draft Strategy are a result of that strategic direction.

Strategy development began in Fall 2024 with a current state analysis of Saanich's outdoor sports fields and lacrosse boxes. After an iterative development process and two rounds of community engagement, the Draft Strategy is now in the refinement phase, where staff will be incorporating feedback received through the second round of engagement and developing an implementation plan with financial implications. The final Strategy is planned for completion in Winter 2027.

### DISCUSSION

Saanich is undertaking the *Outdoor Sports Field Strategy* (the Strategy) to assess the current condition, use, and distribution of outdoor sports fields and lacrosse boxes, and to plan for future community needs as the District continues to grow and evolve. This is an opportunity to modernize how Saanich manages these important community resources. The desired outcome is to ensure Saanich can sustainably support active sports field use now, and into the future, as community sport evolves and Saanich's population grows.

Saanich has 60 sports fields and two lacrosse boxes, serving more than 50 sports groups and field users, each with distinct needs and organizational capacity. These activities are distributed across 20 parks.

With Saanich's continued growth and a complex sports field system to manage, there is increasing pressure on the District's parks and sports fields. The Strategy considers how to address growth while balancing demand, field health, fairness, long-term capacity, and investment. The Strategy will align Saanich's sports field and lacrosse box planning and management with best practices such as a sports field classification system, allocation policy, updated fees and charges policy and asset management to ensure community sport opportunities continue to be available and to prioritize future investments.

Many connected factors influence outdoor sport field planning. In Saanich this includes a variety of arrangements with long-standing and emerging sports organizations. The Draft Strategy explores way to address access and ensure equity in how fields are allocated, anticipates changes in demand, and supports better planning, management, and investment decisions.

Working with a consultant, the Strategy is informed by a comprehensive engagement process (See Appendix G in the Draft Strategy). It includes an assessment of the current state of Saanich's outdoor sports fields and lacrosse boxes, identifies the community's current needs and values, establishes a vision and principles, and makes recommendations for planning, management, and maintenance of these important community amenities.

### **Sports Field User Groups**

Most of Saanich's outdoor sports fields and lacrosse boxes are allocated through a unique framework known as the Home User Group Model. Home User Groups (HUGs) are non-profit organizations with long-standing connections to their *home* parks. Over the years, these groups, most of which are sports organizations, have invested significant time and resources into these parks by offering community programs, helping maintain park spaces, and supporting the construction and improvement of sports field infrastructure and associated amenities. These contributions help foster strong communities centred around their passion for sports.

There are 17 sports HUGs that use Saanich's sports fields and lacrosse boxes: 11 baseball and softball associations, four soccer associations, a lacrosse association, and a football association. In total, these 17 sport-focused HUGs use over 60 sports fields and lacrosse boxes and support the maintenance of ancillary amenities such as clubhouses, batting cages, and outdoor lighting systems.

Historically, the base principle of the HUG model has been that these groups manage and/or maintain the infrastructure they helped to install. To acknowledge these contributions, HUGs receive priority allocation and access to various spaces, buildings, and structures within Saanich Parks. These long-standing informal arrangements with Saanich date back several decades, and because there is no formal policy governing the HUG model, the specific detail of each arrangement varies across groups.

Saanich's sports fields are also used by many non-home user groups. These generally fall within two categories: emerging user groups, which are larger and growing in participation, and smaller community-based user groups.

### **ENGAGEMENT**

Engagement for the Draft Strategy was conducted in two phases. A detailed engagement summary and results are provided in Appendix G.

**Round One** (November–December 2024) focused on gathering input from sports user groups, schools, neighbouring municipalities, and staff through meetings, interviews, workshops, and questionnaires.

Engagement revealed strong enthusiasm for sport and an appreciation for existing facilities. However, many organizations reported capacity challenges within their organizations, largely due to declining volunteerism. Several groups indicated a lack of clarity around the HUG model, especially with regards to historical arrangements, partnerships, and roles and responsibilities.

Alongside strong demand for Saanich’s established sports – soccer, baseball, softball, football, and lacrosse – emerging sports such as cricket, rugby and ultimate frisbee – are increasing in popularity and increasingly seeking access to Saanich’s fields.

Feedback highlighted varied experiences with the HUG model, general satisfaction with field conditions but concerns about aging amenities, increasing demand for high-quality and year-round facilities, and growing pressure from expanding and emerging sports. Opportunities for collaboration with schools and neighbouring municipalities were also identified.

**Round Two** (October–November 2025) focused on collecting feedback on the *Draft Outdoor Sports Field Strategy* through an online open house and public questionnaire.

Overall, participants expressed strong support for the Strategy’s vision, guiding principles, and recommendations, and viewed it as a positive step toward more equitable, modernized, and accountable sports field management.

Feedback emphasized the importance of recognizing community sports organizations, addressing asset renewal and maintenance, considering environmental impacts, and clarifying cost recovery and allocation policies. While respondents were generally supportive, they identified several areas requiring further review included field capacity limits, changes to illuminated grass fields, potential impacts to HUGs under a new management model, and the need for a more detailed implementation plan, transition measures and financial analysis.

## **THE STRATEGY**

### **Best Practices**

A review of Saanich’s current practices highlighted several best practices that present strong opportunities for Saanich to adopt and/or build on.

#### Sports Field Classification System

A sport field classification system provides a clear framework for appropriate levels of play, recommended maintenance standards, maximum hours of use, supporting amenities, and associated fees. Adopting such a system would improve clarity, consistency, and equity across the sports field system.

#### Allocation Policy

An allocation policy defines who can use public recreation facilities, when, and under what conditions. Adopting an allocation policy, similar to the Recreation Division’s existing policy, would establish clear priorities aligned with the community needs and values, help match the right users to the right fields at the right times, optimize field use, and generate more reliable data to inform future planning and investment decisions.

## Updated Fees and Charges Policy

Updating Saanich's Fees and Charges Policy would create clear, consistent, and transparent fees based on factors such as field type, classification, use and amenities. It would also support better asset management by generating data on actual field usage and demand and encourage users to book only what they need, helping ensure fields are used efficiently and equitably.

## Asset Management

The Draft Strategy included updating the asset inventory for Saanich's sports fields, aligning the work with the District's Asset Management Strategy. The review evaluated the condition and lifecycle of each asset, enabling the prioritization of maintenance and upgrades and supporting more efficient, long-term budgeting.

## **Draft Vision and Principles**

The vision and principles for the Draft Strategy draw on the District's Strategic Plan with input from engagement. These statements provide the basis for the recommendations and will help guide decision-making over the long-term.

### Draft Vision

The Strategy's draft vision is intended to guide Saanich sports fields operations, management, and development over the next 15 years. It serves as a framework for the Strategy's guiding principles and recommendations and was developed through public engagement, background analysis, and discussions with Saanich staff:

*Saanich Parks provides facilities, ranging from informal playing fields to high-end competition field complexes, to help foster a sense of belonging, community health, and sports development. The District's outdoor sports fields and lacrosse boxes are inclusive for everyone, including players, coaches, spectators, and other users.*

### Guiding Principles

The draft principles are designed to guide decision-making for sports field service delivery, even as participation patterns and community needs evolve. They emphasize equity, accessibility, and transparency, support long-term athlete development, clarify roles and responsibilities, promote efficient use of parkland, and ensure accountable financial management:

1. Saanich's inventory and allocation of sports fields and lacrosse boxes reflect community needs and consider sports facilities within the context of the wide range of demands on the park system.
2. Sports fields, lacrosse boxes and supporting amenities consider accessibility, diversity, equity and inclusion to create a welcoming environment for all sports users and spectators.
3. Sports field and lacrosse box infrastructure and allocations align with the principles of the Sports for Life Long-Term Athlete Development Framework.
4. The roles and responsibilities of Saanich, user groups and other partners are transparent, well understood, and clearly defined.
5. Sports field and lacrosse box maintenance and capital investments are guided by clearly define levels of service and align with the District's Asset Management Strategy.
6. Sports field and lacrosse box allocation and booking policies are transparent and aim to use parkland efficiently for the greatest public benefit.

7. The financial management of the District's sports field infrastructure demonstrates accountability to all District of Saanich residents and helps support the local economy.

## **Draft Strategy Recommendations**

Twenty draft recommendations aim to move Saanich toward a modern sports field management model that aligns with best management practices from neighbouring municipalities. The core shift is from user-group-led field management to a collaborative approach where Saanich leads planning, allocation, maintenance, and asset management, and sport organizations remain key partners focused on program delivery in the community and collaboration on key aspects of asset renewals (such as the ability to pursue grant funding).

To support the shift, the Draft Strategy proposes a field classification system, backed by regularly updated field inventory and cost tracking, so maintenance levels, renewal priorities, and responsibilities are clearly defined and consistently applied. This aligns with the District's Asset Management planning approach.

It also recommends establishing a formal, transparent allocation and booking policy, alongside an updated fee framework guided by equity, cost recovery, and best practices. This includes any required updates to the Fees and Charges Bylaw – and a clearer, more consistent tournament policy.

Partnerships should be strengthened through regular roundtables with sport groups, updated Joint Use Agreements with School Districts 61 and 63, exploring a Capital Region inter-municipal working group to coordinate planning and share best practices related to sports field and lacrosse box management.

Finally, the Draft Strategy supports broader community access by promoting and recognizing informal community fields for spontaneous play, improving public visibility of available times, and sustaining long-term investment through asset renewal, accessibility audits, and ongoing capacity reviews.

The goal of this approach is to improve equity, transparency, and sustainability. Fees, clear maintenance expectations, and a standardized allocation policy are intended to ensure equitable access for the community while reducing liability and workload on HUGs. The Draft Strategy envisions a phased transition, allowing existing arrangements to evolve gradually into a clearer, more transparent system.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The next steps are to incorporate the feedback received through the second round of engagement into a Final Draft Strategy, with an emphasis on developing an implementation plan and financial implications. The final Draft Strategy will be presented to Council in Winter 2027.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

1. That Council receive this report for information.
2. That Council not receive this report for information.
3. That Council provide alternate direction to Staff.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

While there are no financial implications in receiving the report for information, the Draft *Outdoor Sports Field Strategy* is a complex, multi-year-phased approach to supporting the sustainable and vibrant delivery of outdoor field sport to the residents of Saanich.

In this next planning phase, staff will evaluate the impacts, risks, and financial requirements associated with implementation. This work will be undertaken concurrently with the development of a detailed implementation plan, which includes direction on phasing, future engagement with sport user groups, and monitoring and evaluation.

The final Draft *Outdoor Sports Field Strategy* will outline the costs associated with the implementation plan. Some costs will reflect one-time and ongoing operational costs and others will reflect capital / asset management costs. Financial requests will be made through future budget planning cycles.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

The Draft *Outdoor Sports Field Strategy* is an initiative under Council's Strategic Plan Community well-being, number 2.3.4, "Undertake a Parks Field Use and Allocation Strategy".

## **CONCLUSION**

The Draft *Outdoor Sports Field Strategy* aims to improve how Saanich plans, allocates and stewards its sports fields, lacrosse boxes and related infrastructure, ensuring these community assets keep pace with population growth and evolving sports participation.

With such a large and complex system of 60 outdoor sports fields, two lacrosse boxes and many individualized relationships with sports clubs, Saanich needs a modernized approach supported by data and best management practices to ensure optimal, equitable and sustainable service delivery.

The executed planning process of several rounds of engagement and feedback from the public and community sports organizations will refine the Draft Strategy as staff develop a framework for implementation and corresponding financial considerations.

Prepared by: Nikki McWalters, Parks Planner + Designer  
Donovan Coates, Park Use Coordinator

Reviewed by: Julie Lommerse, Manager of Parks Planning & Development  
Nathalie Dechaine, Manager of Community Development & Business Systems  
Eva Riccius, Senior Manager of Parks

Approved by: Suzanne Samborski, Director of Parks, Recreation & Community Services

Attachments:

Appendix 1 – Draft Outdoor Sports Field Strategy Report

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

**ADMINISTRATOR'S COMMENTS:**

I endorse the recommendation from the Director of Parks, Recreation & Community Services.

Brent Reems, Chief Administrative Officer