

Providence District Field Development Priorities

Report to Supervisor Linda Q. Smyth
Providence District Athletic Fields Task Force
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Background

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the priorities for athletic field development on Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA or PA) property within Providence District. In making that determination, the Providence District Athletic Field Task Force (AFTF), established under the auspices of Supervisor Linda Smyth, surveyed the Park Authority inventory, evaluated the existing needs of community users, considered a variety of different development options (including artificial turf, lighting, irrigation, new field development, and related amenities), and ranked the possible projects in order of priority.

Providence District is sorely lacking in park land, with only 6.7% of its area dedicated to parks. That is the lowest percentage in Fairfax County. Further, there is little open space in the District that could be acquired by the County for park land. Providence District is also suffering from a severe shortage of active recreational space, particularly rectangular fields for soccer, football, lacrosse, field hockey and other sports.

The PA Needs Assessment study determined that Providence District has the greatest long term need for rectangular fields in the County.

The AFTF was established in 2006 to advise Supervisor Smyth regarding potential solutions to this shortage. At the outset, Supervisor Smyth and the AFTF determined that any plan to meet the needs for athletic fields would not come at the expense of other recreational users. Thus, any increase in the availability of athletic fields must come from improvements to existing fields. There are essentially three ways to increase availability of athletic fields through field improvements: (1) irrigation and maintenance of existing fields to improve their quality, (2) lighting to increase the amount of time that can be scheduled on a field, or (3) installing artificial surfaces to eliminate weather-related cancellations and increase utilization rates.

Providence District Needs Assessment

The Park Authority Needs Assessment emphasizes the deficiency in rectangular field county-wide. The PA determined that it needed to add 95 rectangular fields to meet projected demand in the future. Providence District has one of the largest deficits. The athletic field priority for PA has been to significantly increase the availability of rectangular fields. To do this, the PA initiated a program in its 2007 bond to install artificial turf fields (turf fields) at a number of priority sites throughout the County. Data indicate that usage on turf fields is significantly higher than natural turf fields due to the low maintenance requirements and the lack of weather-related cancellations. When turf fields are installed on lighted fields, actual usage could increase by up to 40%.

The Park Authority bond in 2007 provided \$10 million in funding for up to 15 rectangular turf fields. None of the selected fields were in Providence District. Priority was determined based upon readiness for turf after evaluating cost to install. In this way, the County was able to do the largest number of fields for \$10 million. The average cost of a turf field installation was projected to be about \$800,000. Because of this emphasis

on low cost installations, almost all the sites that were selected already had lights and other amenities and were regulation size. Thus, the only cost associated with the development of these fields was the cost of the turf field itself.

There are no regulation-size rectangular PA fields in Providence District that have lights. Thus, no Providence District fields were selected for turf field installation. Providence District was the only magisterial district in the County that did not have a field developed under the PA turf field program.

In sum, the “needs” gap between Providence District and every other district in Fairfax County has grown as a result of FCPA turf field development decisions. The first step in closing this gap is to develop existing rectangular fields to the point that they are suitable candidates for turf field installation.

Park Authority Inventory in Providence District

The first goal of the AFTF was to develop a comprehensive inventory of all athletic fields in Providence District, including the Park Authority and Fairfax County Public School fields. An inventory of Park Authority fields in the district is attached as Appendix A.

While there are nominally 11 rectangular fields in the PA inventory, several of these fields can be eliminated from consideration for any improvements due to their small size, the existence of a diamond field “overlay,” and/or uneven topography that would significantly increase the cost of any improvements.

For example, the Towers Park rectangular field is not really a field at all; it is just the outfield portion of a diamond field.

Similarly, the Walnut Hill rectangular field is just an irregularly shaped area that overlaps several poor quality diamond fields on the site of a former elementary school.

The three fields at Blake Lane are not clearly defined. The space is very small, there are severe topographical barriers to any improvement to that site, and no parking.

That leaves only 6 real candidates for any significant improvement: Oak Marr fields 1 and 2, Nottoway Park field 4, Idylwood Park field 1, Larry Graves Park field 3, and James Lee Park field 3.

Development Options

Most of these fields are already reasonably well-maintained. Thus, they would be candidates for either lighting, installation of artificial turf, or both. We would not recommend adding lights or installing artificial turf on any field unless it were regulation size and could be used for scheduling games. Since no regulation size, rectangular Providence District field has lights, our first priority would be to make improvements to an existing rectangular field so that it would then be a suitable candidate for a turf field.

Of these fields, the most problematic site is James Lee. Although that field is on the site of a Recreation Center and has good parking and other amenities, there is a diamond overlay on the site, the rectangular field is too narrow, and the topography is very uneven.

Both Idylwood and Larry Graves have regulation fields and suitable topography, but neither have lights and they are both located on side roads in primarily residential neighborhoods. The amenities for Idylwood, particularly parking, are poor.

Nottoway is the only rectangular field with lights, but the field is too short and cannot be used for regulation game play. It is possible that the field could be expanded in the future to regulation size, but that will require site work and the removal of structures. The amenities on-site are good, but access is only fair as the park is not located on a major highway.

Oak Marr has the best quality fields and they are side-by-side, thus allowing for some economies of scale during installation of improvements. The site is located on a major highway, near the intersection of Route 123 and Jermantown Road. It has a regional Recreation Center, and substantial parking. The fields at Oak Marr are adjacent to a lighted driving range and a golf course and are in a topographical “bowl” so that light would have minimal impact on adjoining neighborhoods, especially given technological improvements in field lighting in the last 10 years.

Recommendation

We believe that Oak Marr is the best candidate for improvement and that the PA should install lights and artificial turf on both fields. Our evaluation is summarized in the table below:

Providence District Rectangular Field Priorities										
Field	Priority	Lights	Field Number	RF/60 Overlay?	Dimensions (est)	Accessibility	Amenities (parking, facilities)	Field Quality Level	Topography	Surrounding Development
Oak Marr Park	1		1		207' x 321'	Good	Good	Good	Flat	Rec Center
Oak Marr Park	2		2		198' x 321'	Good	Good	Good	Flat	Rec Center
Nottoway Park	3	Y	4		192' x 279'	Fair	Fair	Fair	Flat	Major Park
Larry Graves Park	4		3		200' x 330'	Poor	Fair	Good	Flat	Minor Park
Idylwood Park	5		1		196' x 356'	Poor	Poor	Fair	Flat	Minor Park
James Lee Park	6		3	Y	160' x 358'	Fair	Good	Poor	Uneven	Rec Center
Blake Lane Park	7		1		140' x 195'	Poor	Poor	Poor	Uneven	Minor Park
Blake Lane Park	8		3		75' x 140'	Poor	Poor	Poor	Uneven	Minor Park
Blake Lane Park	9		2		75' x 140'	Poor	Poor	Poor	Uneven	Minor Park
Towers Park	10	Y	2	Y	90' x 156'	Good	Fair	Poor	Flat	Minor Park
Walnut Hill Center	11		1	Y	irregular	Poor	Poor	Poor	Uneven	Former ES

APPENDIX A

Providence District Field Inventory

Field	Lights	Field Type	Field Number	RF/60 Overlay?	Infield Type	Accessibility	Amenities (parking, facilities)	Field Quality Level
Blake Lane Park		RF	2		NA	Poor	Poor	Poor
Blake Lane Park		RF	3		NA	Poor	Poor	Poor
Blake Lane Park		RF	1		NA	Poor	Poor	Poor
Idylwood Park		RF	1		NA	Poor	Poor	Good
James Lee Park		RF	3	Y	NA	Fair	Good	Poor
Larry Graves Park		RF			NA	Fair	Fair	Good
Nottoway Park	Y	RF	4		NA	Fair	Fair	Fair
Oak Marr Park		RF	1		NA	Good	Good	Good
Oak Marr Park		RF	2		NA	Good	Good	Good
Towers Park	Y	RF	2	Y	NA	Good	Fair	Fair
Walnut Hill Center		RF	1	Y	NA	Poor	Poor	Poor
Eakin Community Park		60	1		Skinned	Poor	Poor	Poor
Eakin Community Park		60	2		Skinned	Poor	Poor	Poor
Eakin Mantua		60			Grass	Poor	Poor	Poor
Idylwood Park		60	2		Grass	Poor	Poor	Fair
Idylwood Park		60	3		Skinned	Poor	Poor	Fair
James Lee Park	Y?	60	2		Skinned	Good	Good	Fair
James Lee Park		60	1	Y	Skinned	Fair	Good	Poor
Jefferson Village Park		60	1		Grass	Poor	Poor	Fair
Larry Graves Park		60	2		Skinned	Fair	Fair	Fair
Larry Graves Park		60	3		Skinned	Fair	Fair	Fair
Nottoway Park	Y	90	6		Grass	Fair	Fair	Good
Nottoway Park	Y	60	1		Grass	Fair	Fair	Good
Nottoway Park	Y	60	2		Skinned	Fair	Fair	Good
Nottoway Park	Y	60	3		Skinned	Fair	Fair	Good
Nottoway Park	Y	60	5		Grass	Fair	Fair	Good
Towers Park	Y	60	1	Y	Skinned	Good	Fair	Good
Walnut Hill Center		60	1	Y	Skinned	Poor	Poor	Poor
Walnut Hill Center		60	2	Y	Skinned	Poor	Poor	Poor
Westgate Park	Y	60	1		Grass	Fair	Fair	Good
Westgate Park	Y	60	2		Grass	Fair	Fair	Good