

BOARD PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT TO THE PUBLIC

I want to take this opportunity to address the public controversy surrounding the use of Highland School last month by the North/West Bergen/Passaic Basketball League, which is a travel league that is privately owned by one of our Board members, in which Midland Park athletes compete along with many other towns.

Until this controversy arose, neither the Board nor the administration had knowledge about the private status of this League.

Board Policy and Regulation number 7510 explains the uses and groups that may apply to use our facilities, and delegates to the Business Administrator the authority to approve applications provided they fulfill the application procedures and submit all of the required documentation.

The Board does not approve these applications and does not become involved in an applicant's request to use our facilities unless the proposed use falls into the category that requires the applicant to pay a rental fee, in accordance with the board policy and regulation.

The application that was submitted to use the Highland School was submitted by the Board member on behalf of the Midland Park Basketball Association, with all of the required documentation.

However, the North/West Bergen/Passaic Basketball League was not identified in the application and there was no indication that the facilities would be used by other Town leagues when Midland Park athletes were not participating.

Because of this registration omission, the Business Administrator approved the application for the use of Highland School, identifying the Midland Park Basketball Association as a Class I user, entitling them to use the facility without being charged custodial and service costs. Class I users are not brought for board review, as they are designated as School, Recreation department and other community group uses.

Once the Business Administrator learned that other towns were using Highland School, she contacted the Board member to confirm this information and upon doing so, advised him that the use by other towns had to cease because their use was not approved under the application, which was submitted on behalf of the Midland Park Basketball Association.

Upon the Business Administrator's further inquiry, and my own discussion with the Board member, we learned that the League in question is privately owned by him for profit. As such, the Board member was informed that while the League was eligible to apply to use the district's facilities as a private for-profit entity, the League is a Class III user, required to pay a use fee and charges for custodial and service costs, and further more needs to receive board approval.

As for the extended use of Highland School by other town leagues, it was clearly stated that even if the application had been properly submitted by the League, the extended use of Highland School to other towns would not have been permitted during the present public health emergency.

The Board's policy and regulation were not followed by the applicant. Any desire to provide opportunities for student athletes, including our own residents, during this public health emergency does not excuse or justify the failure to abide by the Board's policy and regulation.

We regret that these events have called into question our practices, and that the recent publicity over the League's use of Highland School has cast us in an unfavorable light. Please know that we have taken this matter seriously, and beyond addressing the present circumstances, the Board and the administration are committed to a comprehensive review of the current policy and regulation, in an effort to fortify the application procedures, and to reexamine the imposition of custodial and service fees for the use of the district's facilities to ensure that the district's facilities are being used for community purposes that best serve our residents.