

An update on Winter Park Playing Fields and Mead Garden maintenance



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To



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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope everyone had a healthy and happy holiday. This past year has been especially difficult and we are all looking forward to the New Year. I know parents and children are extremely excited about the new playing fields at Ward Park...no more cancellations due to soggy fields and no more 1-1/2 hour drives to other fields. As a parent, less driving time is a gift in itself!

I've received numerous questions as to why the commission voted to accelerate the repair to the field and why turf. Although I've received hundreds of positive emails about this decision, a few residents expressed concern. Therefore, I sent your questions directly to Jason Seeley, City Director of Parks & Recreation, to respond to you directly.

They are as follows:

Q. Why should the fields be fixed now? Why not wait 5 more years since they are part of the Capital Improvement plan and are slated for \$596,000 over the next 5 years?

A. The advantage of doing this all in one shot over the next two years is that our young athletes will have improved fields sooner than later. This would resolve some concerns over frequent rain cancellations during the rainy season and mediocre field conditions. The recommendation regarding athletic turf is based on feedback we received during the MLK Master Plan process a few years back where our athletics community strongly supported such an improvement. We feel athletic turf fields are warranted to keep up with current and future demand for year-round field space.

At Ward Park, we would be re-doing A1 and A2 with natural grass and then B and C would move to athletic turf. It's roughly \$700k-800k per field to go to athletic turf.

Q. Jason, could you please provide some detail as to the condition of the fields in Ward Park currently and why they were slated for repair?

A. A1 and A2 are both slated for renovation this summer. The two fields suffer from poor drainage which leads to frequent periods of standing water during the wet season. This results in field closures and event cancellations in an effort to preserve the grass and ensure safety of participants.

Renovations planned for this Summer will address both surface and sub-drainage along with upgrading irrigation. We expect the entire process to take roughly 3-4 months, as we will need to give the newly installed Bermuda sod time to take root and become established.

Renovations will begin at conclusion of the Spring season (mid to late May).


Fields should be ready for action by early to mid-September and once completed, will drain better and have a much-improved surface, but residents cannot forget that the fields are still grass. This means that overuse and misuse (playing on wet fields, excessive cross play, etc) will need to be managed if we want to keep the fields in good shape season to season.

Fields B and C would not start until December of 2021. We would not want four fields down at once as it would severely impact the community. I also have reservations about having the athletic turf installed over wet season as it could very likely make a 3-4 month project go more like 5 or 6 months which would create havoc for leagues.

annually under ideal conditions and adherence to field usage guidelines. While we are hovering at the upper limits on hours, we also have to consider that hour counts are based on normal play and doesn't take into consideration that most of the use hours our fields see are not traditional use and consist of cross-play games and practices where fields experience double to triple the traffic of a regular game.

If the athletic community wants fields that can stand up to high use, offer consistent playing conditions, and be used regardless of mother nature, then athletic turf is going to be the best option to meet that demand.

Q. What about safety concerns?

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A. Athletic turf fields have some bad press and some parents may have some safety concerns, but you need to look no further than Showalter Stadium (where Winter Park High School football and soccer games are held) for evidence that athletic turf, when done right, is just as safe if not safer than natural grass. Other local examples of facilities choosing to move in the direction of athletic turf can be found at Rollins College, Bishop Moore High School, and Seminole County's Boombah Sports Complex. Municipalities in South Florida and West Florida