Grass fields save hand work for Grand Island foreman

How do you cut costs and still provide the same level of service? Directors of municipal parks and recreation departments all over the country constantly ask themselves that question at budget time.

Raymond Billica, parks foreman for the town of Grand Island, NY, came up with one answer: his staff converted several of the town’s baseball and softball fields into “all grass” fields. Only the eight-foot diameter pitcher’s mound (on baseball fields) and a 12-foot diameter home plate area area are left in clay, while the baselines and base areas themselves are overseeded.

Before converting the fields, Billica’s crews screened the fields every day, hand raking the pitcher’s mound, home plate and the bases. Foul lines and coaching boxes had to be marked out, and after heavy rains it took extensive manpower to shape up the fields again. Crews would have to squeegee water off the field, apply water-absorbing compounds and then work up the clay all over again.

Since converting the fields, “the need for extensive work during wet weather is all but eliminated,” Billica said. Daily maintenance has been greatly reduced, and only the home plate area needs to be lined daily. All grass lines are applied with a field marking paint and need retouching every other week.

While more area needs to be mowed after the conversion, Billica said the extra time involved is negligible. The switch increases the need to fertilize, top dress and reseed the playing areas, but he also noted that the town’s youth baseball fields (used only two months a year and players are prohibited from wearing metal cleats) do not require extensive extra maintenance.

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