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[Park panel in Highland Park: Manual weeding 'ineffective'](#)

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Last Modified: Jan 23, 2012 09:22PM

The Park District task force convened to research and recommend new turf management practices to treat the community's weed-ridden athletic fields has concluded the previous manual weeding proposal would prove ineffective.

While no official plan was determined during the group's first meeting Jan. 18, Executive Director Liza McElroy reported that the Parks Advisory Committee will reconvene Feb. 13 to discuss other short-term options to rescue the playing fields at Danny Cunniff, West Ridge and Larry Fink parks.

The panel was created last fall after a community backlash motivated the district to back off a planned, one-time application of an herbicide. Parks officials reported that the three major athletic parks have been overrun with more than 60 percent weed coverage.

"In order to rid the athletic fields of weeds by the spring (sports season) you would need an army," McElroy said. "The committee agreed that we don't think that's a solution."

Task force member Michelle Kramer, who led the community effort against herbicide treatments, agreed. She said the district's approach must address problematic soil conditions.

"The Park District should instead focus on growing healthy grass and eliminating conditions which encourage weeds to grow, (like) compaction of the soil," she said. "My goal is for our committee to develop an organic turf-management plan which is adopted and embraced by the Park District Board."

The district banned chemical sprayings at all community parks several years ago. In 2007, the Park Board adopted a progressive, model lawn care program that includes aggressive irrigation, aeration, mowing, over-seeding and other cultural practices to keep the turf in good condition.

But with fields deteriorating, the turf management and chemical herbicide issue came back to the Park Board in August.

"To me, it's about the big picture, adopting an overall program," McElroy said. "We aren't going to turn the fields around over night. It's going to take time and patience.

"We need to look at all options and best practices out there," she added. "I don't know what the best route will be. We need to do our homework first to find out what will be the best decision for our community."

The Parks Advisory Committee did provide the district the go-ahead to continue using herbicides at Heller Nature Center to address the invasive spread of buckthorn. The district sought the approval of the committee as it had

suspended chemical spraying district-wide in the fall. The use of herbicides and pesticides was never previously banned in open, natural areas as they are not heavily populated by park users.

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