



**SUBJECT: Sports Field Service Standard Improvements**

**TO: Planning & Development Committee**

**FROM: Parks & Recreation Department**

Report Number: PR-01-17

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 930-01

Date to Committee: February 28, 2017

Date to Council: March 27, 2017

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### **Recommendation:**

Approve the proactive and preventative maintenance service standards for irrigated natural turf sports fields as outlined in parks and recreation department report PR-01-17.

### **Purpose:**

- To outline the City's current sports field maintenance program
- To present a review of other municipalities' sports field maintenance programs
- To present a proposed sports field maintenance program

Connection to the Strategic Plan:

A Healthy and Greener City

- Healthy Lifestyles

An Engaging City

- Good Governance

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### **Background and Discussion:**

The City of Burlington has 110 natural turf sports fields; 46 rectangular fields and 64 diamonds, and permits are issued for 33,500 hours of use for sports fields each year.

Assuming that on average there are 30 participants on the field per hour, there are over 1 million participant hours on our fields each season (based on 2015 organized sport performance measures) and sports fields are assets valued at approximately \$30 million, including approximately \$2 million in irrigation infrastructure.

The City of Burlington's outdoor sports fields are key community assets that support safe, active recreation opportunities for all. As assets that support the health and well-being of residents, sports fields need to be recognized as green infrastructure assets that warrant specialized and proactive care that aligns with sound management practices. The ultimate goal is to provide high quality natural turf sports field assets for the safe play of users by means of providing dense turf cover through sound maintenance and irrigation practices.

For the scope of this discussion staff is referring to the City's 65 irrigated grass sports fields. Out of scope are:

- Halton District School Board (HDSB) fields which are maintained by either City staff or under a City contract, but adhere to the sports field maintenance standards prescribed by HDSB
- Halton Catholic District School Board fields
- Artificial turf fields totaling 7
- Non-irrigated City-owned sports fields totaling 45
- Sports fields on private property; and
- Irrigated sports field infrastructure: irrigation controllers/heads and associated infrastructure which would be subject to a separate assessment in the form of an irrigation systems audit

On November 19, 2015, Council received a memo outlining a proposed process and timeline to review sports field service standards.

In December of 2015 user groups delegated to Council regarding concerns around field quality.

On October 31, 2016, Council again heard delegations from sports field users asking for improved playfield service standards.

On January 23, 2017 Council approved a motion to add an additional \$200,000 of tax supported funding, including 1.85 FTE, to partially implement the sports field service standards as outlined in this report.

### **Current Parks Maintenance Operations**

The maintenance of the parks is overseen by four geographically assigned supervisors. The supervisors, their staff teams and/or contractors maintain all aspects of the parks within their respective park district, including both active (sports fields) and passive parks. Parks Operations supervisors are also directly involved in the loose leaf collection program, winter control, city-wide spring clean-up and special events.

To manage the parks and open space system, staff also rely on annual contracted services to assist with the maintenance of active (sports fields) and passive parkland, as well as boulevards. Recognizing the scale of the operation and the variables involved with managing the park system, current sports field service level standards are not being routinely met.

### **Internal Operational Best Practices**

Both City staff and contracted services have had to adhere to the Provincial cosmetic pesticide ban, since 2009. In response to the pesticide ban, and in order to maintain robust turf for safe playing conditions, a routine combination of the following cultural practices are required:

- aerating
- topdressing
- overseeding
- fertilizing
- mowing

Collectively, the practices constitute an integrated plant health care program for natural turf.

Spencer Smith Park is the best example in Burlington of a successful preventative turf maintenance program of aerating, topdressing, overseeding and fertilizing. The turf of the exceptionally well-used irrigated park is routinely stressed by many large special events and quickly recovers from the heavy wear because of the investment in the turf management program. Spencer Smith Park is aerated twice a month during the special event season to reduce soil compaction, overseeded once per month and topdressed with a soil mix 3 to 4 times per growing season. The intensity of use and resulting wear creates conditions that have to be carefully managed.

The same principle applies to sports fields, but with the added expectation that sports turf should afford safe play opportunities; a greater demand of the natural turf beyond the mere aesthetics enjoyed by the casual park user.

## **Strategy/process**

To develop the proposed service standards for grass sports fields, staff:

- reviewed the City's current sports field standards and practices
- conducted an environmental scan of surrounding municipalities' sports field maintenance programs for natural turf
- consulted with local Burlington sports organizations to determine what aspects of sports field standards are important to them

## **Municipal Comparators**

To better understand how other municipalities maintain their fields, staff completed a review and consulted with Waterloo, Oakville, Milton, and Guelph. Appendix A provides a summary of the comparison municipalities' cultural practices for irrigated sports fields, as compared to Burlington.

The comparison municipalities have dedicated maintenance staff that perform sports turf maintenance as their primary function. Having a dedicated maintenance team ensures the natural turf assets meet playability and safety standards, while providing consistent asset service standards.

While most municipalities have well-defined sports field maintenance programs for their fields, the programs vary slightly in frequency of maintenance activity between individual municipal operations, based on the type and classification of the field.

## **User Group Consultation**

Apart from other municipalities, staff also consulted with Burlington sports field users over the winter 2015/16 to determine and prioritize what they look for in a safe, quality sports field. Staff held three user group meetings and on-line surveys to capture the sport organizations thoughts and opinions. A detailed ranking can be found in Appendix B.

Based on the consultations with users groups over the fall and winter, staff implemented some quick wins for the 2016 season, including the addition of an extra cut per week, by contractors, to our non-irrigated fields last May and June. The additional service enhancements were well received. Some organizations would like the City to consider lining of the fields and providing and maintaining the soccer nets that the user groups currently are responsible for.

## **Proposed Changes to Operations**

Based on the aforementioned, staff propose the following changes to improve the operation of sports fields:

- Introduce and/or improve on cultural practices
- Create a dedicated Sports Field Maintenance Operations Team

Refer to Appendix C for a comparison of irrigated sports field maintenance standards as current state vs. future state.

The commitment to a formalized approach to maintaining our sports field assets will provide a marked improvement in the condition and safe play of our sports turf. However, it will also take time (growing seasons), along with the committed resources to improve field conditions. A dedicated sports field maintenance operation team would oversee and implement future state cultural practices.

## **Options considered**

Staff considered a number of implementation options for enhanced sports field service standards including:

1. Redeploying staff and resources from other services
2. Contracting out all sports field maintenance services
3. Additional in-house dedicated resources

### **Option 1**

Redeploying staff and resources from other services towards a proactive turf maintenance program for sports fields would negatively impact other park service levels including, spring clean-up, start-up of the mowing season, fall mowing operations, as well as the operational support provided to the loose leaf collection program. This option would not have a financial impact.

### **Option 2**

Contracting out all maintenance services for sports fields may pose a risk due to the additional time to respond to poor field conditions over the course of the season. Additional staff oversight to ensure quality control on the service delivery of contracted services would be required. The estimated annual cost for this option is \$880,000.

### **Option 3 (Recommended)**

A dedicated sports field maintenance operation team would oversee and implement future state cultural practices. The commitment to a formalized approach to maintaining

our sports field assets will provide a marked improvement in the condition and safe play of our sports turf.

To achieve a viable irrigated natural turf sports field maintenance program, staff propose the creation of:

- a full-time Sports Field Supervisor, for 1 non-union FTE to plan, execute and supervise the program.
- the creation of six, 8 month Temporary Equipment Operators, as an additional 3.7 FTE, to implement the proposed service standard enhancements.
- the introduction of an evening and weekend Sports Field Patrol position to assist sports field customers and park users with lighting, permit adherence, equipment and other time-sensitive operational concerns.
- an increase in sports field agricultural materials, seed, soil, and fertilizer will also be required to implement the proactive maintenance program at an average of approximately \$5,000 for each of the 65 irrigated fields, totaling an additional \$325,000.

These additional resources allows the City to reduce its overall reliance on contracted services. The net estimated annual cost for this option is \$585,825. It should be noted that it will take time (growing seasons), along with the committed resources to improve field conditions.

Sport organizations did identify other improvements that they would like to see. At this time, staff has decided to address concerns of safety and quality of play as the top priority. Any other items including lining of the fields and supplying and maintaining nets is not being considered at this time.

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## **Financial Matters:**

As with all City of Burlington assets, it is necessary to provide ongoing preventative maintenance to ensure assets meet their lifecycle objectives and are kept in a state of good repair.

With Council's approval of \$200,000 including 1.85 FTE in 2017, towards the partial implementation of a formalized cultural practices program for irrigated sports fields, an additional \$385,825 including 2.85 FTE will be required in 2018 to implement the full program.

The forecasted net increase to the on-going operating budget is as follows:

Labour and Benefits	\$395,825
Agricultural Materials	\$325,000
Total:	<u>\$720,825</u>
Less Contracted Services	-\$135,000
Proposed Total Operating:	<u><b>\$585,825</b></u>
2017 funding approved	<u><b>-\$200,000</b></u>
2018 funding requirement	<u><b>\$385,825</b></u>

### **Source of Funding**

A combination of revenue from user fees and a subsidy from the tax base funds the operating budget for the organized sport service. A revised sports field classification and pricing model will be developed in continued consultation with user groups and brought forward as part of the 2018 budget.

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### **Connections:**

As noted in the City's Strategic Plan as part of an Engaging City, 4.1 Good Governance; infrastructure needs to be in good condition and properly maintained.

Parks are a valuable community asset, and residents consistently rate highly the value and importance of parks and green space. It would be prudent for the City to invest more into the maintenance of its green infrastructure assets, just as it does with other assets such as roads and facilities.

An increased investment in sports fields also links to the City's strategic direction of a Healthy and Greener City, 3.1 Healthy Lifestyles.

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### **Public Engagement Matters:**

In January 2016 sport organizations were asked to provide recommendations for service standard changes. All sports field organizations were invited to attend one of three workshop meetings on sports field standards. 8 of 52 organizations sent representatives to one of the meetings. In addition, staff sent out a survey to user groups to ensure all organizations had an opportunity for input even if they were not able to attend a meeting. In total, 23 surveys were returned.

Staff summarized and categorized comments/feedback from the meetings. This information was sent to the user groups who were then asked to prioritize which items are most important to be addressed. This listing was included in the discussion area of this report.

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## **Conclusion:**

Sports fields should be recognized as green infrastructure that requires routine specialized care, consistent with the maintenance practices that apply to golf course turf, horticultural features and the urban forest. Dense sports turf is essential for safe play and is only achievable through well-planned and executed maintenance practices. Further, such turf maintenance practices are critical in the absence of chemical weed control, as weeds will out-compete the sports turf resulting in a degraded asset.

The skill sets required to execute the sound management practices for sports field care are best learned through formal education, continuous learning and hands-on training. A contracted services approach provides no guarantee of the skill sets or a degree of understanding as to the specific requirements of sports field maintenance practices, or a strong familiarity of the City's sports field assets or user groups.

Staff recommends that the City invest in a dedicated Sports Field Operations Team to perform an enhanced grass sports field maintenance program that will result in the improved playability and safety of our sports fields, and provide consistent standards.

This formalized approach to maintaining our sports field assets will provide a discernible improvement in the condition of our sports turf, however, as noted; it will take time, along with the committed resources to improve the overall condition of the fields.

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Respectfully submitted,

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**Appendices:**

- a. Area Municipalities Standards Survey
- b. Sports Field Users Priority Ranking of Field Needs
- c. Irrigated Sports Field Maintenance Standards

**Report Approval:**

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, Director of Finance and Director of Legal. Final approval is by the City Manager.