

# 'Partnerships' could fill funding gap



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**A**cquisition and maintenance “partnerships,” in which local sports clubs pool their monies to buy and—in some cases—help maintain athletic fields, could be a way to fill the budget gap in many municipal sports programs.

Bill Whirty of the Fort Collins, Colo., Parks and Recreation Department endorses the idea.

“Many municipalities,” explains Whirty,

“haven’t kept up with the growth, and field shortages are likely.”

Money availability, however, is often at the whims of the voters, who—while they have every right to decide on tax levies—are often unaware of what’s needed to make those fields safe for their children’s sports activities.

Youth sports clubs are not always tied to a city program and need

places to play, but don’t have much land of their own. They look to the city or county for space to play.

The city can’t always afford maintenance, which is where acquisition and maintenance “partnerships” can come to the rescue.

“About four years ago,” says Whirty, “a school district had 10 acres of land it wasn’t using. The Fort Collins youth soccer and youth baseball had some money and went into a cooperative agreement with the city to develop and maintain the fields.” The school district crews handle mowing and irrigation duties, and the Parks and Recreation Department maintains the baseball infields.

Other duties, such as snow removal and weed control, are handled by whichever department has the best equipment or expertise. Tax money allocation is smarter. As Whirty rhetorically asks, “Do [voters] care which department is using the

[GOLF/GROUNDS]

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tax money, as long as the fields are taken care of?”

Education includes explaining just what it takes to grow healthy turf. A local soccer club in the Denver area, for example, thinks 40 hours of play a week is “moderate” use.

“We need to get input from them to know their needs,” explains Whirty, “and educate them so they’re our allies.”

Steve Trusty, new executive director of the Sports Turf Managers Association, agrees that municipal sports face a funding gap. He plans to engage in some helpful public relations during his tenure.

“One of the things we want to do,” says Trusty, “is help educate not only the sports turf managers around the country, but the people they have to depend on for the funds.”

“The school districts are pretty poor right now, and athletic groups don’t care where they’re playing,” says Whirty. “As long as they play.”