



Synthetic Turf Task Force Report

July 2013

BACKGROUND

- December 2011 – School Board approved a resolution requesting that the Board of Supervisors and the Park Authority Board create a joint task force to make recommendations on the development of synthetic turf fields in the future
 - Affirmed that request formally to both parties via letter in February 2012
- April 2012 – Board of Supervisors affirmed collective interest in this effort and referred issues to staff to determine task force participation
- June 2012 – County Executive notified Board of Supervisors that a task force would be created with membership from staff (FCPS, Park Authority and NCS) and community (Park Authority Board and Athletic Council)
 - Membership also included a representative of both the School Board and Board of Supervisors

BACKGROUND

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- Park Authority Needs Assessment in 2004 identified a rectangular field shortage of 95 fields
 - Same report identified a shortage of 13 diamond fields
- Youth and adult sports participation has steadily increased over the past decade, placing further pressure on an already insufficient field inventory
- Succeeding decade saw FCPS and the Park Authority, along with a variety of community partners, embark on an ambitious effort to resurface existing natural grass fields with synthetic turf to address the field shortage by increasing playable hours on existing fields

BACKGROUND

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- **Primary benefits of synthetic turf fields:**
 - Allows for year-round use in most weather, both during and immediately after rain events, thus increasing the playable hours on existing fields (Park Authority estimates an increase of 62 percent)
 - Provides even playing surfaces and conditions that are similar to natural grass fields
 - Eliminates the need for watering, mowing, fertilizing, and applying of pesticides

BACKGROUND

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- **Current synthetic turf field inventory (spring 2013)**
 - 67 synthetic turf fields
 - 47 are currently in use and 20 are pending construction
- **Significant funding from the community was leveraged to create synthetic turf fields**
 - Community sports organizations and individual school booster clubs funded almost 1/2 of the cost of high school synthetic turf fields, with many taking on debt to contribute
 - Community sports organizations, through the Athletic Services Application Fee, or “\$5.50” fee, contributed another \$4.5M (or 8 percent) to the total effort at all fields
 - Proffers have been used, when available, to provide significant funding support
 - Park bonds funded the majority of funding for park fields and non-high school FCPS
 - No FCPS bond funds have been used in the development of synthetic turf fields

DEVELOPMENT - FINDINGS

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- Development requirements are site specific
 - Rectangular fields range from \$600,000 - \$900,000
- Reliance upon leveraged partnerships helped to create the significant inventory that exists today
 - Some communities will continue to struggle with community funding sources
- Significant comparative shortfalls in available fields in the Mount Vernon and Lee Supervisory districts
 - Youth sports participation
 - Total population
 - High schools with/without

DEVELOPMENT - FINDINGS

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- Synthetic turf fields are not included in the existing FCPS school construction education specifications
- In a two-field synthetic turf model on high school sites, overall use capacity is significantly increased
 - Available play hours double
 - FCPS programs and community sports use equally benefit
- Development proffer funds have been available for use in the past, however, they can cannot be relied upon as an “assumed” standard of funding in the future

DEVELOPMENT - RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Synthetic turf fields and lights should be standard components in new school construction and future capital improvement renovation schedules
 - At high school sites, the two-field synthetic turf model should be standard
- The diamond sports field community should be engaged to determine interest in expanding the conversion of natural grass softball/baseball fields to synthetic surfaces
 - Currently there are three diamond synthetic turf fields
- Future synthetic turf field development should be guided by recommendations in this report for oversight, locations, development schedule, and share of public funding allocations

DEVELOPMENT - RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Install the two-field synthetic turf field model at all remaining high schools
 - Funding options
- Continue to support community partnership opportunities
- Modify construction standards to incorporate new stormwater management requirements and develop consistent guidelines for promotion of the county's adoption of the use of green construction
- Establish an oversight committee to oversee and monitor synthetic turf field development

REPLACEMENT - FINDINGS

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- Life expectancy of synthetic turf fields is no longer than 10 years
- First two synthetic turf fields are being replaced this summer, so estimates of useful life and replacement costs are still being tested
- Review of surrounding jurisdictions indicates most are in similar situations in terms of planning for replacement
- Total current annual funding of \$0.74 million is provided through various funding sources
 - Athletic booster clubs, community field use agreements, turf field replacement fund, tournaments for turf, and county general fund appropriations
 - Efforts are not sufficient to meet current requirements
 - **Necessary to increase annual funding by \$1.66 million for current requirements and by \$2.16 million if recommended additional 8 high school sites are developed**

REPLACEMENT - RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Identify an ongoing funding source to fund the scheduled replacement of synthetic turf fields on Park Authority and FCPS sites
 - Funding options
- Continue administration of the Turf Field Replacement Fund in support of future synthetic turf field replacement projects
 - Administered by NCS
 - Project funding utilization by a joint planning committee

MAINTENANCE - FINDINGS

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- Park Authority staff centrally maintains synthetic turf fields at county parks and fields located on elementary, middle, and alternative high school sites
 - The total annual operating cost of a synthetic turf field, including maintenance and utility costs, is comparable to a lighted and irrigated natural grass field because of the nature of year-round use
- Due to the decentralized nature of the maintenance activities at each FCPS site, any achieved savings from natural grass maintenance to synthetic turf should be redirected to specific site operations, to include the maintenance and replacement of the synthetic turf fields

MAINTENANCE - RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Park Authority and FCPS should adopt a consistent maintenance program for synthetic turf fields utilizing agreed upon best practices in order to maximize use of equipment, staffing, and other resources
- Create a joint FCPS and Park Authority field maintenance work group, tasked with meeting to address ongoing maintenance needs to include recurring operating budget requirements

Conclusion

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- Synthetic turf fields are a good public investment and have been a solid model for public/private partnership
- Fairfax County has been able to address the identified rectangular field shortage through the synthetic turf field development effort that has resulted in the creation of a significant inventory utilized by over 130,000 participants each year
- Joint planning will continue to leverage public space, maximize use, and provide equitable distribution across the county for community and school users
- Various options exist for financing future fields recommended by the committee – all of which rely on public investment for development and replacement and continued shared financing from community users
- This effort has been a success story, but the work is not done as more is needed to ensure all share equally in that success