



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK & PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

**MCPB
Item # 16
July 24, 2003**

VIA: Lester L. Straw, Superintendent of Parks

**FROM: Brent Conner, Ballfield Coordinator
Carolyn Wainwright, Administrative Supervisor
Tanya Schmieler, Park Planning Supervisor
Mark S. Wallis, Senior Park Planner**

Date: July 18, 2003

SUBJECT: Progress Report from the Ballfield Work Group

I. Recommendations

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a status report on the Ballfield Work Group (BWG) activities and request the following actions.

1. Approve the proposed FY05-10 Ballfield Initiatives work program for inclusion in the FY05-10 CIP (*****which includes the lighting project at Damascus Recreational Park see page 2**)
2. Reconfirm the policy of no new MCPS field renovations without commensurate operating budget increase.
3. Approve the disbanding of the Ballfield Work Group and the development of the Montgomery County Field Sports Advisory Group.

II. Introduction

In January 1999 the Montgomery County Planning Board and the Interagency Coordinating Board approved the formation of a BWG to address the acute shortage of ballfields in Montgomery County. The group consisted of ballfield users and staff from Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF), M-NCPPC, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and the Montgomery County Recreation Department (MCRD). Progress reports and recommendations were submitted in July 1999 and January 2002.

This packet contains the proposed Ballfield Initiatives work program through FY10, which provides strategic direction to help alleviate the ballfield shortages throughout Montgomery County. In addition there is a proposal to disband the current BWG and reconstitute it in effort to reinvigorate user participation.

III. Proposed Ballfield Initiatives CIP

Funding for the Ballfield Initiatives CIP was deferred in FY03 and moved to FY04. During this time the BWG Sub-Committee on New Field Development has met on a regular basis developing the FY04 program and a proposed FY05-10 CIP work program. (See@ 1-11)

The combined FY04-10 proposed work program includes 12 MCPS sites, 3 closed school sites, 4 park sites, funding for a feasibility study and construction of alternative surface fields at locations to be determined by the study. The Sub-Committee on New Field Development gathered information from various sources including MCPS, CUPF, user group representatives, the Park Permit Office and Park Staff in developing this work program.

MCPS Sites – The 15 MCPS sites selected (including the closed school sites) include projects previously identified by the BWG as well as new projects. Our priorities when evaluating each site were as follows:

1. Create new game fields,
2. Identify new practice areas,
3. Enhance existing game fields.

The criteria listed below were used to select the 15 sites chosen for renovation.

1. Location,
2. Current field and amenity condition,
3. Amount of open space (field size),
4. Permitting history,
5. Field demand.

These additional 15 sites will bring the total number of renovated MCPS sites to 85. Attached (see @12-13) is a list of MCPS sites that have been completed to date and are being maintained through the M-NCPCC and its contractors. Five sites are to be renovated in FY04. Maintenance of these sites is possible due to cost savings attained through competitive bidding of the ballfield maintenance contract. **MCPS projects listed in the proposed FY05-10 work program are dependent on an Operating Budget Increase. If no Operating Budget Increase is made available for maintenance of these additional MCPS sites, renovations cannot continue beyond FY04.**

Park Sites - Lighting of an athletic field nearly doubles its capacity for play. (See @14) In the July 1999 BWG Report on page 17 and reiterated in the January 2002 BWG Report on pages 4 and 12 the BWG identified Damascus Recreational Park as a site for field lighting. A public meeting was held in March 2003 at which time the residents were informed that Parks was considering lighting as many as 4 fields at Damascus. Attached (see@15-20) are five letters received in response to the public meeting. Four of the letters represent opposition to lighting and one is in favor. Opposition focuses mainly on increased traffic, noise, trash and parking. With the opening of Ridge Road Recreational Park and its three lighted fields and the planned development of Ovid Hazen Wells adding several more fields up-county, a portion of the up-county demand will be met. Therefore at this time the BWG and staff recommend lighting baseball #1 and softball #2. Staff will continue to monitor and evaluate ballfield demand in this area and based on its findings may return to the board in the future to request the lighting of fields #3 and #4 at Damascus.

***** Due to the fact that there is some controversy surrounding lighting Damascus Recreational Park, staff will return this item to the board this fall as a separate agenda item to ensure the public has had ample opportunity to comment before a final decision is made.**

In the January 2002 report the BWG also identified Wheaton Regional Park for additional field lighting. Currently fields #1 & #2 are lit. Field #3 lighting is currently being

installed. A public meeting was held on May 29, 2003 to present the proposal to light fields #4 & #5. One resident joined us for the presentation. Since the public meeting one letter has been received (see @21) concerning the lighting project at Wheaton. The concern was traffic related and funding for a traffic study is included as part of planning and design. Those concerns were addressed in the Chairman's response (see@22) dated June 13, 2003.

The replacement of the lights at Olney Manor is the only project on Park Property that was not mentioned in the original Ballfield Workgroup reports because the emphasis was on new projects. However it is possibly the most critical. The lights at Olney are more than 25 years old, technologically obsolete and in need of replacement. This project is scheduled in FY04-05.

The South Germantown Recreational Park (Hondros Property) project will add one new softball/baseball field adjacent to the Spark Matsunaga Elementary School. This project was noted in the January 2002 BWG Report. Ballfield Initiatives will fund the planning and design as shown in the proposed CIP work program. Construction funds have not yet been designated but will likely come out of the South Germantown PDF.

IV. Alternative Field Surfacing

Introduction- The BWG Subcommittee on New Field Development is proposing an Alternative Field Surfacing Feasibility Study to be funded through the Ballfield Initiatives Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The BWG report dated January 2002 raised the question under Outstanding Issues on page 10:

“Alternative field surfaces: What is the potential for using alternative field surfaces including artificial turf at heavily used sites?”

Purpose of Study- The feasibility study's purpose is the identification, selection and recommendation of alternative field surfacing material. Field surfacing that will reduce both upfront ballfield construction and long-term maintenance costs.

Initial Scope- The study team will include representatives from MNCPPC and the BWG. The study will divide ballfield analysis into five major categories and attempt to answer the following questions:

General Considerations- Is there an alternative surface to natural turf that will allow increased play and decreased seasonal maintenance and periodic renovation costs? Can we increase play for both games and practices at specific sites using alternative surfaces while concurrently reducing maintenance costs? What conditions (i.e. fencing, lights, availability of stadium seating, poor soil conditions) make alternative surfacing a competitive choice? What are the capital and maintenance costs for alternative surfaces? What is the payback in years for such an investment verses current maintenance practices? What opportunities can now be identified verses current surfaces? What are the drawbacks? Is there a greater chance of users being injured? Is there greater liability?

Site Selection- What are the characteristics needed to successfully build, maintain and manage an alternative surface field? Are lights and security fencing mandatory? Should the first site be a school or park? If a school, is the best candidate a High School or Middle School? If a park, is the best candidate a Regional/Recreational or a Local Park? What are the environmental considerations for drainage or run-off?

Soccer/Rectangular Sports- Does alternative surfacing allow soccer to become weather independent? Can enough soccer demand be accommodated on alternative surface fields to eliminate soccer overlay field? What role, if any, will the portable goal play? Is specialized equipment needed to successfully play on such a surface? Can other rectangular sports (Field Hockey/Lacrosse) play on such a surface?

Baseball/Softball- Is alternative surfacing desirable for these sports? What role does the soccer overlay field add to the maintenance costs of keeping a baseball/softball outfield in a safe condition?

Permitting- Should we change the pattern of how we permit fields to designating "game only fields" verses "practice only fields" with a different level of maintenance for each? What role does having year round soccer and baseball contribute to maintenance costs? Should permit fees for alternative surface fields differ from grass fields?

Funding- The feasibility study will be funded in the Ballfield Initiatives CIP over three years. Funding in the first year will allow for internal staff charge backs, reimbursement of research and travel expenses, and purchase of sample products if necessary. The scope of work for the subsequent years is dependant on the major issues identified. Outside consulting help may be necessary to develop and implement solutions to identified issues. All costs are initial estimates and subject to change.

V. Restructuring the Ballfield Work Group

Current Structure- The Ballfield Work Group (BWG) has been organized in its current configuration for four years. Established by the Montgomery County Planning Board and Interagency Coordinating Board (ICB) at the direction of the County Council, the BWG was tasked with exploring three issues:

1. New Field Development,
2. Maintenance Standards and Adopt-a-field Programs,
3. Permitting Standards and Fee Issues.

Membership on the BWG was open to all field users, leagues and staff from the Department of Park and Planning, the Montgomery County Recreation Department, the Community Use of Public Facilities and the Montgomery County Public Schools. Two chairpersons were appointed. The mailing list includes more than 70 names.

The BWG divided itself into three sub-committees and worked diligently on their tasks. They have periodically reported their progress to the Planning Board and ICB and asked for approval on certain policy issues. Because most of the tasks for the Maintenance Standards Sub-Committee and the Permitting Standards Sub-Committee have been achieved, these two groups are no longer meeting on a regular basis. In the past year, only the New Field Development Sub-Committee has continued its work, particularly in the area of capital projects. However, attendance at these meetings by field user groups has dropped significantly. Due to this lagging participation and in an effort to reinvigorate the BWG, it is the belief of the remaining active participants that the BWG needs to be disbanded and rebuilt in order to regain the participation of the users to ensure their needs are being met.

Future structure- The BWG Co-Chairs, active BWG members, and staff have considered the following options.

Option #1: Disband the existing Ball Field Work Group because it has basically achieved its goals. Communicate important issues by mail with field users as those issues arise and hold meetings with user groups as needed.

Option #2: Disband the existing BWG and instead use the existing Recreation Area Advisory Boards to address athletic field issues. (There are 5 regional boards and one countywide board, whose members are appointed by the County Executive. The M-NCPPC historically has presented issues for information and advice on a variety of topics. i.e., park design, fee proposals, new development concepts, CIP, etc. Membership on these boards represents a wide variety of community perspectives. They meet monthly.)

Option #3: Disband the existing BWG and develop a new group that would have a smaller, appointed membership with a two-year commitment of service.

Recommendation- The BWG Co-Chairs, active BWG members, and staff recommend option three because participation by appointment will provide more consistent input. There are still outstanding ballfield issues as identified on page 10 of the January 2002 BWG Report. Field abuse and field monitoring is just one of the vital unresolved issues. A system for monitoring fields when they are closed needs to be implemented in order to protect our inventory and reduce maintenance and renovation costs.

- The new title would be “The Montgomery County Field Sports Advisory Group” (MCFSAG)
- The group would consist of 12 voting members who represent sports groups and government agencies i.e.

Sports Groups

Baseball
Softball
Youth Soccer
Adult Soccer
Countywide Rec. Brd.
Open Seat

Government Groups

Department of Park and Planning
ICB
MCRD.
One Representative of Municipalities (such as Gaithersburg, Takoma Park, and Rockville)
MCPS (2 seats: Maintenance and Programming)

- Each seat listed would have one vote.
- Applications for appointment to the Group would be made to the Planning Board and the Interagency Coordinating Board (ICB); selection would be made by those two agencies.
- There would be an annual field users meeting (An Athletic Field Summit Meeting), where all field users are invited to verbalize their issues and ideas. The Group, as a basis for developing a work program and sub-committees, would prioritize the resulting issues.
- The co-chairs of the Montgomery County Field Sports Advisory Group (MCFSAG) would be appointed by the Planning Board and ICB and would be non-voting members, unless there is a tie.
- Agency directors will appoint staff representatives and sports groups would nominate their representatives to be appointed by the Planning Board and the ICB.
- The membership would serve for a two-year term, with a staggered term being given initially to some of the membership.
- All meetings would be open to the public. Anyone wishing to offer advice to the MCFSAG would do so at the meetings or by mail.

- Appeals of MCFSAG decisions would be made to the Planning Board and ICB, collectively for consideration. OR the co-chairs would name an appeals committee.

The creation of the Montgomery County Field Sports Advisory Group requires approval by the Planning Board and the Interagency Coordinating Board (ICB).