

Member and Facility Profile

TAB BUCKNER, MANAGER, PARK OPERATIONS AND CEMETERY SERVICES
TOWNSHIP OF LANGLEY, BC



Interview with Tab Buckner

What is your role with the Township of Langley? Manager of Park Operations and Cemetery Services for the Township of Langley. The Township of Langley is located in the southwest corner of the province of British Columbia. We are 45 kilometers east of the City of Vancouver in the beautiful agriculture-rich Fraser Valley. The Trans-Canada Highway runs through it dissecting the northern part of the municipality from the south. The

municipality has a land mass of 316 square kilometers and a population of approximately 104,000. 70% of the Township land mass still resides within the BC Agricultural Land Reserve and is not available for land development.

What kind of team do you work with? The Township has a dedicated parks crew of 21 full time staff ("FT") and 12 temporary full time staff ("TFT"). Four of those full time staff are administration, tasked with the following duties: park management, clerical, park bookings, facility allocations, special events, managing contracts, and asset maintenance. The remainder of the staff are outside employees and they work in three separate work groups: 1) Turf management: 8 FT's and 8 TFT's, 2) Park facilities and infrastructure (which includes sanitation, trails, playgrounds, sport courts, etc.): 6 FT's and 4 TFT's, and 3) Cemetery services: 3 FT's.

What is the biggest challenge in your job? Dealing with multiple personalities that exist both internally and externally of the organization. You walk a fine line trying to keep most people happy most of the time. When allocation of sports fields was part of my responsibilities I used to comment to my Director that if all the user groups were unhappy with their allocation hours.....then I got it right!

What is the most satisfying part, what makes the job worthwhile for you? I enjoy servicing the community that I reside in. Also, I get great satisfaction when I tour around the Township's park system and get to see the great park infrastructure that has been constructed and maintained to a high standard.

What is the biggest misconception about your job? That individuals think it is just seasonal work. What I mean is that people assume the winter months are a slow period for parks departments. Which is correct in terms of growing season but staff are busy; maintaining both natural and synthetic turf fields, baseball prep, finalizing the budget, allocating sports fields for the next season, facility maintenance and hiring seasonal staff for the spring.

What is your educational/employment background? I have a BA in History from the University of Victoria, Diplomas in Horticulture (Turfgrass Management) and Business from Kwantlen Polytechnic University. I have been in this industry for 25 years; 18 years with Langley School District Grounds Department and the past seven years with the Township of Langley.

What are you and your team responsible for?

In the Township of Langley there are over 101 active and passive parks, 3 cemeteries, greenway and trails which adds up to 607 hectares to manage. The largest park is McLeod Athletic at 42 hectares and the smallest is Jubilee Park at 250 square meters.

The Turf Management crew is responsible for 63 natural turf and 6 synthetic turf sports fields in total:

Sand Based Sports Fields

- (1) Combination Soccer, Rugby and Ball
- (26) Combination Soccer and Ball
- (1) Stand Alone Rugby
- (6) Stand Alone Soccer
- (6) Stand Alone Ball

Soil Based Irrigated Sports Fields

- (1) Combination Soccer, Ball and Cricket
- (5) Combination Soccer and Ball
- (2) Stand Alone Soccer
- (5) Stand Alone Ball

Soil Based Non-Irrigated Sports Fields

- (3) Combination Soccer and Ball
- (1) Soccer Stand Alone
- (6) Stand Alone Ball

Synthetic Turf Fields

- (1) Combination Soccer, Field Lacrosse and Ball
- (1) Combination Football and Soccer
- (3) Combination Soccer and Field Lacrosse
- (1) Stand Alone Soccer

The Park Facilities and Infrastructure crew are responsible for:

- (1) 2200 seat Stadium
- (1) 400 m Track
- (9) Fieldhouses
- (1) Dock with 2 Boathouses
- (30) Tennis Courts
- (5) Skateparks
- (5) Sprayparks
- (56) Playgrounds
- (6) Sportboxes
- (2) Mountain Bike Parks

Tell us about your family. My family lives in the Township of Langley in the community of Brookwood. My wife Christine is employed by Surrey School District as a Special Educator. Christine and I have two teenage daughters. The oldest one graduates from high school this year and then is off to university and my other daughter is in grade nine and plays both school and club volleyball.

What do you enjoy doing outside of the workplace? I enjoy sailing, skiing, gardening, travelling, golf and a good cigar with a dry gin martini on my back sun deck.

How has the industry changed and in what direction(s) would you like to see the industry, as a whole, move towards? Synthetic turf fields are providing sports field managers with another tool in their tool box especially in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island out here in British Columbia where it rains, rains, rains and rains, some more! The only other all-weather field option was gravel before synthetic turf became reasonable to afford and user groups no longer are willing to use those gravel fields... expectation levels have been raised! Some cities in BC are converting the all-weather gravel fields to synthetic turf fields. The Township of Langley completed a conversion in 2012.

What do you consider to be the biggest benefit of being a member of the STA? It is the network of people that I have been able to meet over the past couple of years. I enjoy reading the Sports Turf Manager and I find the articles most informative.

What percentage of the acreage of sports fields are irrigated? 84%

What is the percentage of sand based sportfields in the Township of Langley? 64%

What is the primary type of turfgrass? Perennial ryegrass

Is yearly overseeding part of your sports turf maintenance program? Yes, the Township overseeds twice a year using a 4-way perennial ryegrass mixture (the varieties vary each year depending on the NTEP trials/cost) with a slit seeder at a rate 10 – 12 lbs/1000 square feet on high use areas and 8 – 6 lbs/1000 square feet on low use areas of the field.

How many times do you fertilize? Sand based sports fields receive 6 lbs of N/year, irrigated soil sports fields 4 lbs of N/year, and non irrigated soil sports fields 2 lbs of N/year.

Do you aerate? Topdress? Twice a year; pull cores in the spring and solid tines in the fall. All sports fields are topdressed annually with ¼-inch of 3 ml washed sand.

What is your maintenance regimen for synthetic turf? The high wear areas are topdressed every two weeks, baseball home plate and pitcher mound are topdressed 3 times a week during ball season, the fields are groomed every two weeks and the fields are

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Willoughby Community Park, Langley, BC

swept/vacuumed every four months. Gmax, Head Injury Criteria (HIC) and Depth Infill are tested annually by an independent firm.

How many hours per year are the fields permitted? Who permits them? Are the fields ever closed during the season to give them a rest? How much input do you have in the amount and timing of use? Natural turf during fall/winter season, 6 hours of play area allowed Saturday and Sunday for a total of 12 hours per week. During spring/summer season 20 hours of play are allowed per week. The Township of Langley permits the sports fields and makes the final decision if a sports field is to be closed or not. Generally, the sports fields are never closed during the season to give them a rest. The only break sports fields receive is during the month of August when there is very little activity occurring on them. Last year I did remove one sand sports field from the fall/winter inventory because it was constantly failing prematurely into the season. This sports field will be reopening this fall/winter season to see if its playability conditions have improved due to a rest. Synthetic turf fields are permitted 60 hours/week within the Township. •