

WORKSHOP RESULTS

The City of Lake Forest Parks & Recreation Board hosted a community workshop on December 15th, 2021 from 7 to 8:30 pm to discuss key topics related to potential athletic field improvements at Deerpath Community Park. Approximately 60 community members were in attendance, the majority of which engaged in round table discussions.

This workshop is the first of two on this topic and aims to better define the community's priorities moving forward. The workshop included exhibits and a scorecard exercise, round table discussions, as well as a "report out" session for sharing table comments.

PRIORITY RANKING

Community members were asked to review and rank ten (10) improvement priorities through a scorecard exercise. The table below displays the topics in order of priority:

PRIORITY LEVEL	IMPROVEMENT KEY TOPIC	COMMUNITY RANKING
1	PLAYER SAFETY	4.5
1	MAXIMIZE PLAYABILITY	4.5
1	MAXIMIZE FIELD USAGE & CONDITIONS	4.5
2	PLAYER/USER GROUP EXPECTATIONS	3.8
3	OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES	3.7
4	ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	3.6
5	PARKING AVAILABILITY & TRAFFIC	3.5
5	ENHANCED/IMPROVED ON-SITE AMENITIES	3.5
6	FINANCIAL/OPERATIONAL COST	3.3
7	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY	3.1

The community engagement process for Deerpath Athletic Field Improvements is prepared and conducted by The Lakota Group, a landscape architecture and community engagement firm based in Chicago.

**THE
LAKOTA
GROUP.**

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

Overall, community members agreed that the main priority is providing what is best for the younger generations, and highly stressed player safety. The Lake Forest community also focused on the need to develop a plan for Deerpath Community Park that would make residents proud and ahead of the curve. Below is a summary of key topics based on a ranking exercise completed by participants and subsequent conversations held during the workshop.

Comments provided below within each key topic area are listed in order of priority, based on how much they were emphasized by community members.

PLAYER SAFETY

- The majority of community members were concerned about Deerpath Community Park's current field conditions for player safety. Participants expressed concerns about divots and uneven surfaces, existing sprinkler heads on the fields causing trip hazards for players, flooding and ponding problems, and a lack of sufficient field maintenance as issues that lead to player injuries.
- Player safety, to many respondents, was one of the highest priorities. Enhancing site drainage, improving playing surfaces, providing better lighting/visibility, and addressing field maintenance are critical to many.
- Participants wished to have more information about the best field conditions—synthetic turf or natural grass—as it relates to player safety. Providing high quality field improvements for the kids and the community was unanimously agreed upon by community members.



QUESTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP:

1. WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF PLAYER SAFETY ON NATURAL GRASS VERSUS SYNTHETIC TURF?

MAXIMIZE PLAYABILITY

- Year-round access to athletic fields was a very strong desire shared by more than half of the community members in attendance. This can provide local athletes the opportunity to compete at an elevated level. A few community members mentioned that local leagues are going to neighboring communities, including Libertyville, to access high quality athletic fields, and argue that Lake Forest has an opportunity to host locally as we move into the future.



- High cancellation rates due to field conditions, among other reasons, was a major concern to community members, specifically members with younger kids or those who have a direct affiliation with sports. Maximizing playability, including during the winter and fall seasons, was deemed highly important to residents.
- Some participants noted that synthetic turf, while increasing playability exponentially, does not guarantee year-round access to fields, especially in the Midwest climate.
- A few community members mentioned that the Parks and Recreation Department needs specific athletic field types to better accommodate current demands. This includes baseball fields, among others.

MAXIMIZE FIELD USAGE & CONDITIONS

- The majority of community members were very concerned about the current quality of athletic fields at Deerpath Community Park. Respondents believe that field conditions go hand in hand with the safety of users.
- Field maintenance was a common theme in community conversations. Optimizing playability and properly maintaining heavily utilized fields to ensure player safety and overall best practices was deemed necessary. This includes uneven surfaces, loose dirt in the infields, and divots and holes, among other issues.
- Developing a field resting schedule was also suggested to reduce wear and tear.



QUESTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP:

1. WHAT IS THE COST COMPARISON FOR NATURAL GRASS VERSUS SYNTHETIC TURF AS IT RELATES TO INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE?

PLAYER/USER GROUP EXPECTATIONS

- Community members mentioned the need to engage local leagues and affiliates to better understand their current usage needs (practice time, play time, etc.)
- While the community acknowledges the demand for field usage, they are looking for more factual data to support this argument.

Questions on the next page.



QUESTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP:

1. IS THERE A POTENTIAL PARK SITE THAT CAN SHARE THE HEAVY USAGE OF THE ATHLETIC FIELDS AT DEERPATH COMMUNITY PARK? SOME PARTICIPANTS MENTIONED TOWNLINE COMMUNITY PARK AS AN ALTERNATIVE OPTION.

2. WHO ARE THESE FIELD IMPROVEMENTS FOR: THE MIDDLE SCHOOL AND GYM CLASS/RECESS, SPORTS LEAGUES, SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS, REGIONAL TOURNAMENTS? WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO THE PLAYING FIELDS?

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES

- Community members expressed interest in seeing a cost comparison to operate natural grass versus synthetic turf.

QUESTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP:

1. WHAT IS THE COST COMPARISON FOR NATURAL GRASS VERSUS SYNTHETIC TURF AS IT RELATES TO OPERATIONS?

2. IS THERE A DESIGN ALTERNATIVE THAT INCORPORATES BOTH SYNTHETIC AND NATURAL FIELDS?



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Deerpath Community Park is partially located in a floodplain area and drainage has impeded field usability in recent years. A large number of community members suggest the use of synthetic turf to mitigate drainage issues.
- A significant number of community members raised concerns towards the use of synthetic turf for sustainability reasons, including:
 - Synthetic turf may not be recyclable
 - Synthetic turf may release micro-plastic elements
- However, others argued that synthetic turf has more “hidden sustainability,” including:
 - Synthetic turf may have low carbon emissions with the absence of traditional maintenance equipment, such as mowers.
 - Synthetic turf may be less toxic due to the absence of weedkillers, pesticides, fertilizers, etc.
 - Synthetic turf may help manage stormwater
- Some recommended that the City’s Strategic Plan and Sustainability Plan should act as a guide for any future improvements to the athletic fields at Deerpath Community Park.



Questions on the next page.

QUESTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP:

1. WHAT ARE THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF DRAINAGE BACK TO THE CREEK WITH NATURAL GRASS AND PESTICIDES VERSUS SYNTHETIC TURF AND POTENTIAL MICRO-PLASTICS/RUBBER PELLETS?
2. WHAT IS THE LIFESPAN OF SYNTHETIC TURF, BASED ON THE PROJECTED LEVEL OF USE?
3. WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF RECYCLABILITY FOR SYNTHETIC TURF? ARE THERE MICRO-PLASTICS IN SYNTHETIC TURF?

ENHANCED/IMPROVED SITE AMENITIES

- While enhanced amenities were deemed beneficial by some residents, the majority of community members ranked this lower on their list of priorities for improvements. Bathrooms close to the fields were deemed as an important amenity to improve current conditions.
- Fencing was one of the amenities heavily discussed during the community workshop - a number of community members were not in favor of fencing.



QUESTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP:

1. DO TURF FIELDS OR NATURAL GRASS FIELDS REQUIRE THE PROPERTY TO BE FENCED IN ORDER TO PROPERLY MAINTAIN AND MONITOR USAGE?

PARKING AVAILABILITY & TRAFFIC

- Some residents mentioned that improving Deerpath Community Park provides an opportunity to enhance the overall site, including widening roadways to better accommodate traffic flow, including better access to the fire department.
- A few community members suggested channeling heavy usage, including larger community events and tournaments, to more adequate park sites, including Townline Community Park, due to its central location within Lake Forest, and its proximity to a major street.
- A few participants mentioned that transportation infrastructure must be sufficient to support the use of the fields. If there is an increase in usage, traffic should be studied to accommodate this projection.

QUESTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP:

1. HOW WILL INCREASING PLAYABILITY AFFECT TRAFFIC?

FINANCIAL/OPERATIONAL COST

- Cost was one of the main topics of conversation for community members, arguing that synthetic turf, while more resilient than regular grass, will require a higher installation cost. Others mentioned that maintaining synthetic turf, on the long run, will reduce maintenance and operational costs.
- A large number of community members expressed an interest in seeing a cost comparison of natural grass to synthetic turf, including both short-term and long-term costs.
- A hybrid system of providing some natural grass fields and some synthetic turf fields was brought up, by one community member, as one of the alternatives that could address cost concerns.



QUESTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP:

1. WHAT ARE THE COSTS (OPERATIONAL, MAINTENANCE, INITIAL INSTALLATION) OF NATURAL GRASS VERSUS SYNTHETIC TURF?

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

- Overall, community members see great value in improving Deerpath Community Park's athletic fields and see this as a prototype for other park enhancements in Lake Forest.
- On more than one occasion, participants noted that multi-purpose fields can host local events and drive economic development for Downtown Lake Forest.
- Some community members see improvements to Deerpath Community Park's athletic fields as an opportunity to compete with other North Shore sports fields and leagues, draw more users and potential new residents, and support existing and new businesses.
- One community member was concerned about synthetic turf and its impacts on local events, such as the July 4th event.



**WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AT THE SECOND
COMMUNITY WORKSHOP ON JANUARY 19TH!**

VISIT [CityofLakeForest.com/AthleticFieldImprovements](https://www.cityoflakeforest.com/AthleticFieldImprovements) FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION