



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Office of the Inspector General

MEMORANDUM OF LIMITED INVESTIGATION

August 8, 2024

To: Miti Figueredo, Director
Montgomery County Department of Parks

Kristi Williams, Division Chief
Public Affairs and Community Partnerships

From: Renee Kenney
Inspector General

Re: Permitting Irregularity
MC-002-2025

A Memorandum of Limited Investigation describes specific issues or complaints received and the outcomes of limited procedures undertaken during a preliminary inquiry conducted by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). The investigation was not conducted per Government Auditing Standards or Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspectors General.

Concern/Allegation: Per a Memorandum of Investigation, issued on September 8, 2023, by the Office of the Inspector General, Montgomery County, Maryland, Ms. Carolyn Chen, Montgomery County Council staff member “intentionally mislead staff from CUPF¹ and Parks² to believe they were requesting reservations for athletic fields on the Council’s behalf when in fact they were doing so for the benefit of their [her] spouse. In total, field use permits in the amount of \$19,190 (\$11,490 of which was reserved under the council’s ActiveMONTGOMERY account) were obtained by the employee and never paid for.”

On March 8, 2024 the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (Commission) filed a civil action claim against Ms. Carolyn Chen. The case was dismissed on July 18, 2024, as Ms. Chen submitted payment in full (\$19,190).

The objective of this limited investigation was to assess compliance with Montgomery County Department of Parks (MCP), Permits & Rentals – Athletic Field Use Permit Policy.

¹ Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF). CUPF, a Montgomery County agency, provides community organizations and public agencies with access to public schools and government facilities for community services, programs, and events.

² Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Montgomery County Department of Parks.

Inquiry and Outcome:

On July 31, 2024, the OIG met with [REDACTED], [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to gain additional information on the permitting irregularity. [REDACTED] single permit users must pay permit fees in full before obtaining a permit; exceptions are provided to leagues to allow for monthly billings. When asked specifically why Ms. Chen was allowed to book numerous reservations without payment, [REDACTED] explained, Montgomery CUPF received approximately \$1M in federal Covid funding to support youth sports, which in-turn was awarded to local leagues in 2022. We [REDACTED] assumed Ms. Chen's reservations were being made with authorization from Montgomery County Council for the local leagues. It wasn't until [REDACTED] was reviewing 2024 bookings, that he saw the large balance due from Montgomery County Council for 2022 and 2023, and realized something might be wrong. [REDACTED] MCP is in the process of updating their permitting policies. The current paid in full requirement is not accurate and does not reflect the revision provided to leagues allowing monthly payments.

Summary and Conclusion:

Per MCP's Permits & Rentals – Athletic Field Use Permit Policy, "CUPF will issue permits only after all fees have been paid in full." The OIG reasonably concludes, reservations provided to Ms. Chen did not follow MCP's documented policies. Although the documented policies were not followed, it appears reasonable, based on County Council's prior booking activities, that personnel within the Public Affairs and Community Partnerships Division, Permitting and Information Section did not contribute to the permitting irregularity. There was no evidence of a personal relationship between permitting personnel and Ms. Chen to suggest favoritism in bookings or kickbacks. Since the permitting irregularity occurred, the Permitting and Information Section have committed to strengthening their internal processes over permit booking and payments of permitting fees.

The OIG does recommend MCP management:

1. Complete the necessary policy updates regarding payment requirements for both leagues and county council members.
2. Implement stronger internal review procedures to detect past due balances in a more expedient manner.

Cc:

Audit Committee

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