



Date: August 26, 2003

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT: Synthetic Turf Playing Fields Development - Public Consultation Process

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the public consultation process outlined in this report for determining appropriate locations for the installation of synthetic turf sport fields be approved.

POLICY

On July 8, 2002, the Board approved the Planning Field Renewal Plan as a reference for future capital funding opportunities. The Renewal Plan recommended “that an additional six artificial turf fields be constructed to meet the increasing demand for outdoor field sports.”

The 2003-2005 Park Board Capital Plan allocates \$2.9 million to the construction of two synthetic turf fields.

BACKGROUND

The 2002 Playing Field Renewal Plan was developed through a study conducted by the Vancouver Park Board and the Vancouver School Board (VSB) — the two boards together providing almost all the sport playing fields in the city — with the active involvement of the Vancouver Field Sports Federation (VFSF). The study determined that the combined inventory of VPB and VSB playing fields barely meets the current use levels for soccer, field hockey, football, rugby, ultimate frisbee, cricket, softball and baseball. Furthermore, the study projected increased demand for playing fields mainly due to the following factors:

- C city population growth;
- C identified trends towards gender equity in sports participation, and
- C the impact of recent initiatives, such as the MoreSport Program, aimed at engaging youth in sport and fitness in all city neighbourhoods.

The report calculated that the combined effect of these factors over the next decade could potentially result in a 50% increase in demand for playing field use.

The study concluded that six new synthetic turf fields, having the collective playing capacity of 25 to 30 grass fields, should be developed in addition to the existing inventory of three such fields (one on School Board property at Eric Hamber Secondary School and two at Andy Livingstone Park in downtown Vancouver). Such development would increase the combined VPB/VSB capacity of regulation-sized sport fields by approximately 19-22%, a relatively modest target in relation to projected demand trends. The Renewal Plan identifies a number of potential locations, on both parks and secondary school grounds, for synthetic turf development; a list of these sites is Appendix A to this report.

The 2003-2005 Capital Plan includes an allocation of \$2.9 million for the development of two synthetic turf pitches with lights, essentially the first phase of implementation of the longer term field renewal strategy. In response to this allocation in the Capital Plan, the VFSF formally endorsed the following proposal:

“Up to 50% of the funds be allocated to the construction of one artificial field and one gravel field with necessary lighting at Trillium (park site) leaving the possibility of replacing the gravel pitch with a second synthetic turf field in a future Capital Plan. The balance of available funds be allocated to the construction of up to two more artificial synthetic turf fields with necessary lighting at decentralised locations that will address current and growing needs in other areas of the city. User groups in partnership with the VPB will be involved in raising the balance of the funds for the decentralised locations.”

The Playing Field Renewal Plan was endorsed by the Vancouver School Board on July 2, 2002. The School Board will also receive a report on the proposed public consultation process for synthetic turf fields development, and the Park Board will be informed of the outcome.

DISCUSSION

Two key conclusions of the Playing Field Renewal Plan support the case for increasing the supply of fields in relation to demand, and in the manner proposed:

1. Sustained public provision of sport playing fields in relation to growing demand is warranted by the ensuing benefits to individuals and to communities. These benefits include improved physical fitness and health, positive social development of children and youth, and the building of strong community networks.
2. Increasing the current field inventory with lighted synthetic turf — as opposed to grass pitches, makes most sense from both a financial and environmental point of view. Land acquisition costs alone for 25 additional grass playing fields, assuming that it was feasible to purchase properties of an adequate size in the city, would be in the order of \$200 million. Alternatively, the conversion of the equivalent amount of existing parkland would entail an unacceptable loss of passive green space and/or natural habitat.

The recommendations of the Playing Field Renewal Plan are well understood and accepted by the amateur field sports communities, but not necessarily by the broader public, which has not yet had the opportunity to consider these issues in any depth. Therefore, with a plan and first phase funding in place, the next challenge is to find acceptable locations for synthetic turf field development in the short and long term. Staff propose that a public consultation, focused on both the rationale for synthetic turf and on siting criteria, be conducted according to the following outline:

Overview

The consultation process will involve both public education and advisory input components. The process will progress through stages of notification, explanation of issues and rationales, group development of selection criteria leading to agreement on priorities with respect to siting options. The initial scale of the exercise will city-wide, and will resolve down to local areas as agreement is reached on selection criteria. The cost of the consultation exercise is estimated at \$5,000 and will be charged to the Park Planning allocation in the 2003-2005 Capital Plan.

Preparatory work and resource development

A number of tasks have been or are in the process of being addressed before the official launch of the consultation process:

- C Photo and other documentation of potential sites, including those identified in the Field Renewal Plan and later additions;
- C Further development of assessment criteria in draft, to rate site specific advantages and disadvantages, and to ensure that the end distribution of fields serves the entire city;
- C Develop communications and facilitation plan;
- C Identify city-wide and local stakeholders for direct contact;

- C Design and production of display and information materials, including:
 - a. Field locations, current usage and demand trends
 - b. Benefits of field sport participation
 - c. Fiscal and environmental cost benefit analysis for synthetic vs. 'natural' field types
 - d. Public experience of synthetic turf installations in other jurisdictions (photos, testimonials and other data)
 - e. Technical data on turf and lighting systems
 - f. City map with identified possible locations
 - g. Draft criteria for site selection

Launch of public process

It is proposed to launch the public process, upon Park and School Board approval, with a media event illustrating the overall playfield strategy with visual displays and information handouts. At the same time, feedback systems (e.g., web site, phone lines, mail-in) would be set-up and subsequently monitored. Invitations (targeted and open) would be sent out to prospective participants in the city-wide Forum.

City-wide Forum

The objectives of the city-wide forum are: (1) to explain, and validate with a broader public, the need to increase the City's supply of sports fields (and in particular doing so with new synthetic turf fields), (2) to further develop criteria for determining the location of such fields, and (3) to establish a shortlist of a minimum of six appropriate sites . The forum would be approximately 3-4 hours, and be designed and conducted by a professional facilitator to handle up to 100 participants, representing field users, park advocates, secondary school PACs, community groups (especially those near short-listed sites) and other relevant perspectives. The program will be further refined, but shall address the following components:

- a. *Plenary session* (full group):
 - C Review the objectives and process of the forum
 - C Outline the benefits of field sports for individual participants and the community at large
 - C Present the rationales for increasing the supply of playing fields
 - Population growth and City demographics
 - Gender equity
 - New programming aimed at children and youth
 - C Summarize the fiscal and environmental cost-benefits of Synthetic vs. 'Natural' turf. approaches
 - C Review list of potential locations and add any others proposed by participants.

- b. *Breakout groups in three geographic units* -- East/West/Central (boundaries to be defined).
 - C Review draft criteria and refine according local needs and interests, and with the possible addition of weighting of criteria
 - C Apply revised selection criteria to list of candidate sites developed in the plenary session. Shortlist to no more than 6 locations.
 - C Consider approaches to balance local vs. City-wide access to playing time on fields
- c. *Report out to Plenary Session*: Record reaction to small group site selections.
- d. *Plenary group to determine whether follow-up session is needed* at the city-wide level.

Transition from City-wide to local focus

Once the objectives of the city-wide forum(s) are met, the outcomes will be documented, followed by technical review and verification to ensure that the candidate sites are suitable. Preparation for undertaken for localized Open Houses:

- C Identify and book meeting spaces on or near three top shortlisted sites;
- C Identify local stakeholders, if any, who have not participated in city-wide process;
- C Issue notifications/send invitations to Open Houses, via
 - i. Signs on proposed development sites
 - ii. Current field permit holders in area
 - iii. Local community organizations (e.g., School PACs, Community Associations, etc.)
 - iv. Residents (brochure distributed to 3 block radius of sites)
 - v. Website information

Localized Open Houses

A series of site-specific open houses will take place in the period October 2003 to November 2004. Displays will summarize the same information as for City-wide launch & workshop. In addition, the conclusions from workshop will be presented, to explain why this particular site is under consideration. The presentation will include:

- C Proposed layouts in local context
- C Proposed implementation timeline & phasing
- C Identification of known site specific issues and mitigation needs, with opportunity for further input.

Reporting Back

Staff anticipate a report back to the Park and School Boards early in 2004 with respect to the outcome of the consultative process. The report will include a summary of outcomes of the city-wide forums and open houses, along with inputs received from the other feedback systems put in place. An implementation plan will be presented that responds to identified issues. Upon approvals from both Boards, staff proceed to design/construction tenders for field development.

SUMMARY

This report summarizes the progress made to date on expanding the current inventory of sport playing fields in Vancouver, and proposes a public consultation process for Board approval, leading to the development of 2-3 synthetic turf playing fields.

Prepared by:

Planning and Operations
Board of Parks & Recreation
Vancouver, BC
MV

Appendix A

Possible sites for synthetic turf field development, as identified in the Playing Field Renewal Plan:

Balaclava Park
Beaconsfield Park
Britannia Secondary School
Churchill Secondary School
Eric Hamber Secondary School (north field)
Gladstone Secondary School
Jericho Park
John Oliver Secondary School
Killarney Park and Secondary School
Kingcrest Park
Oak and 37th Park site
Oak Park
Prince of Wales Secondary School (or Park)
Point Grey Secondary School /Kerrisdale Park
Trillium Park Site
Tupper Secondary School
Vancouver Technical Secondary School

Sites subsequently proposed for consideration:

Camosun Park/Queen Elizabeth School
Carnarvon Park
Clinton Park
Gordon Park
Kensington Park
Kingcrest Park
Sexsmith Elementary Community School
Strathcona Park
University Hill School
Windermere Secondary School