

parks and the construction of a new horticultural center. The third referendum was for the land acquisition and construction of a 60 to 70 acre community park which will include an athletic field complex, shelters, a lake and a district parks maintenance building.

Green space in developments

Green space in new housing areas also is pre-planned and pre-funded. When a developer purchases a block of farm land or other property to convert to residential units, he or she is required to set aside a specified segment of land (approximately 10 acres in the average development) for a small neighborhood park. In addition, the developer must contribute a set fee per each house built to a fund for development of that park.

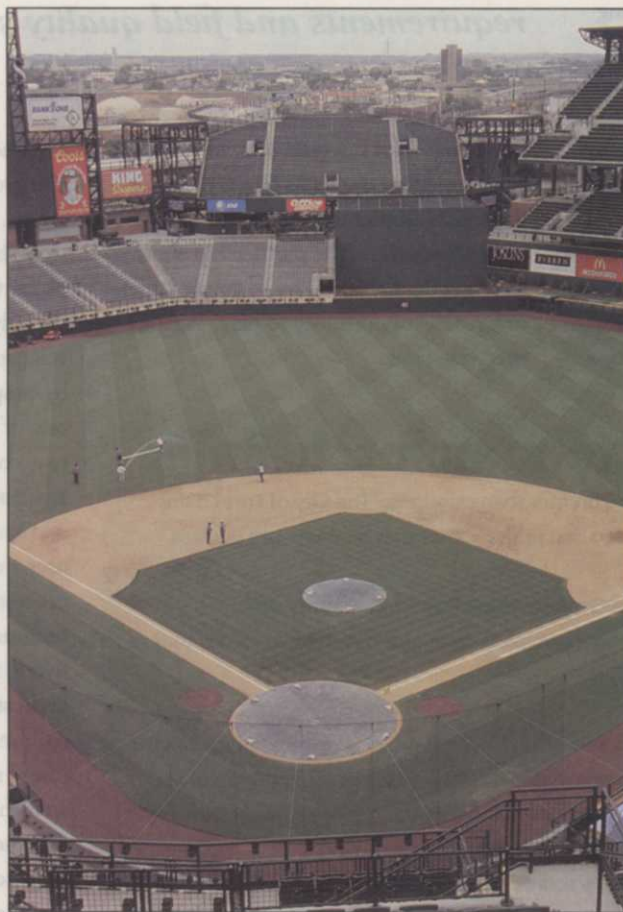
Where's the pain?

Problems still remained. With the population growth and more interest in sports participation, requests for use of the park's athletic fields outnumbered existing resources. Increased use of existing fields would have resulted in excessive wear and deterioration of field integrity and usability.

We believe it's vital to the parks program to know who is using your facilities and for what. We had already established good communications with our various user groups. The next step was to find the pain.

We attended board meetings of our key groups — the Youth Soccer Club, the Youth Baseball Club, and the Poudre School District — and met with them at their sites and ours to determine their feelings about existing conditions and to learn what they needed and wanted to improve the situation.

We then compared the expectations of the various user groups with the reality of current conditions. Armed with the fact-



Coors Field in Denver is managed by Mark Razum. It is the home field of the Colorado Rockies professional baseball team.

finding results, we began working together to develop realistic solutions to our problems.

Strategic partnerships

Strategic partnerships became the basis to accomplish goals that no individual department or group could manage alone. Some of these partnerships are relatively simple and involve our Parks Maintenance Department and one of our user groups. For example, the Youth Soccer Club wanted more fields painted but we had no funds for that in our budget. The Soccer Club offered to purchase the paint machine and cover one-half the costs of the paint if our department would do the painting.

Under this arrangement, our department paints all the fields used by the Soccer Club, including all those park fields we

were painting before plus some fields at off-city sites on school district and church properties. We're doing a little more painting, but because of the more efficient tool, the paint machine, and the additional funds, it's within our budget.

Everyone wins

Some partnerships are complex, involving our department, other city departments and multiple user groups. For example, more athletic fields were needed to attempt to accommodate the increasing number of players. The city had allocated some funds for field development, but not enough for multiple fields. The school district had some usable undeveloped land, but no funds for development. We proposed a joint project to build three soccer fields and two baseball/softball diamonds on the site. Then, together, we approached the Youth Soccer Club and Youth Baseball Club, who would be the primary field users

after the School District, to ask for their assistance.

Parks Maintenance already had been working within Quality Improvement (QI) groups with the Park Planning and Development Departments. The development of this successful cooperative project required: the School District to supply the ten acres of land and the irrigation system that was already in place on one-half of the site; the Parks Planning Department to develop the field and irrigation system designs; the Parks Maintenance Department to provide the earth work, irrigation installation, seeding and fertilization; the Youth Soccer Club to fund the remaining half of the irrigation system; and the Youth Baseball Club to supply the backdrops for the

baseball/softball fields and to supply additional financial support through fund raising and donations.

The partnership continues following the construction of the multi-field site. Parks Maintenance maintains the infields of the ball fields and handles fertilization, overseeding and sodding of all the fields. The School District handles mowing and irrigation.

This does necessitate some coordination. For example, if we need to lay sod in the soccer goal mouths we must work with the school district to communicate irriga-

Athletes and other field user-groups have developed a better understanding of basic field maintenance requirements and field quality standards.

tion needs. But it would have taken five years for either the Parks Department or the school district to swing a project of this size individually. The partnership allowed us to get the fields and more young athletes to have the opportunity to play. Again, everyone wins.

The city is working on further cooperative projects with the school district for the future. As new schools are developed, we're building parks next to the school property. This minimizes costs by requiring only one set of such infrastructure development as roadways and walkways and by cooperating in such areas as the installation of a single water system large enough to accommodate both facilities.

The benefits

Open communication with the various user groups serves as an educational process for all of us. Parks Maintenance has become more sensitive and more responsive to their needs. Field users have a better understanding of basic field maintenance requirements and quality standards. If we cancel soccer games on all fields following an inch of heavy rain they'll understand that the safety of the athletes was the prime consideration. They'll also recognize that play in those conditions could cause enough damage within the goal mouths and other heavy use areas that they would lose accessibility to some of those field for a much longer period.

While it's not easy to reschedule the 3,000 young athletes who were ready to play soccer that Saturday morning, the reasons why it had to be done is understood, and is an accepted part of providing safe, playable conditions for as our athletes.

Once again, everyone wins! □

The author is parks supervisor for the City of Fort Collins, Colo., and a member and former board member of the national Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA). Photos by Steve Trusty, Trusty & Associates.

Communicate to match schedules

Even with new fields, demands are greater than resources. The City of Fort Collins had to set priorities on field use and focused primary attention on the youth in three areas.

- ▶ Sports coordinated through the City Recreation Department programs.
- ▶ Youth sports groups and the school groups, such as girls competitive soccer, that require park facilities.
- ▶ Adult competitive groups.

The city and school district partner here as well. We share joint project fields, with the school district needs coming first. On other sites, the school district uses park fields as they "fit" into the scheduling. During the winter months, the city recreational basketball leagues use the school district courts as we "fit" into their scheduling.

The Parks Department must also leave some non-scheduled playing time on the various fields for those people who are not part of organized sports groups, but still want to use the fields occasionally. Communication makes this all possible. Representative of all the organizations involved meet quarterly to coordinate scheduling for that quarter's athletic events.

A typical meeting would include:

- ▶ the school district;
- ▶ the city recreation department,
- ▶ the youth soccer club,
- ▶ the youth baseball club,
- ▶ five church-run high schools,
- ▶ coordinators for sport tournaments other than those connected with the organizations already represented,
- ▶ parks maintenance.

While we try to schedule the more intensive maintenance and renovation procedures during the "off play" periods for the various sports, that isn't always possible. We'll inform all the groups of changes in field availability during these meetings. For example, two fields were out of use this past spring; one for major fence replacement, the other for outfield sod installation and establishment. We'll also identify and schedule maintenance requirements to accommodate the various use demands.

Parks maintenance personnel talk directly with the athletic directors of the various schools and with the various groups to coordinate scheduling changes.