



Report Date: May 28, 2024

VanRIMS No.: 08-3000-30

[Submit comments to the Board](#)

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: Director, Park Planning and Development
SUBJECT: Sports Field Strategy

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. THAT the Vancouver Park Board approve the “Sport Field Strategy”, as outlined in this report and attached within Appendix A, to guide the planning, management, maintenance and operational decision making for Vancouver’s sport fields over the next 10+ years.
- B. THAT the Vancouver Park Board direct staff to report back to the Board through the four-year Capital Plan and Annual Capital and Operating Budget processes to confirm specific project priorities and investments.
- C. THAT staff be directed to report back to the Board prior to making any substantive changes to current operating policies as suggested by this Strategy.
- D. THAT the Vancouver Park Board direct staff to provide a briefing to City Council, for information, per recommendations within the City’s Office of the Auditor General’s report of November 27, 2023.
- E. THAT the Vancouver Park Board consider past Board motions dated 2021 or prior regarding sport fields superseded, by virtue of approval of this report and attached Appendix A.

REPORT SUMMARY

Vancouver’s extensive sport field system is a vital aspect of recreational life in the city. The [Sport Field Strategy](#) will guide sport field development, management and maintenance decision-making in Vancouver over the next 10+ years and provide a basis for ongoing capital and operating plans and budgets. The Strategy, including its implementation plan, responds to direction provided by VanPlay, considering the management, maintenance and renewal of the sport field inventory through a city-wide equity lens to service delivery, while making a commitment to Reconciliation and decolonization. This aligns with VanPlay’s first two strategic bold moves: to meet asset needs and to advance equity. Approval of this Strategy does not guarantee its implementation as it is subject to funding that may be available through the City’s financial processes and potential future partnerships. Approval of this Strategy also does not imply approval of decisions for major projects or operating policies. Staff will report back to the Board prior to making any substantive changes.

BOARD AUTHORITY, POLICY, PREVIOUS DECISIONS/UPDATES

As per the [Vancouver Charter](#), the Park Board has exclusive jurisdiction and control over all areas designated as permanent and temporary parks in the City of Vancouver, including any structures, programs and activities, fees, and improvements that occur within those parks. The following adopted policy documents guided the development of this Strategy:

- [VanPlay: The Framework](#) (2020) guides decision-making and supports the pursuit of equity, connectivity and access to parks and recreation;
- [Report 3 of VanPlay, Asset Needs chapter](#) (2019) articulates specific recommendations, service needs and asset targets which were considered in the Sport Field Strategy's development and implementation plan.
- Park Board's recently adopted [Unsolicited Proposals](#) process; and
- Various other adopted policy documents as listed in [Appendix A](#).

The following initiatives currently being developed have been considered in this Strategy:

- Park Board Washroom & Fieldhouse Strategy update;
- Park Board Parking Strategy;
- Stanley Park Comprehensive Plan; and
- implementation of the City of Vancouver endorsed [UNDRIP Strategy](#).

The Strategy considers past relevant Board motions, including:

- An October 2017 Board decision: [Synthetic Turf Playing Fields – Potential Sites](#).
- An April 2019 Board Motion: [Playing Field Upgrades – Synthetic Turf & Lighting](#).
- A September 2019 Board motion related to [Artificial Turf Assessment and Remediation](#).

Motions passed in 2022 or later, such as the [December 2022 motion](#), [2023 Service Plan, Operating and Capital Budgets – Parks and Recreation](#), have been considered as “instream” ongoing works, and are not considered part of the Strategy, as they were passed following completion of background work and initial community engagement. Direction from these Board motions has been considered and referenced within the Strategy's implementation plan.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The Park Board's sport field system includes 151 rectangular fields and 116 ball diamonds for a total of 267 sport fields. 72 rectangular fields overlap with ball diamonds. The sport fields are in 79 parks, approximately a third of the parks in the system.

The last city-wide review of Vancouver's sport fields was undertaken in [2002](#) jointly with the Vancouver School Board (VSB), in consultation with the Vancouver Field Sport Federation (VFSF) who represent over 40,000 adults and youth who play and/or volunteer in field sports in the city. A number of the challenges facing the system at that time persist, including ongoing maintenance budget shortfalls, aging inventory, and a growing population. Since 2002 the Park Board, through partnership with VSB, has advanced several key recommendations including developing new and renewed synthetic turf fields at Vancouver Technical Secondary School, Eric

Hamber Secondary School/Oak Meadows Park and Point Grey Secondary School/Kerrisdale Park and, currently installing field lights for community use of the synthetic turf field at Kitsilano Secondary School, which has increased the system's capacity.

DISCUSSION

The Strategy's implementation plan is based on background review, research, analysis and engagement as outlined throughout the Strategy's background appendices and summarized in sections 1-4 of the document. For a complete picture of inputs that informed and shaped the implementation plan, [the Strategy](#) should be read in conjunction with the Strategy appendices, which include the [Appendix A "Current State" Research Findings Report](#), [Appendix B Environmental and Human Health Report](#) and [Appendix C "What we Heard" report 1](#), [Appendix D "What we Heard report 2"](#) and [Appendix E "What we Heard report 3"](#) [Appendix F Re-Classification Of Sport Fields & Appendix G Sport Field Cut Sheets](#), and [Appendix H Guidance For Implementing The Recommended New Allocations Approach](#), [Appendix I Amenity Best Practices And Guidelines](#), [Appendix J Guidance For Establishing Cost Recovery Targets](#). Section 5, 6 and 7 of the Strategy feature the guiding principles, directions and actions and the implementation plan.

Engagement Overview

The development of the Strategy included three phases of community engagement (including extensive liaison with key stakeholder groups per below):

- Phase 1: aimed at understanding the current sport field situation and future needs and
- Phase 2 and 3: provided opportunities for review of key aspects of the Strategy.

Total engagement metrics are as follows:

- 2,186 responses across three Shape Your City surveys **Translated into six languages*
- 408 quantitative survey responses - A statistically representative sampling of residents
- 10 "pop up" events in parks
- 23 stakeholder and user group/permit holder discussion sessions (45 total participants)
- 74 permit holder user groups engaged through a series of surveys and questionnaires (89 total participants)
- 3 special meetings with the VFSF, and project updates at bi-monthly meeting

An External Advisory Group comprised of 12 members of the public provided feedback and a community-informed "lens" on the research and engagement findings and assisted in promoting Strategy engagement opportunities to user groups and the public.

Strategy Framework

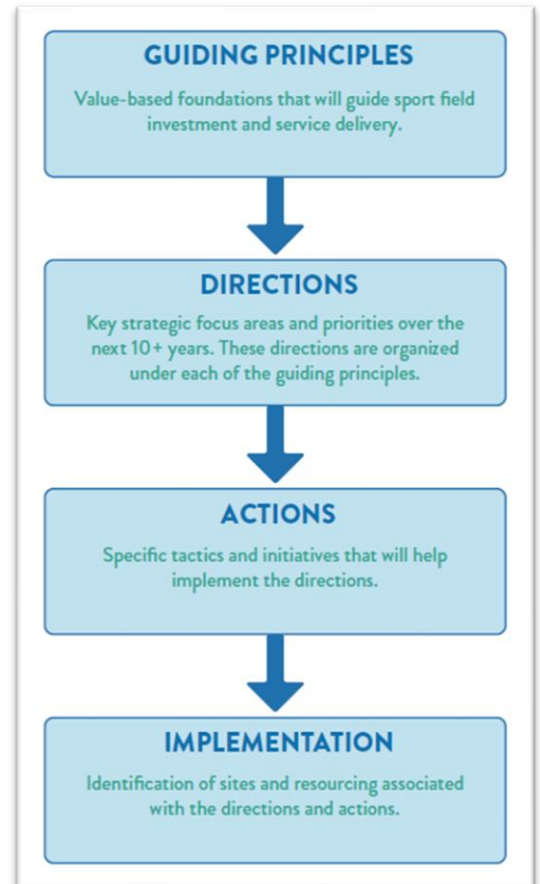
Sections 5 and 6 of the Strategy introduce guiding principles, directions and actions with supporting rationale:

Four Guiding Principles

1. Optimally manage the sport field system.
2. Provide great sport field experiences for all.
3. Make the best value of capital and operating resources.
4. Leverage the broader benefits of sport fields.

Eight Directions

1. Implement a renewed sport field classification system.
2. Seek opportunities to apply a revenue generating lens.
3. Implement an equity model for allocation, booking, and permitting of fields.
4. Facilitate spontaneous use of select rectangular sport fields and ball diamonds for residents.
5. Focus available capital resources on field quality and adding functional capacity.
6. Work with local First Nations and the urban Indigenous population to increase the ways in which the sport field inventory reflects Indigenous culture and sport needs.
7. Enhance collaboration with key local and regional partners in the planning, delivery, joint use and maintenance of sports fields.
8. Continue to leverage opportunities from sport hosting.



Renewed Classification System

Central to the Strategy is the introduction of a renewed sport field classification system, with the following elements:

- based off Sports Turf Canada field classifications (Sports Turf Canada is a non-profit organization whose mission is to establish standards for the design, construction and maintenance of sport fields nation-wide);
- aligned with best practices in sport field specifications and physical characteristics,
- aligned with Sport for Life principles (physical literacy, excellence, active for life) and commitments outlined in Vancouver's Sport for Life Strategy; and
- provides minimum maintenance standards for each classification.

The system also introduces classifications for ball diamonds which are not currently classified. A corresponding new fee structure, including consideration of maintenance standards and costs for each classification, could be considered in the development of the Park Board's fees and charges policy (Directions 1-3).

Actions

To operationalize the eight directions, the Strategy includes 41 operational and administrative actions. These will require both work by Park Board staff and external support. The implementation plan provides a roadmap for these actions, including resource requirements proposed, and the financial impacts for budget deliberation. The actions outline key opportunities for partnerships, including with VSB, the need for ongoing rightsholder engagement with Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations and stakeholder engagement with the VFSF, and the urban Indigenous population.

One of the proposed key short-term recommendations of the Strategy is the implementation of an equity model for allocation and permitting of fields (Direction #3). As recommended in VanPlay, this would begin with a new sport field allocation framework, followed by the restructuring and resourcing of the Outdoor Sport Facilities (OSF) office to support the transition from historical to more needs-based, equitable allocation. This work would include ongoing engagement with the VFSF and all permitted groups. The renewed classification system identifies that special events may be booked on Class B sport fields under processes outlined in the Outdoor Facility Allocation and Management Policy. This might include consideration of broader community programming needs at a small number of Class B fields in equity initiative zones such as the Downtown Eastside and Strathcona neighbourhoods.

The implementation of a new sport field allocation framework will provide detailed and rigorous data around field needs. This information will, in turn, enable implementation of other Strategy actions and allow the Park Board to continue to improve and right-size the sport field inventory. For example, this data will allow staff to periodically compare the system's capacity to known and projected need for prime-time permit hours, to adjust the inventory's total size and distribution across classifications as needed (Action 3.D). This would include consideration of long tenured, newer or growing sports and/or those who may currently feel under-represented. It may allow for further reclassification of fields, or the removal of select fields to facilitate events spaces or other park uses.

Proposed Capital Projects

The Strategy's recommended capital projects are associated with five "big moves":

1. Renew existing synthetic turf fields
2. Convert select all weather (gravel) fields to synthetic turf fields
3. Create hub sites
4. Establish dedicated ball diamond and rectangular field parks
5. Establish sport-specific priority fields

The Strategy includes a diagram and table to identify specific projects recommended for each "big move," including sequencing and capital cost considerations. The table and diagram integrate the big move projects with major sport field capital projects outside of the Strategy, identified through past Board motions and decisions, including instream projects which are identified for

reference. As noted under the Financial Considerations, implementation timing for capital projects is not confirmed and will be contingent on future capital planning processes.

Synthetic Turf Fields

Chief among the “big moves” is the urgent need to renew the existing synthetic turf fields. Between 2004 and 2016, nine new synthetic turf fields were built, taking the inventory from three fields to the 12 we have today. At present, seven synthetic turf fields, across five parks, are behind schedule for renewal (2019-2020) with only one renewal (Vancouver Technical Secondary School Field) funded. By 2026, the end of the current capital plan, all other existing synthetic turf fields will be at or behind schedule for renewal.

As noted above under Previous Board Decisions, in 2019 staff were directed to review the scientific findings related to synthetic turf fields. This is addressed in Strategy [Appendix B](#), the Environmental and Human Health Report, which includes a statement from Vancouver Coastal Health, and which concludes that both synthetic turf and natural grass turf surfaces are safe for sport use. Community engagement also supports the continued use of synthetic turf to meet year-round community sport needs. Synthetic turf fields can accommodate approximately four times the usage of Class A natural turf fields as there is no need to limit use to preserve field quality. This classification of field is also lit which provides opportunities for later evening bookings. This presents an opportunity to accommodate more use at a single site and in doing so could provide the opportunity to free up scarce, valuable space in the park system for other park uses. Specifically, big move #1: a commitment to synthetic turf renewals, and big move #2: converting select all-weather fields to synthetic turf fields provide this opportunity. However, staff will have to work closely with the City’s Finance team to determine an affordable level of service and investment for synthetic turf fields that considers field renewal cycles, as there are substantial funding constraints and there is a need to replace one synthetic turf field surface each year on average.

Special Considerations

Finally, the implementation plan includes a series of special considerations related to capital project implementation. These provide guidance on sport fields-related decisions expected to be made outside the Strategy or which cannot be fully realized until other work is completed. The following special considerations are included:

- Special considerations for FIFA World Cup 26 Vancouver™,
- timing of big move #4,
- impacts to baseball diamonds resulting from the implementation of the instream and big move projects,
- field hockey,
- fieldhouse projects,
- VSB sites,
- rainwater management,
- City of Vancouver land use and neighbourhood planning, and
- a series of site-specific considerations.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The sport field system is currently primarily funded through the city's capital and operating budgets. Occasionally, other levels of government provide capital funding associated with a major event, which can benefit the community beyond the event date. Grants from senior levels of government and private sector partnerships and sponsorships can present additional funding opportunities.

Recommended actions and projects identified in the implementation plan in section 7 of the Strategy will be considered as part of the larger Park Board and City capital and operating planning processes, along with requests for funding to advance other parks and recreation services. Funding for the implementation of this Strategy is thus not guaranteed through its adoption.

Operations and Administration

Historically, ongoing maintenance and minor upgrades of Vancouver's sport field system have been under-funded. The current capital plan is providing one time funding to address minor upgrades; however, additional ongoing operating funding is required, and the Strategy identifies the need for sustainable annual funding to support the minor upgrades program on an ongoing basis to complete priority field renovation projects which yield immediate improvements to capacity, playability and safety (Action 5.C). This is pivotal to the successful provision of a high quality and safe system. The Strategy also recommends that consideration be given to alternative funding mechanisms including the creation of a sport field renewal reserve (Action 2.C) and fundraising initiatives and partnerships, including through the unsolicited proposals process (Action 8.C) or Think Big Plan opportunities.

To support the Strategy as outlined and to meet industry standards, Park Operations requires a total annual budget of \$3.6M. Currently Park Operations has an operating budget of \$1.8M to address these minor upgrades and repairs as well as general maintenance of fields, which results in an annual shortfall of \$1.8M. Park Operations has access to \$3.5M capital funding over the 2023-2026 Capital Plan which will help address this gap; however, there still remains a shortfall. This shortfall can be addressed as part of the operating budget process and will also be considered as part of the next capital planning process. However, until full funding is achieved, Park Operations will only be able to respond reactively to required minor upgrades rather than maintain the industry standard of ongoing preventative maintenance.

As identified in the implementation plan, staff resourcing, at a minimum, is required to implement the 41 operational and administrative actions. As noted in the discussion, the Strategy provides high level resource requirements for the implementation of each action. Where they will have staffing implications or incremental budget request implications, these will be quantified through budget processes closer to the time of implementation.

Proposed Capital Strategy and Projects

Capital Strategy and Sequencing Plan

The implementation plan recognizes there is no unallocated funding for sport field projects within the current 2023-2026 capital plan. As such, most of the sequenced capital projects are identified for consideration in the 10-year DCL (Development Cost Levy) update and 10-year Capital Strategic Outlook. The exception to this is synthetic turf renewal, which staff recommend prioritizing should any additional funding be made available during the current capital plan,

including the proposed 2024 Mid-Term Capital Update (MTU) and beyond, until the capital cycle for renewal of these fields is in closer alignment with their life cycle replacement schedules.

For other recommended projects and project categories outlined below, the emphasis in the Strategy is on sequencing projects, to be undertaken as funding allows. This sequencing plan can be used as a road map tool to guide allocation of available resources in the future and advocate for funding through partnerships or other mechanisms.

In consideration of historical funding levels for the renewal of existing synthetic turf fields, and the growing demand for funding for the replacement of aging assets city-wide, it is likely that not all fields will be renewed at the desired frequency. When considering current funding levels and the limited funds likely to be available in the future, the playability of these fields may be reduced over time. The construction of new synthetic turf fields can help sustain existing service levels should there be a delay in synthetic turf field renewal projects while other funding mechanisms for field renewals are explored.

The sequencing plan illustrates three upcoming capital plans, as well as “15 years+”, noting specific sites for each project type. Projects recommended for consideration in capital planning or for partnership opportunities up to 2034 highlight the need for \$64-\$84M. For the 2027 to 2030 Capital Plan, at the high end of these estimates, approximately ~50% would be considered renewal and ~50% would be considered expansion to respond to population growth. For funding requests in capital plan funds after 2030, ~25% would be considered renewal and ~75% would be considered expansion with these percentages varying by project. Renewal is currently funded from property tax while growth and expansion funding are mainly from development contributions. It is understood that Park Board and City will also pursue senior government, partner funding opportunities, and explore the potential creation of user fee funding reserves, to augment what future capital planning processes will contribute to the projects.

For reference, the last 3 capital plans allocated ~\$36M for natural and synthetic sport fields and track and field projects, typically including funding for 1-2 major projects per capital plan. In 2023-26 this includes \$3.3M for new fields, \$3.6M for renewals and \$10.7M for track and field projects.

Proposed Capital Projects:

Other than for synthetic turf renewals the Strategy places a higher emphasis on sequencing than timeline of delivery, as funding is not guaranteed:

- Big move #1: \$18.25-\$31M for synthetic turf renewals at 7 parks. This is the priority for any available funding in the 2024 Mid Term Capital Update, 10-year DCL (Development Cost Levy) update and 10-year Capital Strategic Outlook.
- Big move #2: \$24M to convert all-weather fields to synthetic turf at Oak, Killarney and Beaconsfield parks.
- Big move #3: \$4-8M for a sport field upgrade and \$5-7M for a field house to create a hub site at Killarney Park.
- Big move #5: \$3.25M for the development of dedicated and priority sport sites.
- \$8M for the development of a new synthetic turf field and \$1.1-\$2.4M for a field house as part of new Avalon North Park in the East Fraserlands (EFL ODP).

- \$0.5M for phase 2 field improvements at John Hendry Park (John Hendry Park Master Plan).

Occasionally, in-kind delivery of sport fields is secured through major development projects, such as the upcoming in-kind delivery of a new natural turf sport field as part of the Oakridge Transit Centre development.

Capital cost estimates assume all project costs in 2023 dollars, and do not include allowances for inflation or construction cost escalation which, at time of completion of report, are estimated to be in the order of up to 12% total annually. A capital cost range is provided on projects requiring further definition of scope, such as the renewal of synthetic turf fields which can include the surface only, or the surface plus drainage, other subgrade elements, and/or amenities.

Operating impacts of capital projects will be assessed closer to the time of implementation, noting the majority are for upgraded or modified sport fields or amenities rather than entirely new assets. The assessment of operating impacts will consider the Strategy's action to develop and implement a system to better understand operating costs of each classification of sport fields (5E). The operating impact assessment will also consider the cost recovery rates of different field classifications, whereby, with current rates, synthetic turf fields have a greater than 100% recovery rate, compared to an estimated 10% or lower for Class A and B natural turf fields.

RECONCILIATION CONSIDERATIONS

The Strategy recognizes the Park Board's legacy of colonialism, including the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands to create parks and athletic facilities. The Strategy's implementation plan identifies opportunities for increased engagement with Indigenous sport leaders and athletes on administrative actions such as the development of the Outdoor Facility Allocation and Management Policy. Broader work with MST and urban Indigenous populations would determine whether parks including sport fields might better accommodate their needs for cultural uses.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Under-resourcing the ongoing maintenance, minor program upgrades and renewal of existing sport field assets could present ongoing risk related to user safety, playability, and reputation and result in temporary field closures and lost revenue opportunities.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Strategy, including its implementation plan, represents a much-needed opportunity to address the needs of Vancouver's vitally important sport field system, and provide a coherent plan for its future. It responds to direction provided by VanPlay, considering the management, maintenance, and renewal of the sport field inventory through a city-wide equity lens to service delivery, while making a commitment to Reconciliation and decolonization. It is based on significant background review, research, analysis, and extensive engagement with partners such as the VFSF and VSB, user groups and the public.

Pending Board decision, staff will integrate the Strategy's implementation plan into upcoming discussions related to operating budgets and capital planning processes. Where current

resourcing allows, staff will initiate work on the implementation plan's short-term actions, including the urgent need for operational funding. Implementation of the Strategy will include collaboration and coordination with the implementation of the [Think Big Plan](#) and reports back to the Board through the regular Capital Plan and Annual Capital and Operating Budget processes to confirm specific project priorities and investments. Staff will report back to the Board prior to making any substantive changes to current operating policies as suggested by this Strategy.

Should the Board approve this Strategy, staff will provide a briefing to Council for information in alignment with the City's Office of the Auditor General's report of November 27, 2023.

General Manager's Office
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

Prepared by:
Katy Amon, Senior Planner, Park Planning and Development

ka/ns/tm/ds/jk