

BETTER, SAFER SPORTS TURF FOR YOUR DOLLAR

Many municipalities have staff who maintain turf on sports fields in the parks and a separate staff who maintain the turf at the public and high schools. There is often duplication of equipment and standards for maintenance. Safety standards may vary widely between the different jurisdictions.

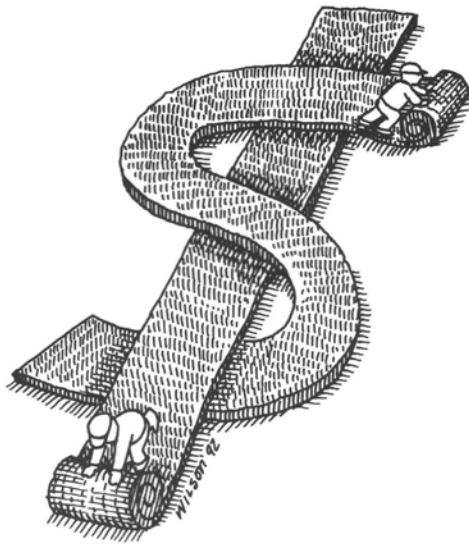
In 1979, the Town of Oakville entered into a reciprocal agreement with the public school board. Under the agreement the Parks and Recreation Department was to maintain the outside properties of all school sites in the Town of Oakville so that community groups could use the schools under the direction of the Recreation Department without cost.

It was agreed that the maintenance should include all grass cutting, fertilizing, keeping the playgrounds safe by doing minor repairs where necessary, and keeping the sports fields safe and in playable condition. The sports field maintenance included Gilling of diamonds, lining of soccer and football fields, plus maintaining the irrigation systems.

Over the years less funds were available through the school board for major projects and the necessary upgrading of the sports fields. The result was a steady decline in the conditions of all sports fields. In previous years the Parks Operations had undertaken surveys of the condition of the sports fields and made recommendations for upgrading, but the funds were not always available.

In April of 1992 the Parks staff undertook another survey and wrote a report. This time they involved the Board of Education from the beginning in making one of the following three recommendations for each field:

- a) continue to maintain the facility under the present standards,
- b) repair or renovate the facility to bring



it up to safe and acceptable standards, or

- c) recommend that the facility should be no longer used due to safety reasons until brought up to safe and playable condition.

A task force was established with the public school board to assess the report and implement the findings of the inspection and to generate a plan of action. The following are the guidelines for the task force.

1. The task force to consist of:

- one staff member from the physical education high school facility,
- one staff member from the physical education elementary facility or a principal,
- one staff member from the Parks and Recreation registration staff,
- one staff member from the Parks Operations staff,

2. The task force was to discuss the report on the conditions of the facilities and its recommendations to find a suitable solution to:

- developing a new maintenance procedure suitable for the general use and purpose of high school and elementary school facilities,
- how the recommended renovation and maintenance procedures should be funded,
- set a budget for the recommended renovations a short and long term basis,
- improve communications through regular meetings and seminars which would benefit the entire program,

- find ways to take facilities out of play for renovation for a period of one year, or alternative methods allowing enough time to do maintenance, and
- find an alternative process or method to maintain or to establish school open space areas to keep them safe, useable and playable.

3. Develop budgets and specifications for the development of drainage and irrigation systems for the high school football fields.

4. Develop budgets and specifications for drainage systems for high school soccer fields.

This task force would develop a detailed weekly maintenance program and budget for each facility, i.e., a high school irrigated football field. The maintenance budget would detail the cutting schedule, herbicide applications, aeration/topdressing operations, overseeding and fertilizer programs for a year. It would also address materials, materials, equipment and manpower requirements. The average estimated cost for one irrigated, high school football field was \$3,600.00, whereas the cost of an elementary school field was estimated at \$1,375.00. Any renovation procedures required to improve the safety or useability of a specific field would be an additional cost.

The Parks and Recreation staff believe this approach will vastly improve the overall condition of the turf on Oakville sports facilities without an increase in total budget by eliminating the duplication of effort. Similar discussions are now underway with the Separate School Board.

WORKING TOGETHER

The Wellington County Separate School Board and the Guelph Parks and Recreation Dept. are working together to develop 10 acres of land into a sports complex. The land will contain two soccer fields and an all-weather running track. The plan is to have the facility available by 1995. In addition discussions are under way for the development of a second, but smaller, parcel in a similar joint venture.