

Easy Reader

City of Manhattan Beach to pay school district for facility use

[Easy Reader Staff](#) | May 22, 2013

With hopeful school parents and district Board of Trustees members looking on, the Manhattan Beach City Council on Tuesday unanimously approved a long-anticipated joint-use agreement with the Manhattan Beach Unified School District, which for the first time in 14 years will receive payment from the city for sharing its facilities, fields and pools.

“We should actually feel good that we’re coming clean and paying for what we’re using,” said Mayor Pro Tem Amy Howorth, who “with great pleasure” made the motion for approval.

Under the previous agreement adopted in 1999, the school district had granted the city free access during non-school hours to its school fields and facilities, including Polliwog Park and Begg Pool, as long as the city footed maintenance and operation costs.

But with the district scrambling for new streams of revenue to offset its [anticipated \\$5 million structural deficit](#) next year, board members and school parents made their case with City Council [last month](#) at a joint meeting.

“What we’re looking for in this agreement is not fair market value,” Superintendent Mike Matthews told council then. “We’re asking for some compensation for the facilities that’s fair for our community.”

Under the new three-year agreement, the city will pay the district \$550,000 a year and continue to upkeep maintenance and operation for access to a total of 14 district facilities and 23 acres of open space, including eight school fields, Begg Field, Polliwog Park and Premier Field, Mira Costa’s tennis and basketball courts and Begg Pool.

And for the first time, the city will have access to Mira Costa’s swimming pool during non-school hours, from 5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. The pool is closed for maintenance in July and August.

Additionally, the agreement grants city use of facilities during emergencies and training exercises and allows opportunities to request other facilities, such as summer classrooms for recreation classes. It also grants city employees and officials the opportunity to enroll their family members in MBUSD schools.

For the 2013-2014 year, the agreement will cost the city about \$1.5 million — a sum of the direct payment to the district, costs of field maintenance, hardscape maintenance and additional lifeguard staffing for the Mira Costa pool during city use. In the following two years, that number, adjusted for inflation, is anticipated to climb up to \$1.7 million annually.

“First off, just to make the message clear, you can afford to do this,” Finance Director Bruce Moe reassured council and residents Tuesday.

Moe explained that the fund will come out of the city’s unreserved general fund balance, which in next year’s budget will have an opening balance of \$3.5 million. The next two fiscal years are also in the clear, he said, as the city has projected operating surpluses within the general fund even after accounting for this agreement.

“But that is before transfers,” he said, reminding council of the growing transfer requirements in the general fund, particularly for storm water and street lighting subsidies, expected to cost more than \$1 million by fiscal year 2015-2016.

“You need to be focused on correcting this problem because ultimately it will affect your ability to extend this agreement in the future,” Moe said.

Mayor David Lesser, who last month expressed concern about adopting the agreement with anticipated increases in the city’s pension costs among other financial obligations he considered to be city priorities, said he extends his support for the three-year term while “recognizing that we’re going to have to look at the challenges in the years to come.”

“My wife and I ... remained here because the school district is so strong,” Lesser said. “Others move here because of the school district. We truly have a partnership with the school district. It enhances our properties, it enhances our lives.”

The agreement runs from July 1 through June 30, 2016.