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By MICHAEL WHITNEY
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Lowell Park pesticide-free pilot ends City begins spraying weeds with chemicals

EVERETT - The effort to keep Lowell Neighborhood Park free of pesticides came to an end last month when the city began spraying parts of the park once again. The Lowell Civic Association maintained the entire 10-acre park without using pesticides for two years under an effort led by association vice chair

Megan Dunn.

This year, the neighborhood agreed to let the parks department spray in the park after not enough volunteers could keep the park up to city standards.

It was too much work for volunteers to maintain the whole park, Dunn said.

"We agreed to expire the program in order to pursue a citywide pesticide reduction plan" called an integrated pest management program, Dunn said.

The city created such a program this year.

The city was working with the Lowell neighborhood in a pilot project to try and keep the park free of chemicals. The pilot ended in December because volunteers couldn't keep up with the weeding needed to maintain the park to city standards.

The parks department asked the neighborhood if they could keep it up and they said no, parks assistant director John Petersen said.

The neighborhood is now trying to get volunteers to keep the sandbox and volleyball court chemical-free. That is where kids play the most. The neighborhood will discuss a plan for that this month, Dunn said.

The city began spraying herbicide along the fences and curb lines of the park the week of May 7. The city plans to spray the park's turf by the end of May to get rid of the moss and to restore it, Petersen said. The turf area went untreated for two years.



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Dunn is determined to keep all parks pesticide-free. "The neighborhood is still supportive, (but) to me it shows it shouldn't be a volunteer effort, it should be a citywide policy," Dunn said.

The neighborhood approached the city in 2009 to get the pilot project going. The neighborhood organized a group of about a dozen loyal volunteers who would weed and clean the park each month between March and September of 2010 and 2011. The work resulted in 100 to 150 volunteer hours each year, Petersen said.

"Although the effort of those who volunteered was commendable, there were not sufficient volunteers present in quantity or frequency to maintain the park at a comparable level to other parks," Petersen said.

Pesticide-free advocates call for keeping pesticides out of parks because long-term exposure to chemicals may affect children's health, who are the largest users of park playgrounds.

"Pesticides are tested (for safety) on a one-time exposure, I take my kids to the park every day in the summer," Dunn said.

Some cities, including Everett, have adopted integrated pest management programs that reduce pesticide use but do not eliminate it completely.



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