

Sports Commission Meeting Agenda

Thursday, November 16, 2017

Langston-Brown CC, MPR

Time: 7:00-9:00 PM

Approval of Past Meeting Minutes

- October 2017 Meeting Minutes

Commission Member Reports

- Aquatics Committee- Janet Eichers
- Arlington Youth Baseball Association- Shirley Brothwell
- Diamond Field Fund Committee- Steve Severn
- Four Mile Run Valley Working Group- Shirley Brothwell
- Greenbrier Operations Committee – Larry Robertson
- Long Bridge Park Advisory Committee – Doug Ross
- Madison Manor- Sherry Kohan
- Out of School Time Commission- Tricia Trapanese
- Park & Recreation Commission- Steve Finn
- JFAC Buck Property Sub-Committee - Jessica Paska
- Public Space Master Plan- Justin Wilt
- South Park Master Plan- Tricia Trapanese

Old Business

- Annual Report/Annual Plan Discussion
- Field Advocacy Groups (Diamond and Rectangular) Discussion

New Business

- Aquatics Committee Statement
- Letter to DPR & APS- Gunston Community Field

Upcoming Meetings:

December 21, 2017 at Langston-Brown CC, MPR

Sports Commission Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 26, 2017

Langston-Brown CC, MPR

Time: 7:00-9:00 PM

Commission Members Present:

Shirley Brothwell, Chair
Jessica Paska
John Bacon
David Tornquist
Sherry Kohan

Drew Murray
Justin Wilt
Steve Severn
Patricia Trapanese

Commission Members Absent:

Larry Robertson

Janet Eichers

County/APS Staff:

Josh Colman, SC Liaison
Robin Leonard, DPR

Megan Carney, DPR

Please note: Agenda items may not be in chronological order.

Approval of Past Meeting Minutes

[7:04-7:10pm]

Review and motion to approve September meeting minutes, seconded, approved.

New Business

Sport User Group Update/Field Allocation Policy

[7:10-7:56pm]

Overview and update of field allocation policy progress.

- Able to meet allocation goals for most leagues in spring season.
- Allocation must continue to include the entire week, not just weekdays.
- Some issues with the 7-8pm timeslot- leagues not allocating this late.
- Allocation changes:

- Practices scheduled on the weekend- has to be considered and implemented more by the leagues
- Use alternative fields for practices (e.g. rectangular sports on diamond outfields)
- Fall end time- 7pm may be too late for entire season, this will be looked at.
- Sport Participation Numbers Updates- continued youth sport growth.
- Summer and Fall Allocation Information
- On-Going Policy Development and Major Policy Components
 - Timeframe- hope to have policy out to groups for review in the winter
- Field/Facility Information
 - Overview of field statuses, closures, upcoming improvements
 - Discussion on field permitting changes- from permit only to permit takes priority on some fields
 - Permit Take Priority- structured use of field requires a permit. Otherwise, field can be used for unstructured activities of less than 10 people.
 - Discussion:
 - Rovers will be checking usage at these locations- ensuring structured activities are not occurring.
 - Can still close fields if needed due to deterioration
 - Communication Plan being worked on- once it's done it will be shared with the Sports Commission.
 - Signage and literature considered.
 - Pets questions? Signage will state that dogs/animals prohibited on fields. This will be monitored.
 - Lights? Lights will not be turned on unless scheduled activity will take place.
 - Posting schedules- idea of having electronic schedules at fields.

Long Bridge Park Project [7:56-8:13pm]

Doug Ross (former SC member and Long Bridge Advisory Group member) visited the Sports Commission to update on the Long Bridge Park project.

- Quick background on project.
- Discussion of what's happening now- four designs currently posted publicly, gathering input from the community at this point.
- Quick info on design/build structure for project.
- All four designs have same basic elements- firms also added a few additional elements if possible within budgetary restrictions.
- Upcoming Board meetings to approve selection of the contractor.
- Discussion will be had on any additional amenities within the near future.
- Brief discussion on business model for facility.
- Josh will send links to commission so members can provide input on individual designs.

Budget Update/County Manager Discussion

[8:13- 8:22pm]

Update on recent budget meeting with County Manager. County anticipates more budget issues- APS asking for more money, big pressure on budget this year.

Discussion focused on:

- What services/amenities do you use?
- What could you give up?
- What can you not give up?

Suggestion offered regarding field based sports- could sports be willing to pay more to ensure fields are protected/saved?

Additional question regarding potential APS softball program and how that could be initiated during a difficult budget time.

No additional budget listening sessions with open space, but Josh will send link so Sports Commission can provide online input.

Annual Report/Annual Plan Discussion

[8:22-8:27pm]

Annual Plan will be emailed so group can review.

Discussion on ideas for the future including:

- Ideas for maximizing field use
- Communication improvements/outreach
- More work on underserved populations piece

Ideas/Input for Agenda Items

[8:27-8:41pm]

Discussion on any new agenda items or ideas for future meetings.

- Discussion on running/biking trails- Sports Commission involvement on that side. Look to work with others who would use running/biking trails.
- Idea of changing structure of the agenda to focus on Sports Commission goals:
 - Ensure agenda is including identified goals or areas SC is focused on.
 - Try online submission of member reports.
 - Reformat agenda to have presentations later, give time to SC to get through SC business first.

New Sports Commission members needed- current members should think about potential new members to join.

Old Business

PFRC Letter

[8:41-8:45pm]

Membership to PFRC denied. Sports Commission can continue to track projects of interest- make requests to join specific project groups.

Benjamin Banneker Discussion

[8:45-8:52pm]

Quick review of previous info presented in the spring.

- Questions on lights or artificial turf- not considered in this park.
- Group agrees letter of support is an easy decision.
- Motion to write a letter in support, seconded, approved.
- Sports Commission will submit letter to board.

Field Advocacy Plan

[Deferred]

Commission Member Reports

[8:52-9:22pm]

- **Aquatics Committee-** Janet at meeting tonight- future report to come.
- **AYBA-** no update/changes in a while- ongoing questions on continued existence.
- **Diamond Field Fund Committee**
 - Received comments from members- some interest in improving batting cages
 - Greenbrier
 - Bluemont
 - Barcroft
 - Some in group okay with not spending this year as well.
 - Sports Commission discussion on increasing field fee.
- **4MRV**
 - Sherry will be backup member for Shirley.
 - Upcoming meetings to review park master plan.
 - Discussion on drafting a joint letter with Park and Recreation Commission- idea that the working group put forward one idea that does not have an arts district- in case the arts district does not happen, there needs to be a feasible option put forward to the Board.

- Ideas discussed: restate the charge, recognition of arts place within DPR from the past, continued interest in integrating arts/parks spaces, bond language, history of acquisition of parcels, feasibility of re-planning buildings.
- Sports Commission in favor of joint-letter with Park and Recreation Commission. Motion to support, seconded, approved.
- **Greenbrier Operations Committee-** John Bacon will be new rep with Larry stepping down. Steve Severn as backup.
- **Park and Recreation Commission-** discussion on idea of every member sharing responsibility for attending that meeting. Sports Commission will rotate monthly with who attends.
- **JFAC-** a lot of questions on how JFAC is progressing- what is the right time to give input? What should be included in any letter?
- **POPS-** Justin will send longer synopsis out for members to review and give input.
 - Five topics to work through:
 - Open Space
 - Level of Service
 - Synthetic Fields and Lighting
 - Natural Resources
 - Land Acquisition
 - Sports Commission needs to get involved in these discussions- there are opportunities to participate.

Meeting ends at 9:22pm

Christian Dorsey, County Board Liaison

Attest:

Josh Colman

Josh Colman, Staff Liaison

Commission Member Report- JFAC

Summary of JFAC

What is JFAC: The newly established Joint Facilities Advisory Commission (JFAC) was created to provide input to the County Board and School Board on capital facilities needs assessment, capital improvement plans and long range facility planning

- For the past year, they were tasked with a 3 part process in determining if the county should acquire Buck/Carlin Springs sites and what to do with the space there.
- In June 2017, after the JFAC presentation, the County Board and School Board directed staff and JFAC to further study three scenarios: one at the Buck site and two at the Carlin Springs site.

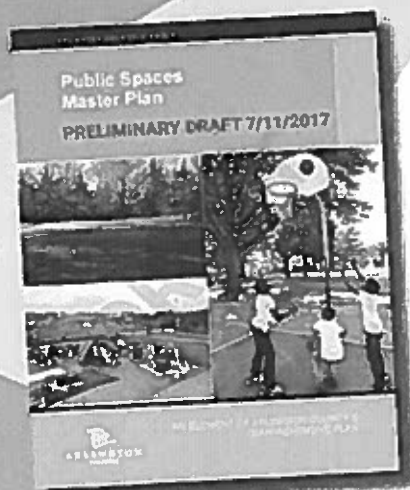
NOTE: None of these include athletic fields.

- Currently, they have entered phase 3, which is an in-depth analysis of options identified, including but not limited to the following:
 - Transportation analysis (traffic impact analysis, pedestrian circulation, access to public transportation options, ingress and egress, parking, etc.)
 - Environmental and historic/cultural analysis (natural resources, historic or cultural resources, noise, light, sustainability elements, etc.)
 - Infrastructure review of capacities and access (water/sewer, storm sewer, electricity, telecommunications, gas, etc.)
 - Cost analysis (site preparation, facility (new, addition or rehab), operating and maintenance costs, existing tenancies, etc.)
- In their phase 2 report, they mentioned they wanted to study/analyze decking for school and field needs as a long term option.
- Phase 3 is coordinated between County and APS staff, and various consultants, and is anticipated to take 9 – 12 months for completion.
- The County Board will not take action on any permanent use of either the Buck or Carlin Springs site for many months, if not a year (plus). However, temporary storage needs for systems furniture and facilities maintenance parts will be met in the near term using vacant office building space on the Buck site.
- Sports commission should write a letter, supporting a study of the decking or field usage at the Buck/Carlin site. Jessica has drafted a letter, but we should discuss what we want and how to proceed at this point.

Help Arlington Plan for our Parks and Recreation Places and Spaces

COME TO ANY OR ALL OF THESE PUBLIC MEETINGS. YOUR INPUT WILL HELP US FINE-TUNE OUR PUBLIC SPACES MASTER PLAN.

Get more information at parks.arlingtonva.us, search POPS.



Chat about Land Acquisition

FRIDAY

December 1

COURTHOUSE PLAZA

11:30am – 1pm

Deeper Dig on Strategies to Expand Field Capacity with Synthetic Turf & Lights

WEDNESDAY

December 6

NAVY LEAGUE BUILDING

6:30 – 9pm

Stewarding Tree Canopy, Natural Resources & Casual Use Spaces

THURSDAY

December 14

CENTRAL LIBRARY

6:30 – 9pm

**ARLINGTON
POPS**
A Plan for Our Places and Spaces



We can provide reasonable modifications for people with disabilities upon request. Podemos proveer modificaciones razonables conforme la Ley de Personas con Incapacidades (ADA) con previo aviso al 703-228-3206. TTY 711.

Help Arlington Plan for our Parks and Recreation Places and Spaces

Arlington County is in the process of updating the 2005 Public Spaces Master Plan, which provides strategies for the future for our public spaces, including parks, natural resource and recreational needs that

2017 ANNUAL WORK PLAN
Sports Commission

Activity	Lead Member	Status / Timeframe	Outcome
Ongoing Work			
Oversee the Diamond Field Fund Committee to review proposal and recommend projects to be funded	Steve Severn	January 31, 2017	Sports Commission votes on recommended projects
Special Projects			
Work with the County Board, the County Manager, and Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) to support the conversion of Gunston field to a synthetic turf diamond field and look for more creative ways to finance the additional costs	Drew Murray	March 1, 2017	Help Arlington Sports Foundation secure \$180,000 for synthetic turf donation
Sports User Group - Field Allocation Advisory Group	Reggie M. Kouba	Share feedback with DPR in April 2017	Define Residency for current clubs (determine percentages for clubs and fees for non-residents) and also come up with policy for new clubs coming into Arlington
Work to get more synthetic fields in the county	David Torquist	June 1, 2017	Write letter to County Board to consider retooling the concrete courts on the W&L parking deck with sports court materials to create a field space & increase the utilization of the space
Work with Arlington sports programs to look at field / facility use issues, particularly regarding density of use / issues to determine if we get more use out of existing / limited fields / facilities without serious degrading the quality of experience	Justin Wilt, John Bacon	May 31, 2017	Benchmark existing Arlington sports group practice densities of use
		June 30, 2017	Researching national standards
		August 30, 2017	Research other possible models
		December 31, 2017	Develop suggestions for any appropriate use alternatives

2017 ANNUAL WORK PLAN
Sports Commission

Activity	Lead Member	Status/ Timeframe	Outcome
Advocate the positive aspects of lighting the turf fields	Sherry Kohan	June 30, 2017	Produce a one pager handout that can be circulated to community members, sent to other commissions and used in public forums that lays out the positive benefits of having lighted fields, while also addressing mitigations for the major concerns. Positive benefits should include not only the direct impacts to the sports groups and the fields themselves but also the indirect impacts to the community
		July/August 2017	Plan for distributing the one-pager

Annual Work Plan 2017 Progress

Please review the 2017 Annual Work Plan (attached). If you were the "Lead Member" for a project, please provide information relating to the following:

- a. A general summary of the work that was completed this year
- b. Was the desired outcome accomplished and/or what is the status of the project
- c. Any challenges/issues that need to be considered for the future

Diamond Field Fund Committee- Steve

Meeting and discussions with Diamond Field Fund Committee members in 2016/17: Phil Juliano (ABR), Drew Murray (AAS), Richie Pacheco (ATB), Adam Rasmussen (ALL), Jerry Spitz (ASBR), Steve Severn- Chair

Produced three projects that were taken to the Sports Commission, DPR and County Board for approval.

Gunston Turf field – Supplement existing Capital Funds in order to install synthetic turf on the Gunston diamond field during the planned 2018 renovation. Cost \$190K

- **Outcome**-This project was approved and is now set for implementation in 2018.
- **Issues/Challenges**-This was a large project considering the percentage of Field fund monies expended and can occur only once every few years after funds have been allowed to accumulate. Therefore, these projects need to be weighed very carefully to ensure the greatest benefit to the entire diamond sport community.

Greenbrier Storage Building- Purchase pre-fab concrete building, prep site and install in Greenbrier Park for use by Diamond Sports- Cost \$30K

- **Outcome**-This project was approved and building purchased. Awaiting delivery of building and installation on site currently scheduled in December 2017
- **Issues/Challenges**-In this particular case, the timeline of the project could have been dramatically shortened if more direct involvement by the Sports Commission were allowed in the communication with the vendor.

Greenbrier Batting Cage Concrete- Contract a vendor to install a concrete pad (15ft x 70ft) in the Field #2 batting cage, replacing existing gravel floor. Cost-\$10K

- **Outcome**-This project was shelved after Contactor estimates far exceeded budgetary figures for completion of the project.
- **Issue/Challenges**- Once it was realized that the project was far more involved (expensive) than originally planned, there was no other practical recourse other than to shut it down completely. Redirection of funds to a similar project was not an option as the entire process of approvals would have to start from scratch.

Gunston Field Conversion- Drew

Project: "Work with the County Board, the County Manager, and Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) to support the conversion of Gunston field to a synthetic turf diamond field and look for more creative ways to finance the additional costs"

Status: Fully funded and County Board-approved; design phase ongoing, with construction estimated to begin in Q2 2018

Overview: Approved in the FY2016 budget, Gunston Park Diamond Athletic Field #1 was slated for a capital improvement project to bring the field up to current playability, safety, and environmental standards.

While the project was budgeted for new natural grass turf, the Arlington Sports Foundation (ASF) - a private 501(c)(3) based in Arlington - proposed that the field instead be converted to a synthetic turf surface to allow year-round play on the order of nearly 880 additional playing hours, youth diamond field user groups. ASF would raise the remaining cost of the conversion after a contribution from the Diamond Field Fund (accrued from a portion of user group fees directed for use in capital projects for diamond fields).

ASF successfully raised its goal of \$180,000, and in April 2017, the County Board unanimously voted to authorize the County manager to accept the ASF contribution, and to allocate \$190,000 from the Diamond Field Fund (as recommended by the Diamond Field Fund Committee, and in turn by the Sports Commission).

The design phase (now incorporating the synthetic turf surface) is scheduled to be finalized in 2Q 2018, with construction projected to complete in 4Q 2018.

Challenges: 1) Ensuring that the final design will maintain playability for adult softball use, while adding excellent playability for youth diamond sports (and even rectangular sports); however, the outfield fence will remain at approximately the same distance as the current field, and multiple configurations of the removable bases makes use of the field very flexible. 2) Public outreach regarding the safety of synthetic turf fields, and the necessity of adding additional such fields in Arlington.

Sports Practice Density Evaluations- Justin/John

- Obtained data from most youth sports groups in Arlington
- Obtained any available "best practices" from national / governing bodies related to various sports
- In the process of developing some suggestions for enhancements for select sports, with the aim of maximizing field uses
- Expect to complete this project within the 12-31-17 deadline

Annual Work Plan- 2018 Ideas

Diamond Field Fund

Input from Diamond Field Fund Committee members produced 3 possible projects to be considered for 2018

- a. Install non-fill synthetic turf in at least one of the 3 batting cages in Greenbrier Park- Est Cost- \$15K per cage
- b. Install batting cage(s) at Bluemont Park Field #3 –Est Cost \$25K per cage
- c. Install roof, lights in batting cages at Barcroft Park Field #3- Est Cost \$50K

None of these projects were received with overwhelming support from all members. An alternative suggestion was to put any new projects on hold for 2018 and simply accumulate more funds for future projects.

Other Suggestions

- 1) A census of daytime use of unlocked/unfenced sports fields and "unprogrammed" or "natural" space - a big point of opposition to fenced, dedicated sports fields is that they are not open and usable to the public most of the time (and particularly during the day, when games are not scheduled during normal work hours). But if games are not scheduled during the day because people are presumably at work, those at work are not also wanting to access the fields for non-sports use at that time. Of course, residents telecommute, are retired or homemakers, etc. - but if the "non-use during the weekday" argument against dedicated sports fields is to be entertained, then we should seek some information about the "ceiling" for any alternative uses.
- 2) Taking a look at different configurations for "combination" fields. Maximizing the *flexibility* of sports fields should already be a general goal for sports groups in Arlington due to limited space, but much of the public (neighborhood organizations) views fenced athletic fields as "use it all the time, or don't have it at all." There are many better solutions short of removing a field entirely: unlocking the fence, removing the fence (for some sports); or configuring the field so that multiple sports and multiple user groups can use it, minimizing time during which the field is not used for sports activities. While "dedicated" sports fields are preferable for playability (adult softball is a great example), entertaining *close enough* playability in order to accommodating other sports uses, likely will preserve playing *hours* in the long run.
- 3) Looking into funding an additional full-time animal control officer. I don't know how accurate this is, but I heard from staff at one of the Gunston open houses that there is only one full-time

animal control officer in Arlington - responsible for the usual wild animal and animal removal calls that you would expect, but also for enforcement of the pet leash and pet droppings pickup ordinances. If it is to be viable for fences to be removed from currently-dedicated sports fields, so that the public can access the fields when not in permitted use, then there has to be *strict* enforcement of the pet ordinances (I don't have to go into why!).

- 4) Finding any test applications (whether full fields or something smaller like batting cages) for non-infill synthetic turf surfaces, like Pure Play, to move beyond health-specific objections to adding desperately-needed synthetic fields in the public process.
- 5) Getting runners, cyclists, walkers, etc. who use the trails (which is a huge number of people) to be aware of and engaged in Sports Commission activities. Not necessarily for clout purposes, but if the trails really are Sports Commission jurisdiction, then we have been missing a big user group. One project that comes to mind personally is lighting the W&OD Trail, 4MR Trail, Bluemont Junction Trail, etc. I am sure that those have been debated several times, but what about methods of lighting alternative to overhead, like solar-powered surface lighting? Are there opportunities to add trails or improve existing trails, with a recreation focus rather than a commuter focus?
- 6) The creation and management (?) of the diamond and rectangular field advocacy groups.
- 7) Work with DPR and sports groups to pursue more efficient mechanisms for field use (how to get more kids on fields).
- 8) Take steps to help improve field condition and availability
 - a. Continue to pursue the viability of putting synthetic turf on the futsal court
 - b. Advocate for improvements at Gunston community field
 - c. Identify other fields in the county that could be either good for a Sports Foundation project (i.e., moderate improvements) or are just generally overlooked/forgotten (do these even exist?)
 - d. Consider organizing Sports Commission field trips to certain fields or parks to improve our collective understanding of field locations and conditions
 - e. Seek info from DPR (maybe just as a reminder) of fields that are scheduled for upgrades over the next 5 years and how DPR goes about making these decisions.
 - f. Develop and/or research options for making softball fields multi-use (i.e., capable of being fenced for the softball user while also capable of being opened up off season to other users) – how is this handled in other communities?
- 9) Continue to advocate for the siting of a multi-use athletic center (MAC, fieldhouse)
 - a. Retrieve information and justification of the need for a MAC/fieldhouse in Arlington and how it was envisioned at Long Bridge Park; consider what amenities would be ideal in such a facility and whether there are any beneficial multi-use options (think of ways to gain supports, like combining with arts or community uses)

- b. Recover information on the decision made by the Long Bridge committee that such a facility would be better sited elsewhere in the county
- c. Conduct research on various such facilities around the country including their size and design (are there various options, can we identify a smaller version that would be less intimidating for Arlington?)
- d. Arrange SC visits of such facilities in the immediate area
- e. Talk with developers/owners of such facilities to see what options might be for Arlington (business model, cost, footprint)
- f. Meet with DPR to see what their thoughts are about whether this is a viable option, where it might be located, what they think needs to be done to advocate for its creation
- g. Consider possible locations for such a facility
- h. Consider advocating again for a feasibility study

10) Take steps to develop a strategy for addressing the underserved youth population

- a. Collect information from coaches who have organized outreach programs to identify the challenges and options for best addressing/serving this population
- b. Identify other groups in town who might care about this issue and be willing to work on it
- c. Work with APS and other commissions to develop a possible approach or a pilot program for sustainable outreach
- d. Prepare a report, make recommendations to the county for steps they can take and steps others can take

11) Expand Commission awareness of smaller sports and their needs

- a. Obtain information from DPR on what sports fall into this category
- b. Learn more about the number and types of participants and changes over time, what sports are trending up, what sports are trending down
- c. Learn more about the playing locations/fields/surfaces for these sports – do they share existing multi-use spaces (fields, gyms), do they need their own playing surface, where are these located, are they in the right locations, how much are the surfaces used
- d. Seek to learn more about participants in these sports, consider inviting advocates or participants to the SC to share their story

12) Research and gather info on non-County sports facilities like gyms and pools – to what extent do these supplement County resources? (i.e., does their existence mean that the county can focus on other areas?)

13) Identify other Commissions and/or interest groups with whom the SC should build a relationship (expand our network, get our message out there)

- a. Planning Commission
- b. E2C2
- c. Aquatics Commission

d. ?

- 14) Review the SC role and mandate and identify areas where we have not been sufficiently attentive
 - a. Develop action plan for addressing overlooked areas, such as biking, other?
- 15) Request information about laws/regs/options for "co-location" facilities – i.e, to understand when this might be feasible and be positioned to identify opportunities when they arise
- 16) Could the sports commission put together a report/letter to the county board outlining examples of successful decking over highways? Perhaps including costs, time frame, community reaction, etc? A quick google search provides many examples, perhaps this is something we could share to push our views on this, especially with the Buck opportunity. There are even some examples in DC.
- 17) I think a tour of Buck/Carlin would be very advantageous before we write/send a letter.
- 18) I think it might be helpful to invite members/chair of key committees to come to our meetings and give us an update. (For example a JFAC rep) Then we could prepare our feedback ahead of time and give some for the rep to take back to their group. It isn't a replacement for us attending their meetings, but it might help amplify our voice is the JFAC person can say at their meetings, "Well the entire sports community feels strongly about x,y,z."
- 19) This is very minor but I'd like to reach out to some runners that I know and see if there is any interest in one of them joining the Sports Commission. (from running clubs)

Aquatics Committee Statement

Statement

The Aquatics Committee supports an aquatic facility at a new neighborhood high school that can provide an equivalent aquatics curriculum as is currently administered by Arlington Public Schools.

Vote

6 of 7 members in attendance voted for this position- 1 passed.

Background

The Aquatics Committee discussed "Boundaries and New School Ongoing Process" as an agenda item at their October 26 meeting. Within that discussion, aquatic facility/curriculum focused on a few different topics:

- Feasibility of facility/curriculum depending on facility- i.e. 4th neighborhood school (at Career Center location) vs. addition in other places (Ed Center).
- Discussion of "choice" school vs. "neighborhood" or "comprehensive"- If school has boundaries ("neighborhood" or "comprehensive") and children must attend, belief that Aquatics curriculum needs to be included (same opportunities to all).
- Background on Aquatics curriculum in schools. 9th and 10th graders- included in P.E. 3rd and 4th graders are bused and have an Aquatics curriculum as well. Growth of younger populations a factor as well (not limited to high school students)
- Discussion/belief that there are more than enough swimmers in the County that Long Bridge would not conflict.

November xx, 2017

Jane Rudolph, Director
Department of Parks and Recreation
Street
Arlington, VA xxxxx

Patrick Murphy, Superintendent (?)
Arlington Public Schools
Street
Arlington, VA xxxxx

Re: Gunston Community Field

Dear yyyyyy,

The Sports Commission serves in an advisory capacity to the County Board on issues that affect Arlington's sports community. ~~Our charter authorizes us to make recommendations as we see fit on, among other things, the adequacy of Arlington's sports facilities.~~ An ever-present concern for our Commission is the adequacy and condition of Arlington's outdoor fields and the extent to which they meet community demand for programmed and unprogrammed field space.

It has come to our attention that the condition of the community field at Gunston Middle School has deteriorated to the point of making it ~~make it~~ essentially unusable. Given the field crunch in our community, the Commission is concerned about any field that is not being used to its full potential. We are writing to inquire about any plans that may be in place or that could be developed to improve the extremely poor condition of this field and to express our support for finding a solution that will preserve the field's condition over the long term for the benefit of its users.

Background: Arlington has a mixture of natural grass and synthetic fields that serve youth and adult sports groups for programmed and unprogrammed purposes. Demand for these fields is high, and most fields are primarily or exclusively reserved for programmed use. There are a limited number of fields that are exclusively reserved for casual, unprogrammed use by members of the community. These casual-use fields are an extremely valuable asset, one that have become increasingly important as our population grows.

Given the high demand for field space, all of Arlington's fields are subjected to intensive use far beyond what is typically recommended for either natural grass or synthetic turf fields. Natural grass fields require regular maintenance, proper drainage, and periods of rest to ensure their continued viability. Caring for grass fields in the proper manner is an acknowledged challenge by our Department of Parks and Recreation. ~~in our community.~~ In order to meet demand, the

County has converted many grass fields to synthetic turf, which can withstand heavy use in all types of weather and requires far less maintenance.

The Gunston community field, a natural grass rectangular field sited between the Gunston synthetic turf field and South Lang Street, is emblematic of the challenges Arlington faces in managing its fields. This unprogrammed field receives heavy use which quickly degrades the playing surface. As the grass dies, water flowing across the surface creates dangerous ruts that further compromise the field. (See photos below.)



Because of the poor condition, the field is not being used to its full potential. Drop-in users avoid the site altogether, preferring to wait for a slim chance to use the nicer adjacent turf field. Not only is the community field unsightly, but an extremely valuable community asset is being wasted. Further compounding the waste, the field has lights (a precious commodity in Arlington), meaning valuable evening hours are also wasted.

Request: The Sports Commission would like to know can be done to improve the field's condition in the short- and long-term. We understand there are at least two factors that work against improving the field. First, money is always a challenge. Second, this space has often been included in APS discussions about potential school siting options, which may have led to reluctance to invest in a field that might be eliminated. Nonetheless, unless and until such a decision is made, an improved field could be serving community users. The Sports Commission, along with various sports user groups, the Arlington Sports Foundation, and other community organizations, would like to work with Arlington Public Schools and the Department of Parks and Recreation to see this field restored as an asset for the community in a way that ensures its long-term viability.

The Commission respectfully requests answers to the following questions:

1. What plans, if any, exist for improving the Gunston community field and making it playable again?
2. What options have been considered for making improvements to this field, and what are the pros and cons (including cost, sustainability, and installation timeframes) of each approach?
3. What improvement options offer the best return-on-investment from a sustainability perspective? For example, if the grass is replaced, what can be done to ensure that it lasts more than a season?
4. What is the preferred approach for improving the field and why?
- 4-5. Is there any consideration being given for using this site as a "pilot" program to evaluate one of the new types of synthetic turf surfaces (eg Pure Play™) that do not require the in-fill crumble that has stirred so much controversy recently.
- 5-6. Are there any forms of community involvement that could facilitate making improvements to this field?