



Artificial turf proposed for city soccer fields

By Terry Pender, Record staff

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KITCHENER — The organization that represents thousands of young soccer players and their parents is enthusiastic about the city's proposed plans for synthetic fields.

Tim Hart, the general manager of the Kitchener Soccer Club, said because synthetic turf can be used earlier in the season, later in the season and during rain storms, the move would help the organization accommodate the increasing number of players.

"Over the last four years we have grown from just under 4,000 to over 5,500 participants," Hart said.

By 2014 the soccer club expects to have 10,000 players.

Hart was reacting to a recommendation in the proposed parks master plan that calls for retrofitting four playing fields with artificial turf during the next 10 years at a cost of \$4.8 million.

Currently, the city spends about \$31.1 million a year on parks and natural areas. The proposed master plan calls for spending an additional \$10 million during the next 10 years. Nearly half of that increased spending is earmarked for installing synthetic turf on four existing grass fields.

Hart said the excitement around the current World Cup could see even more young people than predicted sign up for the beautiful game.

"I have never seen as many flags on cars and buildings as I have this year for the World Cup," Hart said.

Outdoor artificial turf is a new direction for the city's parks and recreation department. There is one synthetic field at the indoor facility in Budd Park. Bechtel and RIM Parks also have synthetic fields indoors.

Wilfrid Laurier University built two fields in recent years with synthetic turf, and the University of Waterloo is currently laying down an artificial surface on a playing field next to Columbia Lake.

Barry MacLean, a WLU soccer coach and agent for professional players, said on balance, the city would be right to install synthetic turf on some grass fields.

"Ideally it would be great if we could have hundreds of grass pitches," MacLean said.

"In Canada the climate doesn't allow that and the reality is if we are going to move the game of soccer forward, especially on the youth side, we have to have decent fields, and synthetic turf is the only way we can move forward in Canada, in my opinion," MacLean said.

MacLean, who has coached at WLU for 15 years, said the two synthetic turfs on that campus are great.

Professional players want real grass but the city is not building its fields for the pros, MacLean added.

It will cost about \$1.2 million to lay down artificial turf and install field lighting on one field. That's how much the University of Waterloo synthetic turf, lighting and other improvements to the field near Columbia Lake.

Peter Mackie, a UW soccer coach and a coach mentor with Waterloo Minor Soccer, said he prefers playing on real grass, but when it comes to providing more opportunities for young players, synthetic is good.

Woodside and Centennial parks have some of the best grass fields in the region and Mackie hopes the city does not tear up those fields to lay down synthetic turf.

"I would love for those to stay grass," Mackie said. "They are really good fields."

The proposed parks master plan can be found on the City of Kitchener's website. The city is collecting public feedback on the plan until late September before it is adopted by city council.

The plan will guide the city's development of parks, trails and natural areas for the next 10 years.

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