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Halifax Regional Council
June 17, 2003

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: _____
Mike Labrecque, Director, Real Property & Asset Management

DATE: June 10, 2003

SUBJECT: **Larry O'Connell Memorial Playground Outfield Fence**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

A petition with 288 signatures of residents was served to Halifax Regional Council on May 27th, 2003, Action Item 9.2.1, demanding the removal of the outfield fence that was installed at Larry O'Connell Memorial Playground.

BACKGROUND

The Larry O'Connell Memorial Playgrounds, which is located on the original lands of the Halifax Boys School, was originally dedicated in honour of Larry O'Connell in 1944. An error was made on the plaque that was later installed in the 1960's referring to the site as playground instead of playgrounds causing some confusion regarding the original usage of the site. At that time, the terminology of playground was an outdoor location where people played, not the same as it is now with organized playground equipment. The diamond was the first "structure" constructed on this site followed by some playground equipment, a building (which was constructed with resources provided by Chebucto Minor Baseball in 1963) and finally the spray pool.

Out of concerns for the safety of both general site users and the players using the diamond, Chebucto Minor Baseball approached staff of the Halifax Regional Municipality with a cost sharing opportunity to install the outfield fence. The group contributed \$5,000 to the project with the remaining funds supplied by Councillor Fougere. The Association wanted to assist in the funding

of the project to mitigate their own risk, to reduce the potential for injury to other park users, and to provide them with an opportunity to have a diamond that meets the requirements to host various PeeWee level tournaments, including Regionals. The outfield fence was installed on May 12th, 2003.

DISCUSSION

Staff do not recommend the removal of the outfield fence at the Larry O'Connell Diamond as it was installed for safety reasons. The project was driven by the Chebucto Minor Baseball and fully supported by staff of HRM based on the concerns regarding the safety of both players and general users of the park. There have been numerous discussions between the Association, Councillor Fougere, and staff in every attempt to ensure the integrity of green space was maintained and that all users of the site were considered while trying to address the risk to injury. The potential uses of the site have been maintained with the erecting of the outfield fence. Whenever the opportunity presents itself, the outfield area of the diamond will be scheduled to other sport users who may require a place for a practice. It should be noted though that in the past five years, this site has not been scheduled to any other users except baseball and one school's field day nor have any requests been submitted by any other sport groups to use this site. There is still ample green space on this site to allow for general play and the occasional pick up game of soccer, football, or frisbee.

An absence of community consultation was based on the fact that the installation was occurring to mitigate the further risk to injury of either player or park user. There have been some injuries and numerous near misses and over the years the number of incidents between players and non-players has increased leading to the Association driving the issue to the forefront. The scope of the project was of a fairly small nature and would not normally be put to community consultation. In order to ensure easy accessibility to all areas of the park, a gate was installed at center field.

The spray pool located on site is no longer operational and has also been identified as a safety concern. As a result, funds have been allocated to have it filled in with soil level to the surrounding area and sodded, thereby eliminating the potential risk to injury.

As the outfield fence was erected in response to injuries there are no viable alternatives that will mitigate the risk to injury in the same manner. It was suggested that outlining the ball diamond perimeter by creating a dirt path along the same pattern of the fence would be a good alternative, however, this will not act as a substantial enough deterrent to be viable. Without the outfield fence there will be no indication to anyone that they are stepping within the perimeter of the diamond outfield and thereby leading to potential injury from a hard hit line drive or a collision with an outfielder playing the ball. With the fence installed, site visitors, who may not fully understand or appreciate the sport of baseball, will not venture onto the playing field and into an unsafe situation. Children playing in the play space around the playground equipment cannot venture unknowingly onto the playing field as the fence is there.

Chebucto Minor Baseball schedules 360 hours during the diamond's open season, which is approximately 16 weeks in length from May 24 to September 15. This equates to 3,360 children using the site during the playing season for a total of 8880 player hours for scheduled usage of the

diamond for baseball. Of 376 available prime time hours (see Attachment 1), the group schedules 328 hours, accounting for 87 percent of the usage of the diamond. The group additionally schedules 32 non prime time hours (see Attachment 1) of the 856 hours available. This diamond is also used for incidental baseball games and practices that are not scheduled.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no further budget implications if the fence is to remain. However, if the fence were to be removed, the Halifax Regional Municipality would be responsible to cover not only the cost of removal, estimated to be \$3,450.00, but also reimburse the Chebucto Minor Baseball Association for their contribution of \$5,000.00.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ALTERNATIVES

There are no alternatives.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Definitions of Schedulable Hours

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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Report Reviewed/Approved by: _____ 490-6205
Doug Rafuse, Manager, Service Delivery

Attachment 1 – Definitions of Schedulable Hours

Prime Time Hours

those hours of the day in which there is the highest demand for use and are defined as follows:

Monday to Friday	5:30 pm to 8:00 pm
Saturdays	9:00 am to 5:00 pm
Sundays	12:00 pm to 8:00 pm
Holidays	9:00 am to 8:00 pm

Non Prime Time Hours

those hours of the day in which there is the lowest demand for use and are defined as follows:

Monday to Friday	9:00 am to 5:30 pm
Saturdays	5:00 pm to 8:00 pm
Sundays	9:00 am to 12:00 pm