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Jim Hartmann/Alex
12/12/2006 08:55 PM

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cc "Mark Jinks" <Mark.Jinks@alexandriava.gov>

bcc

Subject Fw: Field Report

----- Original Message -----

From: "Judy Guse-Noritake" [jnoritake@nka-arch.com]

Sent: 12/12/2006 01:10 PM

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Cc: Jim Hartmann; Kirk Kincannon; Roger Blakeley

Subject: Field Report

Park and Recreation Commission

December 12, 2006

Re: Draft Field Report

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

Tonight at your regular Council meeting you will receive a presentation and the draft of the field report that a consultant has been working on with the Park and Recreation Department for some time. The consultant, Leon Younger, also did the work on the recreational needs assessment completed in tandem with the Open Space Plan in 2003. I think you will find the report to be quite thorough in its findings and recommendations. The Park and Recreation Commission has been asking for field information this definitive for many years and is in full support of the findings and recommendations.

For close to two decades the Department and Commission have been raising a flag about the number and condition of our fields. We knew, and said repeatedly, that we needed more fields. You and your predecessors in reply always asked "how many"? We did not have the tools to give a definitive answer then, but the study of field sports, along with field design, synthetic turf manufacturing and the science of natural turf maintenance has now come into its own. Now we do have the answers.

Experts from Penn State University's turf management program were brought in a few of months to look at our fields and give a presentation on turf (of all kinds) management to the Commission and community. They said quite bluntly that many of our older fields, Four Mile Run being the most representative, were poster children for over-use. They said that the best turf professionals in the world couldn't keep grass on the field at Four Mile Run because of the number of games that are played on it. The report shows clearly that there is a broad range of steps that the Department and this City must take to address issues of field quantity and quality, one influencing the other.

For all those who have said in the past few years that the Department is not taking good care of fields, it must be said that is not entirely the case. They are taking the best care that can be had, given the current level of use. For all those who have said "why do we need more fields, I never see anyone playing on those two at Potomac Yard". The fact is that the fields at Potomac Yard, as well as others in decent

shape around the city are that way because are fenced and use is limited to the "carrying capacity" of the natural turf grass. All this is to say that having enough nice fields to play on for the adults and children in this community is a huge challenge and we will only be able to address that challenge by undertaking a broad strategy of improvements. The report lays out some very specific steps that must be taken.

Certainly a part of the strategy is to place synthetic turf on more fields. But synthetic turf really makes most sense where fields have lights so that at least one game can be played after dusk. We need to remember that in fall and spring many teams do not begin practice or games until it is quite dark, at 6:00 PM, because most coaches/parents work and commute. Many times they are leaving the workplace before 5:00 PM to make a practice. We also need to remember that synthetic turf is expensive and lasts somewhere between 8 to 10 years before it needs replacing. It also has on-going maintenance needs, not unlike real grass. It needs to be vacuumed and repaired on occasion. Its surface can get very hot during warm weather, exceeding 120 + degrees, and in some locations it needs to be hosed down before games to invoke evaporative cooling. Synthetic turf is part of the answer, but it is not right for every field.

Other natural turf fields in our community have been nothing more than a flat area, seeded with grass and played on for years. The underlying soil is mostly clay, with low spots that trap water and refuse to grow grass. These fields need serious reconstruction to place and crown engineered fill which contains a lot of good sand and rich soil, to both achieve rain drainage and good turf growth. It's an investment we need to make. Some of these fields need lights as well. As a community we must stop saying "NO!" to lights at our fields. The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) that governs the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program has standards for "green" lights for athletic facilities which requires "full-cut-off" lamps, meaning that no light or glare reaches beyond a 90 degree angle from the top of the light pole. In addition, these standards are meant to fulfill the Dark-Skies standards many communities are striving for. The design and manufacture of field lights has come a very long way and we should be embracing this new technology which looks out for the concerns of neighbors as well as the needs of the players. One of the first fields where we should address lights is the ball field in Ben Brenman Park used by Alexandria Little League.

We have some limited opportunity for adding a few new athletic and softball/baseball fields over the next 2-5 years and they are opportunities that we cannot afford to either let lag or let go. The fields at Witter Drive are in the design phase, but we need them on-line as soon as possible. The same is true for the two replacement fields in Potomac Yard, at Simpson Field. We need to have the community, commission and Council processes finished there as quickly as we can and construction underway just after the existing Monroe Street Bridge comes down. The outcome of the Jones Point planning process is not yet known, but if there are fields allowed there we should push for completion sooner rather than later.

There has been discussion about getting field play on the open area once reserved for a potential recreation center at Ben Brenman Park very soon. A decade has gone by that this area could have been leveled and used at least for youth team practices. It is sorely needed now for that use and the recreational needs assessment pointed pretty clearly to Chinquapin as the best site for expanded indoor recreational facilities when the time comes. Only a few will remember that the original design for Ben Brenman Park included two more athletic fields than it currently features. One field was to be located on the site that was reserved by Council, discussed above. The other was eliminated at the request of the then-City Manager who asked to have the field proposed at the corner near Holmes Run and Duke Street removed because of noise concerns from the neighbors of the high-rise residential building nearby. The area became, at her request, a passive use area. It remains that today.

In addition, we need to think outside the box about how and where we can find more fields and/or increased capacity. It was suggested at a recent Park and Recreation Commission hearing on this draft report that we consider building a structured recreation deck atop part of the new bus facility being designed behind Generous George's. This project will feature a fairly large parking structure. Buying an additional level of concrete slab on top of the parking structure, some artificial turf and an all-weather bubble would give us a year-round indoor field, which we currently do not have. While there would be additional restroom and fire exit requirements, it is still an option worth looking at. It is also something we should look at for new private development proposed across the city. Those structured fields are not ideal solutions but they still have value, particularly in meeting recreational needs for the adults we currently do not serve. Most young adults who play organized sports will tell you that they are playing on fields or at indoor facilities in Fairfax County or Arlington. We have quite effectively exported our adult field recreational needs to our neighboring jurisdictions.

This report comes at a time when this City is facing a very challenging budget. But the need was known and unmet for decades before this. We no longer have the option of waiting. At the same Commission hearing referenced above it was suggested that the City take whatever amount of the budget anticipated for an annual investment in artificial turf for the next 10 years and use that as debt service on bonds to address the field shortfall more quickly. There is no way that an annual appropriation from the normal budget process is going to begin to meet the shortfall this draft report outlines. Both Fairfax County and Prince William County recently reached the same conclusion and have gone to the bond market to address athletic field needs. We can, and will, ask the development community and the sports groups themselves for help, but the challenge is so much larger than that. The need is beyond urgent.

Several other points need to be made in closing. First, the report, though it offers no solution, points out that our city currently has no track. Once TC Williams is finished, the track behind it will be repaired (not replaced) by the contractor, but the Special Use Permit severely limits its use. We have a greater need than that track can deliver. We need to find another site for a new competitive track. Certainly we should work closely with the Alexandria City Public Schools to do that. Fortunately as we address our challenges with fields and tracks, it is with a new and welcome sense of partnership with the ACPS.

Second, it cannot be stressed enough that the various city departments involved in S.U.P.'s, design firm/contractor selection, and bidding, as well as project execution must work more efficiently together as a team. When one thing is held up, it takes an additional year to get an artificial turf installed or a new field in place. We cannot afford that any longer. The process inside the City itself must be efficient, streamline and coordinated. That has not been the case in the past.

Below is a link to an article featured in the Washington Post this weekend titled "Let Everybody Play". Its main point argues that school sports should not be limited, but available to anyone who turns out. It cites all the things that we have been saying about sports keeping kids fit, mentally and physically healthy, off the streets and away from trouble. Organized sports give kids both a place to be and a place to belong. Certainly sports offered by TC Williams fills some of the need, but the City's own recreational programs offer that same opportunity to kids under high school age or for those that do not make the cut at TC. So do the programs offered by the growing number of non-profits like Alexandria Soccer Association, Alexandria Lacrosse, Alexandrian Rugby, and Alexandria Little League. Groups like these (and there are more) are our partners in caring for our children's health and welfare and they don't turn kids away – not yet. But next year might be the year when that begins. Lacrosse, for instance, reports more than 20% growth annually in the last few years of the number of participants. Soccer has said that unless they get time on more fields, they cannot set up more teams. Rugby begs for a scrap of a field anywhere to practice on. It is a desperate situation. The draft report says we should limit the number of practice games our kids get in any given week to free up field time. While in theory that is good, the kid's competition from other communities will not have those same limits and lack of conditioning and practice will show come game time. In addition, as was the case for my own child growing up in the middle of Old Town, more and more of our children are being raised a highly urban environment without backyards or outdoor space available close by. Having them in sports with lots of outdoor practices and games means they are not inside in front of a TV or computer. It's just a different city we are making now.

The final paragraph of the Post article begins "It makes no sense from a public health standpoint to continue a policy that contributes to the overall decline in physical fitness among adolescents and young adults ...". In the case of Alexandria, the lapse in our public policy has been the long delay of addressing the number and condition of our fields. We have opportunities to grow participation in all kinds of sports, in partnerships with a number of great sports organizations, but we don't have the fields. There is no thing that can do more good for the children and adults of this community than to provide opportunity for active recreation. It's a matter of public mental and physical health policy that we need to step up and address aggressively. There is not enough money. Many neighborhoods will push back at proposed increases in activity at our larger parks, but for the good of our children of today and tomorrow and health of our community in general, these hard decisions must be made. The money must be found.

The Park and Recreation Commission stands ready to help in these endeavors in anyway required. Our purpose is to give you, the City Council, policy advice. Right now the most critical need for recreation in our community is for active recreation. Fields. Tracks. More gymnasium space. Trails. We must find both the will and the way to meet these needs.

Sincerely,

Judy R. Guse-Noritake, Chair
Park and Recreation Commission

Washington Post article link:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/08/AR2006120801518.html>

Cc: Park and Recreation Commission Members
Youth Sports Advisory Board Members

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12-12-06

Athletic Fields Master Plan Presentation

Department of Recreation, Parks and
Cultural Activities
December 12, 2006

Purpose

At its October 25, 2005 meeting, City Council asked staff for a more comprehensive approach to the Field use and condition issues facing the City.

City of Alexandria

Field Use Summary

June 28, 2005

Stand Alone Existing Rectangular Fields 17 Available Fields/ 4 Not Available 21 Total Rectangular Fields

Stand Alone Rectangular Sports Fields (Non Overlay Sports)	Scheduled Use	Size	Age Level	Comments
Ben Brezman	Soccer	(75x120yds)	Youth	Regulation size
Chinquapia 1	Soccer/TCFootball/TC Lacrosse	(40x80 yds)	Youth	Chin #1,2,3 combine during TC use

Since that meeting under CC direction, staff engaged Pros Consulting to perform A Comprehensive Field Analysis & Master Plan

Overview

- Project Process
 - Situational Assessment
 - Alternatives Analysis
 - 10-year Athletic field Master Plan Development- a Tool for RPCA

Situational Assessment Summary

Key findings

- Number, condition, standards and guidelines & policies
- Current design, demand and programming
- Equipment, lifecycle maintenance, fees & operational costs
- Spillover into open space

Alternatives Analysis

- Facility Equivalent Allocation
- Capacity and Service Area Analysis
- Demand
- Field Requirements
- Alternatives Analysis
- Cost-Benefit Analysis

Preliminary Recommendations

- Establish phased Athletic Field Capital Improvement Plan
- Work with Schools to develop synthetic fields
- Establish Council approved policies for field usage
- Update maintenance standards
- Evaluate pricing policies and fees
- Establish life cycle maintenance and renewal/replacement program