

Vancouver Field Sport Federation – Support for Synturf Fields

Active play, including organized sport, is a key part of developing healthy lifestyles and it supports the mental and physical well being of individuals. Sport is also part of the fabric of many communities, providing beneficial social connections and positive interactions among diverse groups of people. The City of Vancouver [‘Healthy City Strategy’](#) cites Active Living as a key part of building and maintaining a healthy city.

Work by the [UBC Human Early Learning Project](#) further highlights the critical connections between access to physical activities and outdoor sport with the healthy development of vulnerable children. Their report details the neighbourhoods in our city with large groups of children at high risk. Creation of more public, durable facilities will provide children with improved places to play and allow community organizations to expand accessible programs. Young adults also face social isolation in Vancouver. Recreation programs provide a place for them to meet, be physically active and socialize providing benefits that go far beyond a one-hour game.

In order to accommodate all of the demand for places to play, the City of Vancouver needs to use its available space as effectively as possible. While we all value grass, the bottom line is that it will only accommodate a select few per week, while synturf can be used for many hours per day. In our densifying city we need more durable surfaces that can accommodate our growing population, similar to tennis, basketball, or hockey surfaces that are needed to meet demand. Synturf located adjacent to schools will provide the greatest benefit, allowing maximum use.

Key Points

- Vancouver field sport users (15,000+) depend on fields. All fields are completely booked. Many organizations, particularly non-mainstream sports have no time slots at all on durable surfaces, and other programs have limited times, meaning they can accommodate fewer participants.
- The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (VPB) limits the number of “footprint” hours in the summer and spring on our grass fields to preserve field health. Grass use is even more restricted during the wet fall and frosted winters, typically to **12 hours of game time** or less. Alternatively, synturf fields can be used 365 days a year, barring snow and ice.
- We need to increase the supply of synturf playing fields to meet user demand and deliver on VPB mandate for increasing healthy active participation in Vancouver by

people of all ages. The VFSF will continue to work with the Parks Board to advocate for increasing the synturf field inventory in the City, for the benefit of city residents.

- The VFSF supports the Parks Board's efforts to ensure that user safety and limited impact on the surrounding community and the environment are given full consideration in field design, construction and upkeep.

Pending Projects

Current pending developments were approved in principle by VPB Commissioners (April 2019) following consultations and planning events with the public. These projects are long overdue and are eagerly awaited by everyone engaged in community field sport programs across the City. The projects waiting for implementation are:

- a new turf playing field and lighting at Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School – pending the selection of the appropriate synthetic material - on the existing grass playfield and diamond adjacent to West 57th Ave; and
- Outdoor lighting at: Hillcrest Park, on the existing mini synthetic turf playing field and Kitsilano Secondary, on the existing synthetic turf field.

Common Questions and Answers

Q: Will the new lights create more light pollution?

A: Parks Board is planning on using **more advanced directional LED lighting**. Information provided at the Open Houses indicate that new lighting types reduce “spill and glare” into neighbouring areas, remain highly effective in illuminating the field at nights, and use less energy. This is vast improvement from the older lights used at many of our older fields. For Clinton Park, for example, new directional LEDs would replace the old light on the gravel field which would be beneficial for neighbours.

Q: What about turf field infill materials – are they safe and environmentally friendly?

A: Parks considers many factors when selecting their materials, including maintenance, performance, cost, sustainability and health concerns. While Parks Board and BCSA currently have no concerns with the existing infill types, the last field upgraded by Parks **used a new alternative environmentally friendly infill material** as compared to the standard material (e.g. recycled rubber crumbs) traditionally used in the past. Parks Board is currently evaluating new materials and research to support selection of the materials used in any new fields out of an abundance of caution.

Q: Why build synthetic turf fields instead of adding more grass fields?

A: In Vancouver the use of grass fields (though a pleasure when well maintained and not frozen over or flooded) must be limited to maintain grass heath and field integrity. Field use is restricted in the spring and summer and even more true across the winter. A synthetic turf field, however, can be used 365 days a year subject to infrequent days of snow. Once built, synthetic turf is less expensive to maintain annually. This frees up Parks Board resources to focus on improving the health and playability of the existing grass fields and park space.

Q: What about loss of greenspace concerns?

A: The ideal locations are ones where the new field would replace the existing footprint of gravel fields or marginal grass fields already restricted for permitted field play. Adjacent greenspace would be maintained and, in some cases, enhanced as part of the larger project. Because these fields would require less annual maintenance, more funds to maintain the existing extensive network of grass fields and parks would be available.

Q: Will the new fields restrict public use and only be available for users that pay?

A: Sports field users currently pay fees to rent fields, whether grass, gravel or artificial turf. Replacing the partial grass or gravel fields with an AT field will increase durability for winter programming (vs grass) and allow these fields see both more permitted and public *ad hoc* use. During off peak times, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM weekdays, permitted or restricted field use is expected to be infrequent. The public will continue to have *ad hoc* use during daylight times when the fields are typically not booked. In fact, the public can now enjoy the benefits of more field hours, when fall storms may have otherwise required Parks Board to close a grass field to all use, permitted or not. Public use, on AT fields during the day, has included everything from informal pickup games (any sport), to Tai Chi, general athletic training, lawn bowling, etc.