

**Albany Sports Field Use Working Group
First Progress Report including Recommendations
to Albany Park and Recreation Commission and City Council
June, 2005**

Executive Summary

Due to the high degree of satisfaction with the field conditions at Ocean View field by all user groups and relevant City Departments, and the financial benefits to the City of Albany, the members of the Albany Sports Field Use Working Group with the approval of the Parks and Recreation recommend that the City:

Revise and expand Albany Little League's (ALL) field maintenance contract beginning September 1, 2005 to include field maintenance at both Ocean View and Memorial fields to the end of June 2006.

Further, to help the City Council determine whether and how to pay for the proposed sports field maintenance and administration fund, city staff has prepared a report that fully summarizes all potentially available field use rental fees, and other sports field related revenues; and sports field maintenance and administration expenses.

Background

Over the past several years, field users have expressed discontent with the condition of the sports fields at Ocean View and Memorial Parks. The field users desire to take on the maintenance of the athletic fields themselves, instead of having the City maintain them. The Park and Recreation Commission expressed its support for allowing the fields to be maintained by the field users, and the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan adopted by Council on October 18, 2004 also supported the use of volunteers and users for maintenance and other tasks.

A contractual agreement and scope of work was approved by City Council on November 15, 2004. The Contractor is the Albany Little League (ALL). The Contract is viewed as a one-year trial. For various reasons, including available funding, the contract specified only maintenance of Ocean View Park field, and not Memorial Park field. Further, the Contract addresses only maintenance and does not resolve all issues regarding use of Albany's sports fields.

In order to help the city resolve these other sports field issues, the City Council, on November 15, 2004, directed that a *Field User Working Group* be formed. That group was formed in February 2005 and has met four times since then. The group is currently comprised of Council member Allan Maris, Park and Recreation Commissioners Leif Magnuson and John Kindle, Recreation and Community Services Director Melinda Chinn, Public Works Manager Richard Cunningham and representatives of local field users groups: Roger Carlsen and David Preuss, Albany Little League; Abiud Amaro, Albany Berkeley Soccer Club; Betsy Thomas, Albany Berkeley Girls Softball League; and others.

Field Use/Maintenance Issues and Progress to Date

The original charges to the group, and their current status, are as follows:

1. Assess the Performance of the Contract

With respect to the on-going spring conditions of Ocean View field, the contractor has met all of the requirements. The consensus among field users and others is that the field is in excellent condition. Conditions that perennially plagued Ocean View field in the past, such as under or over-watered patches of grass, sinkholes, large divots, broken sprinkler heads, and un-mowed grass, have all but disappeared. User groups and the City Public Works Manager are very satisfied with the current field conditions.

2. Develop options for how to pay for full costs of sports field maintenance in Albany at a standard acceptable to users.

It is not anticipated that field use revenues would pay for some costs of field maintenance, thus continued City subsidy would be involved to some degree.

In assessing whether field use rental fees might be sufficient to pay for field maintenance in Albany, the workgroup collected City data on revenues from field use rentals and expenditures for field use administration and maintenance. It was determined that field use fees currently cover only a portion of total field rental administration and maintenance costs. Therefore, the City currently subsidizes the costs for sports field maintenance.

In order to balance sport field user fees and costs, the workgroup determined that the City would have to either raise fees, or cut costs.

Because both Ocean View and Memorial Parks will be renovated next year, with new drainage and irrigation systems, field maintenance costs could go down somewhat, but not substantially.

After both fields are renovated, field user fees could be increased somewhat to reflect the better field conditions, but field user groups are not enthusiastic about that option, for obvious reasons.

There have been concerns voiced within the Workgroup about the equity of which groups are charged user fees and which are not. Since revenue from field rental fees alone would not cover all sports field maintenance costs, other funding sources will need to be explored by the Working Group to pay for the level of maintenance that is expected by users.

To help determine how to fund costs associated with sports field maintenance, the staff has prepared a report that summarizes potentially available field use rental fees, and other sports field related revenues; and sports field maintenance, rental program and adult sports administration expenses.

We feel that this information will allow City Council to make better-informed decisions about for sports field maintenance in Albany.

Recommendations for 2005-2006 field maintenance:

For the short-term, new funding is needed for field maintenance. Due to the high satisfaction with the results of this years' contract, the Workgroup recommends that the City: Revise and expand Albany Little League's (ALL) field maintenance contract beginning September 1, 2005 to include field maintenance at both Ocean View and Memorial fields.

The cost of this service is estimated by ALL to be \$22,000 for the period 9/1/2005-6/30/2006. The field maintenance Contractor responsibilities for 2005-2006 are anticipated to be the same as those in the section entitled "Scope of Services", which is Attachment A to the Contract currently in place for Ocean View Field with the addition of maintenance of Memorial Field and maintenance of the infield of both fields (see attached).

Due to the planned renovation of Memorial Park for June-August, the proposed Contract costs of \$22,000 exclude maintenance of Memorial Park field for July-August, 2006. Ocean View might also be closed during that time, but the turf is not anticipated to be completely renovated, as for Memorial Park field, and so it could possibly be used during some portion of the summer of 2006. We recommend the Park and Recreation Commission and City Council approve a revised contract by July 2005 so that a new contract can be in-place by September 1, 2005.

3. Down time and enforcement.

The Public Works Department rented a large chain-link fence to enclose Ocean View field from December through March so that the grass could be reseeded and given a chance to grow during wet weather months. Access to the field was controlled by a limited number of keys being issued to select field user groups. A minimal number of incidents were reported with unauthorized users being on the field during wet field conditions. The field itself was not harmed by those few incidents.

A wet weather phone line 559-7219 has been established for users to call to determine whether the Albany fields are open or closed in the event of inclement weather. After some trial and error, the Workgroup has determined that it is best for City staff to determine whether to close a field or keep it open, and to put the appropriate message on the phone line in a timely manner.

The fence and field signs appear to have been effective in minimizing unauthorized field use during wet weather months, and so will be employed again next winter. Getting the Police Department to enforce unauthorized field use is an option the workgroup may recommend in the future, if needed.

4. Scheduling

City Recreation Staff currently does field scheduling. The schedule is made available to anyone who asks for it. Field users would like to have easier access to the actual schedule, so that they can view it at anytime and assess available time slots. In response, the City staff is currently evaluating whether they can post the schedule on the City website regularly enough to keep it sufficiently up-to-date. The Working Group also evaluated the City's field allocation system and determined it to be satisfactory, for the time being.

5. Capital Improvements

Both fields are scheduled to be renovated in 2006; so many capital improvements are expected to be made at that time. Future, on-going repairs and improvements to field infrastructure like fences, backstops, bleachers, benches, bathrooms, and sprinkler systems, as well the annual purchase of infield mix and winter fence rental, are expected to be costs that will continue to be incurred by the City. They are not expected to be included in the field maintenance contract, at this time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Working Group feels that contracting for field maintenance has worked well thus far for Ocean View field. Issues related to downtime and enforcement, field scheduling and capital improvements are working well for now, under current procedures. To ensure the successful continuation of satisfactory sports field conditions in Albany, members of the Albany Sports Field Use Working Group recommend that the City:

- *Revise and expand the ALL contract beginning 9/1/2005 to include maintenance of Memorial Park field, in addition to Ocean View field to the end of June 2006.*