

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 7, 2011

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 41: MULTI-YEAR ATHLETIC FIELD PROGRAM AND YOUTH SPORTS PARTICIPATION

This memorandum responds to a request from Councilman Krupicka concerning the trends in youth sports participation and the City's multi-year athletic field improvement program. Specifically, the Councilman has asked whether additional resources are needed for fields to keep up with the growing youth sports participation rates.

The enrollment in youth sports leagues has grown from about 5,300 registrations in FY 2007 to about 6,200 in FY 2010. This represents an increase of approximately 17%. At the same time, registration in adult sports leagues has also been increasing. This growth in registrations puts some additional pressure on RPCA staff to manage these programs. However, the larger issue is the impact on the condition of the City's already-limited stock of athletic fields.

Athletic Field Improvement Program

In recent years, the City has implemented a CIP program that converts natural grass athletic fields to synthetic turf fields to help increase the amount of usable hours available. To date, the City (and ACPS) has converted four natural turf fields to synthetic turf. Three additional synthetic turf field projects are currently moving forward, including two fields at Witter (funded through the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Settlement Agreement) and one field at Hammond (ACPS project). Upon completion of these three fields sometime in FY 2012, the City will have a stock of seven synthetic turf fields.

In addition to the synthetic turf field program, the City has also performed major renovations of natural turf fields (both rectangular and diamonds), including laser grading and re-turfing activities. These fields remain a natural turf playing surface, but provide a higher level of service. Examples of these field renovations include the Four Mile Run baseball field and Ben Brenman diamond field. Additionally, two new engineered, natural turf fields are being installed in Potomac Yard (adjacent to Simpson) by developers. While these projects are less expensive than full synthetic turf conversions, they offer fewer usable hours per year and slightly higher annual maintenance costs. As the City continues to have a deficiency in the number of synthetic fields available, more of these major renovations will be necessary in the future to repair damages done today.

Beyond these recently completed and currently underway projects, no major field improvement projects are planned to occur prior to FY 2017. Providing additional resources before FY 2017 was not deemed possible with the overall resources available for capital projects this decade under City Council budget guidance. The FY 2012 – FY 2021 CIP includes funding in FY 2017 – FY 2020 for four additional artificial turf field projects. The specific sites for these conversion projects have not yet been finalized. However, an athletic field conversion study completed in 2009 used a comprehensive scoring methodology to rank the optimal sites for conversions. The two highest scoring sites (Brenman and Hammond Upper Field) have already received funding for conversion. The next highest scoring field sites were Hammond Lower Field, George Washington, Hensley and Braddock. While the field scoring matrix will certainly be updated at the time additional funding becomes available, it is likely that these same fields would still score relatively well.

City Supply of Athletic Fields

The City estimates that a stock of nine synthetic turf fields along with the existing supply of natural turf fields would be sufficient for handling the current demand for practices and games (both youth and adult leagues). By FY 2012, the City will have seven synthetic fields. This means the City will be operating under less than optimal conditions until around FY 2018, when the ninth synthetic turf field is scheduled for construction and opening. If sports league registrations continue to increase at current rates, it is likely that more than nine synthetic turf fields will be necessary sometime in the near future. Construction of two additional synthetic turf fields later in the decade is estimated to cost approximately \$4.0 million. Conversion projects to date have been less expensive because the sites were better suited for construction. Most of the remaining sites being considered for conversion have site constraints that will increase total project costs.

Operating with less than the recommended number of synthetic turf fields has two primary negative impacts: (1) the field conditions of natural turf fields degrade relatively rapidly necessitating expensive repairs in the future; and (2) some leagues (adult sports) are forced to hold practices and games at increasingly undesirable times, even late into the night. Despite these negative impacts, it is still possible to run successful youth and adult sports leagues in the City.