

STUDY ISSUE WORKSHEET

Board/Commission: Parks and Recreation Commission

Proposed by: Commissioner David Kesting

Date Submitted to Staff Liaison: Aug 20, 2025

Study Issue Working Title:

Comprehensive Field and Park Usage Data Collection

1. What are the key elements of the issue: What precipitated this study?

Statement of Issue:

Currently, the City of Sunnyvale tracks permitted field use through formal rentals by leagues and organizations, but lacks comprehensive data on unpermitted or informal use of parks and recreational spaces. Activities such as pick-up soccer, volleyball, basketball, tennis, pickleball, kite flying, cycling, and informal youth and adult recreation are widespread and unmeasured. Without this data, the City is unable to fully evaluate how parks and fields are serving the community or how future planning should be shaped to meet actual demand.

Background and Justification:

Permitted league use provides an incomplete picture of how our parks and fields are utilized. Walk-on and spontaneous recreational use account for a significant portion of community engagement in Sunnyvale's public spaces, yet no formal system exists to capture this usage. This creates a data blind spot when evaluating new park designs, field allocation priorities, or investments in amenities. Understanding both scheduled and unscheduled use is essential to ensuring our parks system meets the diverse needs of Sunnyvale residents.

This study would align with the City's broader goals around equity, access, and sustainability by ensuring field and park development reflects real-world usage rather than just formal permits. It would also help clarify where conflicts, overcrowding, or underuse may be occurring.

Scope of the Study:

- Evaluate methods of capturing data on informal park and field use (e.g., observation studies, sensors, community surveys, or pilot projects).
- Compare rental data with actual observed use at a sample of sites.
- Identify usage patterns across sports, age groups, and time of day/week.
- Assess any barriers to access or gaps in field availability not captured in rental data.
- Recommend systems for ongoing data collection and integration into planning.

Potential Outcomes:

- A more accurate understanding of how Sunnyvale parks and fields are used by the full spectrum of residents.
- Data-driven planning for future capital improvement projects or field configurations.
- Identification of underserved user groups or sports.
- Enhanced transparency in how space is allocated and maintained.

Relevant Precedents or Examples:

- The City of Mountain View has conducted observational field studies to support planning.
- Palo Alto uses a combination of reservation data and motion-sensor counts at some park sites.
- Other cities have piloted AI-assisted usage monitoring (e.g., people counters, smart cameras) in high-traffic parks.

1. What is the issue or opportunity the City should consider?

The City of Sunnyvale currently tracks rental-based field usage for permitted league activities (e.g., soccer, baseball, cricket) , but lacks comprehensive data on informal, unpermitted use of parks and athletic facilities. This includes pick-up sports (e.g., volleyball, basketball, softball) , individual recreation (e.g., running, cycling, kite flying) , and youth free play. The absence of this data limits the City's ability to fully understand and respond to community recreational needs.

2. What is the potential impact or benefit of this issue?

Collecting accurate data on all forms of park and field usage, both scheduled and spontaneous, will provide a clearer picture of how public spaces are used by Sunnyvale residents. This information will support:

- More responsive park design and field allocation.
- Equitable investment in amenities for underserved sports or user groups.
- Improved planning for maintenance and capital improvements.
- Reduced conflict between scheduled and unscheduled users.

3. How did the issue come to your attention?

The issue arose through Commission discussions regarding park planning and field allocation. While rental statistics are available, there is often anecdotal or observed evidence that informal use outpaces formal reservations at many facilities. Without quantitative data, it is difficult to align investment and programming with true community demand.

4. What are the consequences of not addressing this issue?

If unpermitted usage continues to go unmeasured, the City risks:

- Misallocating field space or amenities based on incomplete data.
- Overlooking high-demand uses that are not captured by permits.
- Underserving key demographics, especially youth and families who rely on walk-on access.
- Missing opportunities to reduce field overuse and user conflict through better design and scheduling.

5. What is the scope of the study issue?

The study should explore methods for quantifying non-permitted park and field use, including:

- Pilot site studies using manual counts, surveys, or sensor-based tracking.
- Comparative analysis of rental data vs. observed field usage.
- Identification of activity types and user demographics not captured in rental statistics.
- Recommendations for ongoing, scalable data collection methods.
- Integration of findings into future park design, CIP prioritization, and recreation programming.

6. What resources are needed to address this issue?

Staff time to scope and manage a pilot data collection program; possible consultant services for observational studies or data analysis; modest funding for monitoring tools or community survey deployment. Potential partnerships with local universities, sports groups, or civic technology providers could also be explored.

7. Is this issue already covered in the current Work Plan or General Plan?

No. While the General Plan emphasizes equitable and inclusive park access, no current initiative focuses on capturing informal recreational use across city parks.

8. Has this issue been previously considered by the City?

Not formally. The City has collected anecdotal reports and maintained field rental data but has not previously initiated a structured effort to measure informal recreational activity or walk-on use patterns.

9. Suggested timeline and prioritization.

This study issue could be scoped and launched within one fiscal year as a pilot study, with final recommendations delivered in time to inform subsequent budget cycles or master planning efforts.

2. Staff Summary of Scope and/or Comments: [Staff Use Only]

The type of information described in the study would be beneficial for the City to obtain. With this information, the City can use trends to allocate resources to maintenance, projects and the park ground designs. However, this type of study issue would come with a high consultant fee, many staff hours (both casual salary and full-time salary), and a high degree of coordination among consultants, staff, volunteers, and 26 park locations.

Additionally, staff conduct public hearings and surveys for any facility, park, or grounds in the queue that are scheduled for updates. Public hearings and surveys provide staff with insight, perspective, and feedback on usage and what the public would like to see in their infrastructure.

Staff consulted with a previous consultant regarding the submitted study issue, and the consultant estimated a minimum consulting fee of \$200,000. The fee would not include salaries for full-time staff to support and oversee the project, salaries for casual staff if the City is responsible for scheduling observers to manually count park-goers, or salaries for staff to oversee volunteers carrying out the manual count. The manual count would be multiple days during the week, multiple times a day, and would need to go through each season. The consultant would need at least one year to collect data, meaning this study issue would take multiple years to complete.

Another methodology discussed involves the City scheduling staff and/or volunteers to manually count park use and type, as well as the overall number of park users. Staff does not recommend a pilot program because there is no capacity.