

Recreation and Parks Advisory Board Meeting
May 28, 2008

Approved Minutes

Members Present: Sue Podobnik, Chairperson, Jody Ledford, Tom Ronaghan, Bobbi Tucker

Members Excused: Colin Furneaux, Kevin Null, Jim Rodriguez

Members Absent: Vince DePalmer, Gary Davis, Tom Hersh, Hernan Padilla

Ex-Officio Member Present: Jeff Degitz

Staff Present: Abby Gruber

Guests Present: Steve Balaz, John and Edith Ballard

Chairperson Podobnik opened the meeting of the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board at 7:30 p.m. on May 28, 2008 in the Public Meeting Room of the County Office Building.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

The March Minutes were tabled until June due to lack of a quorum.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

- *Double Pipe Creek Park* – 3-4 acre passive park located on the Frederick/Carroll County line is now completed with a playground, pavilion and mini-shelters. A dedication with the County Commissioners is being planned and the Advisory Board will be notified of the date. The park also provides access to a 10 mile water trail on Double Pipe Creek.
- *Piney Run Yurt* – Now 95% complete, the yurt will be used for programming and special events. The October meeting of the Board will be held in this new facility.
- *Web Site Updates* – The Department's web site is in the process of being updated and is about 80% complete. Under "Things to Do", listed parks will be linked to photos and information about each park.
- *South Carroll Senior & Community Center* – Groundbreaking ceremony will be held at 1:00 p.m. on June 4th. Ms. Podobnik will represent the Board at the ceremony. The Center, located on Mineral Hill Road, will have the first middle-school size gym.
- *Recreation & Parks Month* – The month of July will be the celebration of Recreation & Parks Month. The Department is working with Public Information to put together a calendar including photos of each of the Commissioners recreating.

ARTIFICIAL TURF FIELDS:

Mr. Degitz shared information with the Board (Addendum #1) on the history, pros and cons, experiences of other counties, analysis of field usage and funding options, and evolving technology of artificial turf fields. The County currently has no artificial turf fields but there are some located in the metro area. Ms. Tucker advised that Liberty High School and others are putting in irrigation systems in their stadiums at \$18,000-\$20,000.

Mr. Degitz stated that the Board of Education brought the artificial turf issue to the Board of Commissioners with the construction of the new Manchester Valley High School, but they did not want to pursue it at that time. In the future, the Department may look into the possibility of sponsorship.

FIELD SCHEDULING DRAFT POLICY:

A draft policy (Addendum #2) developed from the Sub-Committee meeting was reviewed. The draft encourages youth sports programs to work through the volunteer recreation councils but if programs choose not to participate, criteria has been established for consistency in scheduling consideration.

The Department will be preparing a total inventory of fields including County, school, municipal and private sites that are available to programs. Fields will be divided and assigned to groups on a percentage basis equal to the percentages of youth served by their documented registration figures. Recreation & Parks will not schedule non-recreation council usage on fields that are not County-owned. User groups are expected to maintain fields that are permitted to them. The policy will give independent groups some rights they haven't had before.

Mr. Degitz brought up an issue that wasn't addressed in the draft and may need to be included: how to handle shutting down a field when it's in poor condition. It was agreed that a recommendation can be made by a recreation council; however, the decision should be made by the owner of the site. If a field is closed, it would be taken out of the equation.

Comments and emails from the North Carroll Recreation Council President, parents and coaches were shared with the Board. The Council basically feels that recreation councils should have first priority, if not total control of fields, and they have concerns about private organizations and use of public fields.

There are a variety of reasons that a group may not want to join a recreation council: personality conflicts, not a good meeting night, they feel they have worked well independently and, sometimes, they tried but it just didn't work. Ms. Ledford advised that another reason is financial issues when independent groups don't want to contribute to a council. The Sub-Committee felt very strongly that their first effort should be to get everyone to work with a council.

Mr. Degitz will revise the draft policy to include the "out of use" field and send out to the Board requesting feedback. He would like to have the policy in place prior to the fall season. Mr. Ronaghan would like to hear from other members of the Board.

Ms. Ledford asked if there are fields still used and maintained exclusively by a group. Mr. Degitz responded that Roaring Run Park is used by Roaring Run Lions Club and Hampstead Lions Club plays exclusively at Hampstead Lions Club Park. There is no County involvement with them.

Mr. Balaz, a member of North Carroll Recreation Council, commented that his son no longer plays for Manchester Baseball because they don't want to have a travel program. They have also threatened to take fields away from programs. Mr. Balaz supports equitable use of fields and a sense of balance, but not taking fields away. Mr. Degitz explained that each community recreation council decides which programs they are going to offer.

Mr. Degitz provided an update on field use monitoring. Westminster Area, Deer Park, North Carroll and

Charles Carroll Recreation Councils have been monitored with Charles Carroll having the highest percentage of fields in use (only one empty field). North Carroll was checked four times with 40%-70% of all fields in use. Westminster was monitored twice, once on March 15 because they wanted to get on the fields early and once since then. On March 15, 40% of fields were used by Deer Park and Westminster. Ms. Gruber explained that field monitoring helps the Department determine trends of use and some accuracy. Any issues will be addressed next year at permit time. Mr. Degitz added that it will also be important information for the Board when groups request funding for more fields.

Mr. Ballard, a long time member of Hampstead Lions Club, explained that they are an independent group that used to be a member of North Carroll Recreation Council, but left for various reasons. He agrees that, if possible, groups should be part of a recreation council but it doesn't always work out. Mr. Ballard explained that the Lions Club has spent \$25,000 to fix various fields and then got bumped from using them by recreation council programs. Mr. Degitz advised that Abby Gruber got involved with both the Hampstead Lions and North Carroll Recreation Council this year and worked things out for this year, but that will end soon. They have been working on a month-to-month basis, which is what we are trying to avoid. Mrs. Ballard asked if a field is taken out of use, could it be used for another activity. Mr. Degitz responded that the impact of a different sport or age group would have to be evaluated.

CAPITAL BUDGET ISSUES:

Mr. Degitz explained that some capital projects have been requested the past two years that are not included in the County's Six Year Plan. They include the gymnasium addition to the Finksburg Library, the walking trail between New Windsor and Union Bridge, the trail from Route 97 to Bennett Cerf Park, and the Dog Park at Bennett Cerf Park. He met with Ted Zaleski, Director of Management & Budget concerning these projects and other budget issues. These capital projects are all \$1M-2M except for the Dog Park. Mr. Degitz is hoping to get a commitment from the Commissioners to provide a space for the Dog Park and possibly develop it through Self-Help funds or some other group. We are working with the County's maintenance staff to remove the tennis courts at Bennett Cerf.

At the June Advisory Board Meeting, Mr. Degitz expects to request capital funds for a portion of the New Windsor/Union Bridge trail and try to find grant funds for the remainder. He may also consider funding requests for some of the smaller capital projects. He advised the Board not to expect a good year for Program Open Space funds.

It was suggested that Mr. Zaleski be invited to the June meeting to talk about his perspectives on budget issues.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 with a motion by Ms. Ledford and a second by Ms. Tucker.

Respectfully submitted,



Jeff R. Degitz, Director



Darlene Rohrbaugh, Secretary

Artificial Turf vs. Natural Grass Athletic Fields

1. Historical Perspective

The first generation of artificial turf fields began to appear in the early 1970's with products such as Astro Turf which was similar to indoor/outdoor carpet layered over concrete. As you can imagine, while playing conditions were consistent, they were consistently bad with numerous injuries due to the unforgiving surface.

The second generation of artificial turf fields began to appear in the late 1970's. This turf included short synthetic fibers layered over padding, sand or a sand/cork mix. While the surface was more forgiving and not as hard, there were problems with the consistency of firmness and separation of the sand/cork mix.

The third and current generation of artificial turf fields features a product that has woven synthetic fibers with an infill cushion – first made of sand and later rubber pellets or crumbs. This has resulted in a very consistent playing surface that also has some cushion similar to a natural grass field. While one common only at professional and college stadiums, these new turf fields are becoming more and more coming at community high schools and park sites.

2. Pros and Cons of Artificial Turf fields

Pros

- Improved & consistent playing conditions for users
- Extended playing season
- Reduced level of maintenance – brush or groom infill every 3 weeks
- Improved safety due to better playing conditions
- Capable of draining 4" of rain per hour
- Surface does not freeze
- Eliminate cancellation of games due to poor field conditions
- Playing field lines can be sewn into the field, reducing maintenance
- Areas as small as 3" X 3" can be repaired
- Aesthetic benefits – fields always green even during dry seasons

Cons

- Installation cost – approximately \$1 million per field
- 10 year renewal/renovation costs
- Need for specialized maintenance equipment
- Need to wash off sports drinks, blood, other substances spilled on field
- Need to fence to prevent unauthorized usage
- Fields retain heat, average +10-15 degrees, may need to be watered to cool
- Disposal cost of turf after conclusion of useful lifespan
- Maintenance efforts more specialized, likely require trained staff
- Need for antiseptic cleaners after use to remove bacteria & bodily fluids
- No cost savings overall

3. **Estimated Capital & Installation Costs**

Turf Field - \$900,000 - \$1.2 million; replacement cost ½ original installation after 10 years

Grass Field – \$260,000; \$78,000 - \$90,000 to re-sod as needed

4. **Estimated Annual Maintenance Costs**

Turf Field - \$2,500

Grass Field - \$6,000

5. **Environmental Issues**

On the one hand, a “green” argument can be made for installing these fields which find a use for recycled materials which are used to make rubber crumbs or infill to serve as a cushion in between the thousands of fibers that are sewn together. The average soccer field uses 27,000 tires. Turf fields also do not require pesticides, herbicides and resources are conserved by avoidance of mowing (no use of fossil fuels).

However, turf absorbs sunlight and emits unnatural heat and removing grass takes away habitats that serve birds and plant life. There are also some recent concerns about the chemicals released from these “crumbs”/infill as well as dust. Some countries consider these “crumbs” carcinogenic and a hazardous substance. Each field has 100 tons of these crumbs as cushion.

6. **Experiences of Other Counties**

Anne Arundel County has plans to install turf fields at all 12 high schools. The County has partnered the BOE and the Department of Recreation & Parks to combine funding sources. AA County is using POS funds for 70% of the cost of these projects with the County funding the remainder. A new joint use agreement was written to allow for Recreation & Parks usage of these school fields on Sundays, part of Saturdays and a few nights each week. Similar partnerships are occurring in Harford and Baltimore Counties. Harford County currently has 1 turf field and Baltimore County has 2 new turf fields and both have plans for additional sites. Many other counties in the Washington DC and northern Virginia area are also looking to add turf fields.

Howard County has installed turf fields at several of their new parks and has been extremely pleased with the results thus far.

Because of the relative newness of these facilities, we have very little local information with regards to the fields’ durability and ongoing maintenance costs. In the next few years, we will begin to get a better understanding of all of the costs involved and are hopeful that as the technology continues to improve, these facilities and related maintenance equipment may become more affordable as well.

7. Analysis of Present and Future Athletic Field Usage

With a limited budget and a heavily used park system, Carroll County has faced challenges in keep up with maintenance. Properly maintained natural grass fields require the following: regular mowing and spraying for weeds, irrigation and ideally a time they can be closed to allow the grass to rest. The growing popularity of soccer and lacrosse has intensified the need for regular maintenance of grass fields. However, we are finding that to keep up with the current demand, existing facilities do not have the ability to be closed for rest and as a result, we have instituted a policy that closes fields between December 1 and March 15, much to the dismay of spring soccer and lacrosse.

Currently, we have a total of 21 multi-purpose fields at our County park sites with 8 more to be completed in the next 2 years. Each of these fields suffers in playing conditions to varying degrees due to excessive use.

As more of our neighboring counties develop turf fields, our programs will travel to play some games at those sites and we anticipate hearing an increased number of requests for similar facilities in Carroll County.

8. Placement of Facilities

In order to maximize the benefits of any county turf fields, the logical location would be a one of our county park or school sites with lights. This would allow for the most hours of usage and in turn, the most benefit.

9. Analysis of Funding Options

The first option would be to fund the construction of a turf field through the Department of Recreation & Parks capital budget. If that were to happen, it would likely come at the expense of other projects that have been requested such as walking trails, dog parks, gyms and additional grass athletic fields. Also at level of \$1 million per turf field, the cost would have to be weighed against the current POS funding level for FY 2009 of \$490,631. In addition, a House Bill 328 is pending that would eliminate the ability to use POS funds for turf fields. The Maryland Recreation & Parks Association has opposed and submitted testimony against this bill.

Opportunities exist to partner with the Board of Education as in other counties. However, if Recreation & Parks were to partner with the BOE to install turf at stadiums (where schools would benefit the most), a new joint use agreement would have to be written to allow for usage by Recreation & Parks groups, similar to the actions taken at other neighboring counties. Currently no regular Recreation & Parks stadium usage is permitted.

A third option would be to pursue a major gift or sponsorship, possibly in return for naming rights to a turf field.

- DRAFT -

FIELD SCHEDULING POLICY

1. The Department of Recreation & Parks strongly encourages all youth sports programs to become members of and work through the County's volunteer recreation councils. This enables all programs to work cooperatively with the same priority use levels for County parks and schools with a goal of most effectively maximizing the usage of available athletic fields.
2. If youth sports programs choose not to participate through a County recreation council, the following criteria must be met to receive scheduling consideration:
 - A. The program's goal must be to serve Carroll County residents
 - B. The program must be a non-profit organization
 - C. The program must be open to the public
 - D. The program must be able to provide the County with proof of liability insurance coverage in the amount of \$1 million
3. Programs that meet the criteria listed in number two above must :
 - A. Complete a field request form
 - B. Provide accurate, documentation of registration for their program.
 - C. Provide a complete listing of all fields currently used by the requesting program
4. A total inventory of fields will be prepared by the Department including County, school, municipal and private sites that are available to programs. Fields will be divided and assigned to user groups on a percentage basis, equal to the percentages of youth served by their documented registration figures.
5. Every attempt will be made to allow groups the ability to use the same fields from year to year, promoting the concept of ownership and local maintenance. When adjustments need to be made to field assignments due to increased registration or to accommodate new programs, the Department will take into consideration the following:
 - A. Fields not used to their fullest potential
 - B. Any financial and volunteer contributions made to improve a field
 - C. Fields in close proximity to other sites used by that organization.
6. Permits should very closely reflect both anticipated AND actual usage of athletic fields. Fields that are reserved by permit and not used will be reassigned to other user groups.

7. User groups are expected to maintain fields that are permitted to them and to leave those fields in as good or better shape than they found them.
8. The Department of Recreation & Parks will not schedule non-recreation council usage of municipal, private or Board of Education sites. If requested, we will provide those agencies with a letter stating that the Department will not schedule that location to allow for field usage by the independent organization listed by name.
9. Independent users of County park athletic fields for youth sports will be required to provide the Department with a certificate of insurance in the amount of \$1 million, prior to their 1st permitted date of use. Certificates should be mailed to Carroll County Department of Recreation & Parks, 300 S. Center Street, Westminster, MD 21157
10. The Department of Recreation & Parks reserves the right to accept or reject requests for field usage. Additionally, the Department reserves the right to cancel or postpone use due to field conditions or scheduled maintenance.