



Edwin M. Lee, Mayor
Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager

July 22, 2014

Mr. John Arntz
Director of Elections
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Room 48
San Francisco, CA 94103

RE: Request for Analysis of Ballot Initiative Entitled "Requiring Certain Athletic Fields in Golden Gate Park to be Maintained as Natural Grass"

Dear Mr. Arntz,

I am writing in response to your letter dated July 8, 2014, regarding the proposed initiative ordinance titled "Requiring Certain Athletic Fields in Golden Gate Park to be Maintained as Natural Grass" for the November 4, 2014 election ballot.

If this ordinance is ratified by the voters and fully implemented by the Department, it will eliminate the Department's ability to expand the amount of athletic play available for San Francisco residents on the Beach Chalet Athletic Fields, and prevent critical safety, recreation and disability upgrades from being completed as planned and approved by city and state agencies.

Public access to the Beach Chalet Athletic Fields will continue to be limited to only those who have reserved a permit for team play on weekends and late weekday afternoons for a portion of the year. In addition to limiting public access so the grass has time to rest and regrow, the fields will continue to be maintained with herbicide spraying, gopher trapping, regular watering, aeration, seeding, fertilizing, and mowing.

By eliminating a field renovation project expected to add nearly 10,000 hours of play to our field inventory, the impact on City residents will be less access to City soccer fields and an immediate limit on all new youth soccer teams and players due to a lack of sufficient safe, available ground sports fields for afterschool youth practice. The ordinance will effectively end an ongoing trend of increased youth soccer participation in San Francisco enabled by the conversion of select, high-use athletic fields from grass to artificial turf with field lighting. The City has seen a huge growth in participation in soccer over the past 10 years which is expected to continue. This growth will not be able to continue if the proposed initiative ordinance is approved.

Non-athletic field grass areas managed by the Department and currently programmed and permitted as ad hoc youth soccer practice fields may continue to be used in an effort to allow as many San Francisco children to play sports as physically possible.

Background

The San Francisco Recreation and Park Department manages more than 4,000 acres of open space, including 220 parks and natural areas. The Department oversees iconic parks and



facilities, including Golden Gate Park, Coit Tower, the Palace of Fine Arts, the Conservatory of Flowers, Stern Grove, the Sunnyside Conservatory, and Camp Mather. Within the Recreation and Park Department's jurisdiction are the following assets:

- 4,113 acres of recreational and open space
- 671 marina slips
- 179 playgrounds and play areas
- 151 tennis courts
- 82 recreation centers and clubhouses
- 72 basketball courts
- 59 soccer/playfields
- 44 ball fields
- 35 community gardens
- 27 off-leash dog areas
- 9 swimming pools
- 6 golf courses
- 3 stadiums

Our cultural arts programs include digital and visual arts, dance and theater, music and writing, a full-service photography center, the Harvey Milk Cultural Arts Center, Sharon Art Museum, Randal Museum, and natural sciences and technology programs. We offer youth sports leagues, adult sports, athletics camps, six golf courses, an archery range, fly fishing pools, and numerous tennis, basketball, soccer, lacrosse, baseball and softball facilities. Our community programs include early childhood development and tiny tots programs, after-school programs, senior programs, and adaptive recreation and inclusionary programs. In addition to the cultural and athletic programs offered by the Department, we also work with numerous partner organizations to provide even more programming and recreation opportunities.

To serve the greatest number of residents possible, the Department strives hard to coordinate our own programs and those of our partner organizations in the City's limited parks and recreation facilities. Unfortunately, some of our recreation facilities are in such great demand that there is not enough capacity for everyone who wants to participate.

The Department's athletic fields are among our most requested and most over-booked facilities. In 2004, an independent recreation assessment found that San Francisco would need to add 65 full size baseball/softball and soccer fields just to meet the demand at that time.

In fact, in San Francisco, youth sports programs are entirely constrained by a lack of playing fields. Youth sports are particularly impacted by this lack of field space as these facilities are in the most demand afterschool when more than 4,000 kids share portions of athletic fields for practice, games and pick-up games with friends. Compounding matters, many of the existing sports fields are in poor condition due to overuse, busy gophers and over-burdened gardening staff.

Purchasing new park property large enough for athletic fields is prohibitively expensive so the Department can only increase the number of kids playing ground sports when new fields are created or new capacity is created on existing fields through the installation of artificial turf and field lights.

In an effort to ensure that every local child has the opportunity to play sports, the City partnered with a nonprofit organization to launch a successful initiative to replace select grass athletic fields with artificial turf. Since 2006, the partnership has renovated high-use and worn-out athletics fields with artificial turf, field lights and visitor amenities. To date, the \$52,000,000 initiative has completed fourteen popular athletic field renovations in seven parks throughout San Francisco, including:

- Garfield Square
- Silver Terrace
- Franklin Square
- South Sunset
- Crocker Amazon
- Kimbell Playground
- Mission Playground

Two more athletic field renovations are currently in or will soon enter construction. The Minnie Lovie Recreation Center Athletic Field's renovation is nearly complete and the field will reopen this fall. The Beach Chalet Athletic Fields renovation in Golden Gate Park is approved and is supposed to start construction soon.

Each field renovation converts grass to artificial turf and/or includes lights for nighttime play so the fields can be used for significantly longer periods of time. As artificial turf doesn't need any downtime to rest, regrow or recover from rain, the fields can be used by more people, more often and in nearly any weather. The addition of field lights allows for play to continue into the evening without harming the playing surface.

As new field renovations have been completed, Recreation and Parks has been able to provide more hours for athletics at each field. As a result, each year, more and more kids from every neighborhood throughout San Francisco are playing sports. With thousands of families moving out of San Francisco over the past decade, the Department feels it is our responsibility to make sure all of our city's children have safe, affordable and convenient recreation and exercise opportunities.

Since 2011, the conversion of grass athletic fields to artificial turf has allowed the Department to expand the number of fall youth teams citywide by 30% or 151 teams (from 506 to 657) – enough to allow an additional 1,800 kids to play soccer.

These increases are just for the fall season and do not include the busy spring season, winter season, or popular summer camps. Overall, the Department estimates that more than 76,000 hours of new playtime have been created through the installation of artificial turf and fields lights on existing grass sports fields. The Department estimates that these new play hours have resulted in a total 200 new youth soccer teams playing with more than 2,400 kids annually.

Still, as noted above, the demand outpaces the field supply as more and more kids want to play each year. For example, there are still not enough athletic fields for all the kids this fall. To avoid turning children away, the Department will assign a number of afterschool youth practices on large, flat grass areas and baseball outfields in Golden Gate Park and other parks throughout San Francisco, including:

- Golden Gate Park's Little Rec. open grass area
- Golden Gate Park's Big Rec. baseball outfield
- Rossi Playground baseball outfield
- Parkside Square baseball outfield

- West Sunset Playground baseball outfield
- Balboa Park Pool open grass area
- Sunset Recreation Center baseball outfield
- Upper Noe Valley Recreation Center baseball outfield

Unfortunately, regularly assigning youth soccer teams to these grassy areas and baseball outfields creates conflicts with players of other sports and wears-down the grass in park areas designated for passive and non-programmed recreation.

Impact of the Proposed initiative Ordinance on the Beach Chalet Athletic Fields

The proposed ordinance would ban the use of artificial turf and field lights at Beach Chalet and, therefore, eliminate any potential substantial increase in play at that facility. As a result, there is no expectation that the project would move forward and the site would remain in its current, poor condition and closed for a majority of the time.

If the proposed ordinance is approved, the Department will not have enough artificial turf or grass athletic fields, baseball outfields or open grass areas to for all the kids who want to play soccer and will be forced to turn away youth players for a lack of play spaces.

The Beach Chalet Athletic Fields have been athletic fields for more than 75 years and are one of three primary ground sports athletic facilities managed in San Francisco. When open and not closed for rest, more than 1,550 kids and 600 adults play ball at Beach Chalet each week. The seven acre athletic fields comprise less than 1% of Golden Gate Park's 1,017 acres.

The Beach Chalet fields are closed for rest more than 50% of the time and by reservation only. The fields are closed after even a light rain, each weekday before 3:00 pm, every Monday, and for four months a year to allow the grass to recover and regrow. To further allow the grass turf to rest, only three of four sports fields at Beach Chalet are in use at any time.

The fields are in poor condition due to abundant gopher holes, year-round wet conditions and heavy use when the fields are open. There is no disability access, no family-friendly amenities such as spectator seating, picnic tables or play equipment for young kids, a dangerous parking lot and no bike parking.

The approved renovation of the Beach Chalet Athletic Fields would install artificial turf, field lights and spectator seating. A viewing plaza and small children's playground would be built to make the site more accommodating to more people. The bathrooms would be modernized for disability access and the parking lot would be improved. Safe, accessible walkways would connect the facility to JFK Drive in Golden Gate Park to the east and the Great Highway to the west. New picnic areas, barbecues would be installed and the fence surrounding the fields would be lowered in most places from eight feet to 42 inches.

Renovating the Beach Chalet fields with artificial turf and field lights is expected to increase athletic play at the site from 4,738 to 14,320 hours of play per year, more than tripling the fields' current capacity for play. The means by which this increase will be achieved is detailed below.

Increase due to no closure	1,855 hours annually
Increase due to no rainouts	578 hours annually
Increase due to lights	3,570 hours annually

<u>Increase due to new field</u>	<u>3,580 hours annually</u>
Total Increase	9,582 hours annually

As stated above, if the proposed ordinance initiative is approved, the sports fields renovation will not occur and the Department will be forced to turn new children away from participating in youth sports starting in Spring 2015.

Impact of the Proposed initiative Ordinance on Golden Gate Park

The proposed ballot ordinance's impact on Golden Gate Park would be equally severe as it would effectively halt long planned and approved access, safety, disability and recreation improvements that would benefit the entire western end of the Park.

The fields' partnership that would fund the Beach Chalet Athletic Fields renovation is meant for projects that will increase the number of kids playing at a facility each year. As stated above, this increase in play is dependent upon the expanded field hours created by the installation of artificial turf and field lights at existing sports fields.

The proposed ordinance would ban the use of artificial turf and field lights at Beach Chalet and, therefore, eliminate any potential increase in play at that facility. As such, the Department expects that our nonprofit partner would not donate an estimated \$6,650,000 towards this project and many of the approved and needed park improvements would not come to fruition, including:

- Renovating restrooms for easier use and disability access
- Creating a viewing and sitting plaza around the restroom
- Creating sidewalks and walking paths to, through and around the sports fields
- Installing bicycle parking
- Installing a small playground
- Reducing the majority of fencing from eight feet to 42 inches
- Installing barbeques and picnic tables
- Installing on-field seating
- Expanding parking
- Creating safe drop-off zones in the parking lot

A representative from the Recreation and Parks Department will attend the Ballot Simplification Committee when this ordinance is considered to answer any question from the Committee.

Sincerely,



Philip A. Ginsburg
General Manager

**San Francisco Recreation and Parks
Beach Chalet Athletic Fields Maintenance:
Current/Grass vs. Planned/Synthetic Turf**

	Current – Grass Sports Fields	Planned – Synthetic Turf Sports Fields
Hours and Staffing		
Facility Hours	Open for reserved play only, locked if not reserved Winter: 9am – 5pm Fall/Spring: 8am – 7pm Summer: 9am – 8pm	Open all the time, no locks on gates Year-round: 8am – 10pm
Athletic Play	4,738 hours of play annually	14,320 hours of play annually
Open Play Community Hours	0	2,248 hours annually
Days of Operation	Tuesday – Sunday Closed on Monday & 4 months a year	7 days a week, 365 days a year No weekly closures
Field & Landscape Maintenance	1/2 Full Time Employee	1/2 Full Time Employee
Integrated Pest Management		
Gopher Trapping/Removal	Trap daily 60 gophers & 8 moles trapped in FY 2012-2013	Zero
Herbicide Spraying	2 x annually around fence line As needed on athletic fields 16 oz of Aquamaster Herbicide annually 1 application of Sapphire English Daisy Control in the past 5 years	Zero
Turf Maintenance		
Water Use	3-4 x weekly from April - October Est. 5,737,285 gallons per year	Zero
Fuel consumption for maintenance/gardening vehicles	105 gallons of diesel annually 50 gallons of petroleum annually	Zero
Mowing with gas powered mower	1 x 1-2 weeks Approx. 38 cuts annually	Zero
Fertilize from gas powered Toro Workman	1 x 6-8 weeks 2000 lbs granular fertilizer annually	Zero
Aeration and field rolling from diesel powered tractor	2 x annually	Zero
Seeding from gas powered Toro Workman	2 x annually 2000 lbs of perennial rye grass seed annually	Zero
Athletic Fields Striping	Weekly	Zero (synthetic turf includes permanent field striping)
Sweeping with electric Cushman	Zero	1 x 2 weeks (anticipated)
Grooming with electric Cushman	Zero	1 x 5-8 weeks (anticipated)
Repair goals, field holes and turf	As possible by staff availability	As possible by staff availability
Spot Cleaning	Zero	As needed with soap and water, no detergent

2/15/13