

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, May 14, 2024

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: CITY-WIDE SPORTS FACILITIES NEEDS ASSESSMENT STUDY
INTERIM UPDATE – BALL DIAMONDS

FROM:

Vince Musacchio, Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Development

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To provide Council with an update on the City-Wide Sports Facilities Needs Assessment Study being undertaken by staff and proposed next steps for ball diamond development opportunities and improvement priorities.

Report Highlights

- Staff initiated a City-Wide Sports Facilities Needs Assessment Study to review existing fields and identify development opportunities and improvement priorities.
- Local baseball and softball programs are experiencing slower participation growth than originally projected, reducing urgency on the City to develop new ball diamond facilities at the pace identified in the 2018 Active Together Master Plan.
- The ball diamond study evaluated existing ball diamonds to determine locations for future investment and reviewed opportunities with local user groups.
- To support local clubs and to help meet Vaughan's demand for ball diamonds to 2031 and beyond, staff have identified an approach which includes diamond lighting and state of good repair improvements to satisfy short-term demands while medium- and long-term opportunities are confirmed.
- Staff also suggest considering the cost-benefit of introducing artificial turf ball diamonds to support the identified needs of the ball diamond user groups.

Recommendations

1. THAT staff develop a State of Good Repair (SOGR) sports field program to prioritize improvements at existing ball diamonds with funding for design and construction submitted for consideration in the 2025 capital budget process; and
2. THAT staff explore a cost-benefit analysis of redeveloping an existing ball diamond to artificial turf.

Background

In response to recommendations of the 2018 Active Together Master Plan (ATMP), staff initiated a City-Wide Sports Facilities Needs Assessment Study to review existing sports facilities and identify recommendations for development opportunities and improvement priorities.

The 2018 ATMP was approved in principle by Council on May 23, 2018. The purpose of the ATMP is to identify current needs and future facility provision strategies, consistent with the City of Vaughan's commitment to providing safe, accessible, and community-responsive parks and facilities that appeal to a wide range of interests and abilities. Given that Vaughan is one of the fastest growing communities in Canada, timely short and long-range planning is critical to ensuring that facility and service provision properly coincides with development.

The City-Wide Sports Facilities Needs Assessment Study (the "Sports Facilities Study") provides an evidence-based decision-making tool that will enable the City to make informed, efficient, and cost-effective decisions regarding sports facility recommendations listed in the ATMP. Staff have reviewed recent registration data, updated population forecasts, collected user group feedback, and determined obstacles and opportunities associated with achieving the ATMP recommendations.

The Sports Facilities Study is being conducted in a phased approach, which commenced with a report on soccer recommendations that was presented to Council in May 2023, and a business case followed.

The current report focuses on recommendations for ball diamonds.

Previous Reports/Authority

[City-Wide Sports Facilities Needs Assessment Study Interim Update - Soccer Facilities](#)
Item 3, Report No. 27 of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session), May 31, 2023

[Active Together Master Plan for Parks, Recreation and Libraries - 2018 Review and Update](#)

Analysis and Options

Youth registrations are growing at a slower pace to 2031 than anticipated by the 2018 ATMP.

Table 1 below contains the youth registration growth that was forecasted by the 2018 ATMP, compared to actual youth registration numbers provided by baseball and softball organizations in Vaughan.

Table 1: Forecast and actual youth participants

| Year | 2015 | 2016 | 2019 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2026 | 2031 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Estimated youth participants (2018 ATMP) | N/A | N/A | N/A | 3204 | N/A | N/A | 3395 | 3625 |
| Actual youth registration numbers | 2084 | 2833 | 2880 | N/A | 2279 | 2363 | TBD | TBD |

The Toronto Blue Jays success in 2015 and 2016 influenced a national increase in registration numbers. As shown in **Table 1**, this resulted in a local surge from 2084 to 2833 registered youth from 2015 to 2016. However, **Table 1** demonstrates overall slower registration growth than anticipated by the ATMP, likely due to slower City-wide population growth in combination with the COVID-19 pandemic's negative impact on youth activity levels, including organized sport registrations.

Assuming popularity of the sport remains stable, it is expected that the number of youth registrants (aged 5-19 years) will eventually normalize and grow at a similar pace as the total population. However, participation rates will need to be monitored over time to understand the long-term impact of the pandemic on organized sport registrations.

Registration data for adult users has historically not been collected by the City and was not included in the ATMP. However, adult registration numbers were collected for the purpose of this Study and demonstrate high popularity among local adults. In 2023, approximately 2000 adults were registered to play in adult baseball, softball, and slo-pitch organizations in Vaughan (total of 8 organizations offering various levels of play).

The development of 14 ball diamonds by 2031, as recommended by the 2018 ATMP, may not be necessary.

To support registration growth expected at the time, the following recommendation for ball diamond facilities is identified in the ATMP (Recommendation No. 34):

Develop 14 additional ball diamonds by 2031 (these are unlit equivalent fields, where every lit field is equal to 1.5 unlit fields), with an emphasis on diamonds for adult play. Two (2) senior lit diamonds are recommended for a future phase of North Maple Regional Park and additional senior lit diamonds should be provided in future District and Regional Parks (Blocks 18, 41, Northwest Vaughan, etc.). Junior and t-ball diamonds may be considered for Neighbourhood Parks or under-utilized sites, as appropriate. Multi-field development is preferred. In order to implement these

recommendations, the City should revisit its parks capital program to identify opportunities to reallocate space to ball diamonds.

Table 2 below provides a progress update regarding the specific locations listed in the above ATMP recommendation No. 34 and likely development timeline based on latest information:

Table 2: Status of new diamond developments recommended by ATMP

| ATMP Recommendation | Diamond Location | Ward | Timeline (Note 1) | Status of Diamond |
|---|---|------|--|--|
| Two (2) senior lit diamonds | North Maple Regional Park | 1 | N/A | Not included in short-term Program due to site constraints |
| Additional senior lit diamonds in District and Regional Parks | Martin Tavares District Park | 4 | N/A | Not in Program |
| | Carrville community | 4 | N/A | Not in Program |
| | Block 41 | 1 | Medium Term | Under Review |
| | Northwest Vaughan (e.g. Future District Park in Block 59) | 2 | Medium Term | Under Review |
| | TBD based on opportunities in the parks capital program | TBD | Long Term | Under Review |
| Junior and t-ball diamonds in Neighbourhood Parks or under-utilized sites | Multiple parks can accommodate diamonds if need arises | TBD | Based on permitting needs and provision rate | Under Review |

Note 1: Short Term – 2024-2028, Medium Term - 2028-2032, Long Term - 2032+

As demonstrated in **Table 2** above, some locations recommended by the ATMP may not be achievable due to competing interests for park programming and inadequately sized or configured park blocks to accommodate senior ball diamonds (e.g. diamond orientation, inadequate setbacks, adjacent uses, environmental restrictions). Where diamonds may be attainable, development pace will likely not provide the necessary parkland by 2031. As a result, through this Sports Facilities Study, staff are identifying alternate locations, strategies, and opportunities to meet the anticipated demand for ball diamonds.

Table 3 below provides information on progress made so far in increasing the City’s inventory of ball diamonds since 2018. A net total of 0.5 additional diamonds (ULE) have been added to the City’s inventory since 2018.

Table 3: Increase in inventory of diamonds from 2018 to date

| Diamond | Type | Ward | Change | Unlit Equivalent (ULE) |
|---|--------------|------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Chatfield District Park | Senior Lit | 3 | New diamond constructed | +1.5 |
| Nashville Road Community Church ('Calvary') | Senior Unlit | 1 | Lease expired | -1 |
| Total Net Change | | | | +0.5 |

As a result of the limited intensification opportunities within the City's current level of service offerings and the long-term timelines in **Table 2**, it will be challenging to increase the City inventory by 13.5 diamonds by 2031 as recommended by the ATMP.

Achieving the ATMP facility provision targets by 2031 will be challenging with limited suitable parkland in the future.

As a result of recent provincial legislation (Bill 23) and amongst other factors such as increasing cost of land, quality, and location, staff anticipate increased challenges in acquiring parkland dedication of sufficient size and suitability to accommodate new ball senior-sized diamond facilities and associated functional requirements (orientation, setbacks). This challenge is anticipated to become increasingly prevalent in areas of infill development and planned intensification such as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, Yonge and Steeles, and Vaughan Mills Centre.

Furthermore, staff anticipate a significant reduction in cash-in-lieu of parkland collected, because of Bill 23, resulting in less funds available to acquire lands for parks and recreational purposes. Staff also anticipate a reduction in availability of development charges to contribute towards the funding of new ball diamond facilities, given reduced collection requirements and competing infrastructure needs.

Table 4 below demonstrates a short-term diamond intensification opportunity, as well as potential medium- and long-term opportunities to increase inventory:

Table 4: Potential plan to increase inventory of senior ball diamonds

| Estimated Timing (Note 1) | Ball Diamond Location | Existing Diamond Type | Proposed Change | ULE Increase (+) |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Short-Term | Giovanni Caboto Park | Sr. Unlit | Install Lighting | 0.5 |
| Medium-Term | Block 41 future park | N/A | Construct new diamond | 1 - 1.5 |
| | Block 59 District Park | N/A | Construct new lit diamond(s) | 1.5 - 3 |
| | Block 27 future park | N/A | Construct new diamond | 1 - 1.5 |
| Long-Term | Northwest Vaughan future park | N/A | Construct new diamond(s) | 1.5 per diamond(s) |
| | North Maple Regional Park | N/A | Construct new diamond(s) | 1.5 per diamond(s) |
| Estimated Total ULE Potential | | | | 7 – 9 ULE |

Note 1: Short Term – 2024-2028, Medium Term - 2028-2032, Long Term - 2032+

Multi-field development (2-4 diamonds at one site) is preferred to support league play and tournaments. Opportunities to secure parkland within northwest Vaughan should be reviewed as this is an area experiencing growth through new communities.

Ball Diamond user groups provided valuable feedback via an online survey and focused discussion sessions with staff.

In October 2023, staff invited nine ball diamond user groups to complete a survey to understand current priorities and preferences. The survey collected information on registration growth and diamond preferences, and provided an opportunity for the organizations to identify specific diamonds where they are seeking investment or enhancement.

The survey responses are summarized below:

- Most groups are anticipating membership growth of 10 to 20 percent over the next 5 years;
- 3 of 8 clubs indicated a need for more diamonds;
- User groups which offer adult membership recorded an increase in membership, including interest in adult co-ed;
- User groups indicate interest in converting natural grass areas of ball diamonds with artificial turf.

In addition, the responses contained an extensive list of requests for improvements to at least 23 of the 28 existing senior ball diamonds. The requested improvements are associated with quality of game play, such as addition of outfield and backstop fencing, and improvements to surface grading, bases, pitching mounds, lighting levels, netting, and pitching mounds. An online meeting was conducted in April 2024 to further discuss responses provided in the user group survey.

The City's existing ball diamonds are generally well-utilized by CSOs and user groups. In order to understand utilization rates and available capacity, staff have specifically analyzed the use of diamonds at the most in-demand times of the week and labelled these times as 'Desirable Hours'. Desirable hours are defined as weeknights from 6 p.m. to close, Saturdays from open to 6 p.m., and Sundays from open to close.

In 2023, 18 of the City's 28 senior-sized diamonds were booked at least 70 percent of the time (desirable hours). The 3 most-utilized senior diamonds in 2023 were Sports Village (booked 83% of the time), Vaughan Grove Sports Park - Diamond #1 (82%) and Concord/Thornhill Regional Park - Diamond #2 (81%). Junior and t-ball diamonds, while still well-utilized, appear to have a moderate to high amount of desirable time available across the City. The 3 most-utilized junior or t-ball diamonds in 2023 were Routley Park and West Maple Creek Park (both booked 37% of the time), followed by Napa Valley Park (34%).

Current information including user group priorities and registration numbers indicate that short-term demands can be satisfied through a combination of diamond intensification (where available) and state of good repair improvements, while we await access to medium- and long-term opportunities to increase inventory.

Lighting senior diamonds will increase utilization rates of existing assets potentially by a factor of 2.

While constructing sports facilities in new communities is important, it is also a priority of the City to optimize existing assets. An opportunity to increase the capacity (i.e. permittable hours) of existing ball diamonds is through lighting upgrades thereby optimizing the use of existing diamonds.

A standard approach to comparing the factor of useability of a diamond is by applying the concept of Unlit Equivalent (ULE) units where 1 lit diamond equals 1.5 unlit diamonds as per the following rationale: Converting unlit diamonds to lit diamonds provides users with extended permitting hours to 11 p.m., whereas unlit diamonds close at 9 p.m or effectively at sunset.

Both the City of Hamilton's 2022 *Recreation Master Plan* and the City of London's equivalent plan from 2019 indicate that lighting effectively doubles the capacity of a ball diamond, therefore lit diamonds are equivalent to 2 ULE. This differs from the ATMP 2018 (and comparable municipal documents other than Hamilton and London), which indicate a lit diamond represents a lesser ULE of only 1.5. An analysis of the municipal ULE benchmarking is beyond the scope of this study however will be included in the forthcoming Active Together Master Plan update.

The City has 28 senior ball diamonds, 26 of which are already lit and available for permit until 11 p.m. Giovanni Caboto Park and Rosedale North Park are unlit, however only the diamond in Giovanni Caboto Park qualifies for illumination. Eligibility factors include (1) distance to residential area, (2) size and typology of the park, and (3) presence of existing lit park facilities.

Note the City's current level of service does not include lighting for junior unlit or t-ball diamonds, therefore the lighting opportunity only exists for senior unlit diamonds.

Artificial turf may offer intensification opportunities beyond standard level of service which can be investigated through a separate study.

Artificial turf ball diamonds and covered/domed facilities are other types of ball diamond facilities that could offer extended permitting hours. There are only a few examples of artificial turf ball diamonds in Ontario including Judith Nyman Field of Dreams in Brampton, ON, Royal Field in Dorchester, ON, Babcock Softball Field in Oshawa, ON, and Larry Bauer Soccer Complex in Amherstburg, ON.

These types of diamonds are not offered as part of the City's level of service and therefore have not been reviewed in-depth as part of this Sports Facilities Study. However, local ball diamond user groups have indicated interest in both artificial turf ball diamonds and covered/domed facilities. Benefits could include an extended playing season (Spring/Fall), year-round permitting, increased permitting revenue, and reduced maintenance requirements. The ULE factor of an artificial turf or covered diamond is expected to also be incrementally higher (2 ULE or greater) and would therefore increase the City's overall ball diamond inventory. Grant programs, such as the Field of Dreams grant offered by the Jays Care Foundation, could be used to offset capital costs of an artificial turf ball diamond.

A separate and focused study is recommended to further review a cost-benefit analysis of investing in outdoor, artificial turf ball diamond(s).

A state of good repair (SOGR) program is recommended to optimize existing diamonds with low usage.

It is noted that State of Good Repair (SOGR) improvements will not impact the supply of ball diamonds in the City and therefore will not contribute to achieving the additional 13.5 diamonds envisioned by the ATMP. However, in order for a ball diamond within the City's inventory to accurately represent 1.0 ULE, the diamond should be generally in good condition and offer all the components of standard level of service for the corresponding diamond type. If a diamond is in poor condition or missing several components (e.g. outfield fencing, player benches, warning track, pitching mound, foul line posts, parking for increased use, etc.), it is reasonable to assume the diamond is less likely to be permitted. In addition, it would be expected that other diamonds may be over-used if they are favoured due to a difference in level of service. Therefore, providing a consistent level of service is important to ensure accuracy of ULE benchmarking, predictable asset life cycles and replacement costs, and equitable field distribution across the City.

A SOGR program is recommended to address requested improvements to existing ball diamonds which are within the City's level of service. Any requested improvements above the standard level of service can be assessed based on cost magnitude in relation to long-term use of the associated field. Although the intent is to review all senior diamonds to ensure standard level of service is being met, a list of criteria has been applied to assist with prioritization of the SOGR improvements. Ball diamond user groups provided feedback on the list of criteria in the 2023 survey and further provided input through a focus group discussion held on April 9, 2024.

SOGR Selection Criteria

User Base

- a. User group feedback
- b. Amount of time booked
- c. Number of user groups sharing the diamond
- d. Income level

Amenities

- a. Existing lighting
- b. Access to parking
- c. Access to washrooms

Field Characteristics

- a. Park Typology
- b. Number of clustered senior diamonds
- c. Diamond condition
- d. Diamond ownership
- e. Diamond orientation
- f. Proximity to intensification area
- g. Proximity to transit

Each criterion above was assigned a weight of 5, 10, or 15 based on level of importance from the perspective of staff and user group feedback. Using the criterion, each of the 28 senior ball diamonds received a score out of 100 percent, where a score of 100 theoretically indicates the best candidate to receive improvements.

Table 5 below contains a list of diamonds which scored the highest, by community, that are recommended to form part of the initial phase of SOGR improvements.

Table 5: SOGR priority fields

| Ref. No. | Location | Community | Improvements |
|--------------|---|-----------------------|--|
| 1 | Vaughan Grove Sports Park (4 Sr Lit. diamonds) | Woodbridge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add new preset bases • Improve existing grading and drainage • Review condition of existing bullpens |
| 2 | Concord / Thornhill Regional Park (4 Sr Lit. diamonds) | Concord | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase fence height on east side of diamond #1 to prevent lost balls • Add new preset bases for diamonds #3 & #4 • Review condition of existing bullpens |
| 3 | Sports Village (1 Sr Lit. diamond) | Maple | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider removal of pitching mound to accommodate adult softball (subject to review with user groups) |
| 4 | Tudor District Park (3 Sr Lit. diamonds) | Concord/ Carrville | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add new preset bases • Improve lighting, irrigation, parking layout/capacity • Review condition of existing bullpens |
| 5 | York Hill District Park (2 Sr Lit. diamonds) | Thornhill | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install an outfield fence and warning track (West diamond) • Extend infield boundary fence to where the outfield begins • Improve lighting, grading and drainage, infield surface. |
| Total | 14 diamonds | | |

In addition to those which scored the highest, senior ball diamonds which are permitted the least will also be analyzed to determine whether there are any SOGR improvements that could be made to improve desirability of under-utilized fields and increase number of bookings. Efforts will be made to limit impact on playing seasons and coordinate improvements with other planned works at the identified locations, where applicable.

In addition to the above, the City should continue to seek opportunities to acquire new lands which can accommodate large-scale sports facilities including ball diamonds to support sports registration growth demands to achieve long-term goals to 2031 and beyond.

Risks associated with non-investment in ball diamond facilities until 2031.

In a scenario where the number of youth participants surges to the extent forecasted in **Table 1** and the City make no investments to increase the supply of ball diamond facilities to 2031, the City would be in a position where the current ATMP facility provision rate of 1 diamond per 40 registered youth is no longer met. As a result, approximately 505 participants (equivalent to 14 percent) would theoretically be without access to a ball diamond. Also, this scenario would likely hinder the ability of baseball, softball, and slo-pitch organizations to accommodate new members or expand their program offerings.

Financial Impact

The Sports Facilities Study will set out an assessment of capital costs for implementing outdoor sports facility improvements and redevelopment works, including the need for additional studies, design, permitting and construction. The funding for these capital costs will be reviewed and assessed through future budget plan process for Council's review and approval.

The capital cost to install lighting at an existing senior unlit diamond is estimated to be approximately \$350,000, depending on site specific servicing requirements. The capital cost for the SOGR program priorities will range between \$25,000 to \$75,000 per diamond depending on the scope of work to be completed (excluding admin, tax, contingencies, cost escalation). Staff will refine costing to develop a SOGR program funded over three years to address the deficiencies identified. The funding for these capital costs will be included for consideration in the 2025 capital budget process.

Capital costs associated with upgrades in response to growth needs can be funded from the Community Services Development Charges Reserve. Costs associated with capital asset renewals are typically funded from tax-supported infrastructure renewal reserves and/or other contributions.

Operational Impact

Lighting installation and SOGR improvements are not anticipated to impact current operations. However, slight increases in operating costs may occur as a direct result of increased bookings and usage of a diamond.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Completion of this project will demonstrate the City's commitment to supporting local sports groups and Community Service Organizations, regional/provincial/national sport tourism and economic development opportunities.

Conclusion

The City-Wide Sports Facilities Needs Assessment Study represents a concerted effort to monitor, review and provide updated recommendations to the existing 2018 Active Together Master Plan. The initial recommendations regarding soccer fields, now ball diamonds, and potential future recommendations related to other sports, will identify investment opportunities and priority considerations to ensure adequate resources are in place to meet the current ATMP recommendations and to provide important information for the upcoming review and update to the ATMP.

Following this ongoing analysis on ball diamonds, a similar methodology will be applied to another sport facility in the City's inventory to inform the 2025 budget.

For more information, please contact: Jamie Bronsema, Director, Parks Infrastructure Planning & Development, Extension 8858.

Attachments

None

Prepared by

Diana Guida, Planner 1, Extension 8195

Aimee Pugao, Manager, Extension 8936

Michael Habib, Senior Manager, Parks and Open Space Planning, Extension 8092