

Synthetic fields

Globe NW 12/22/02

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LEXINGTON

Meeting still on, but fields may be done deal

By Denise Dube
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Lexington officials are preparing for a special Town Meeting on Jan. 22 to reconsider the townwide vote that approved \$3.4 million for Lincoln Park's renovation, but it's not clear that anything can be accomplished at the meeting.

The special Town Meeting results from the efforts of the group Concerned Lexington Citizens and Friends of Lincoln Park, which gathered 292 signatures and petitioned for the meeting. That was 92 more than needed to reconsider the funding approved by voters in May.

The group — bothered by the use of synthetic instead of grass fields, replacement costs for the artificial turf, parking locations, and field design — was hoping that a special Town Meet-

ing would reconsider the project.

But according to Town Manager Richard White, it might be too late to change anything by Jan. 22. "The town authorized us to do the project," he said.

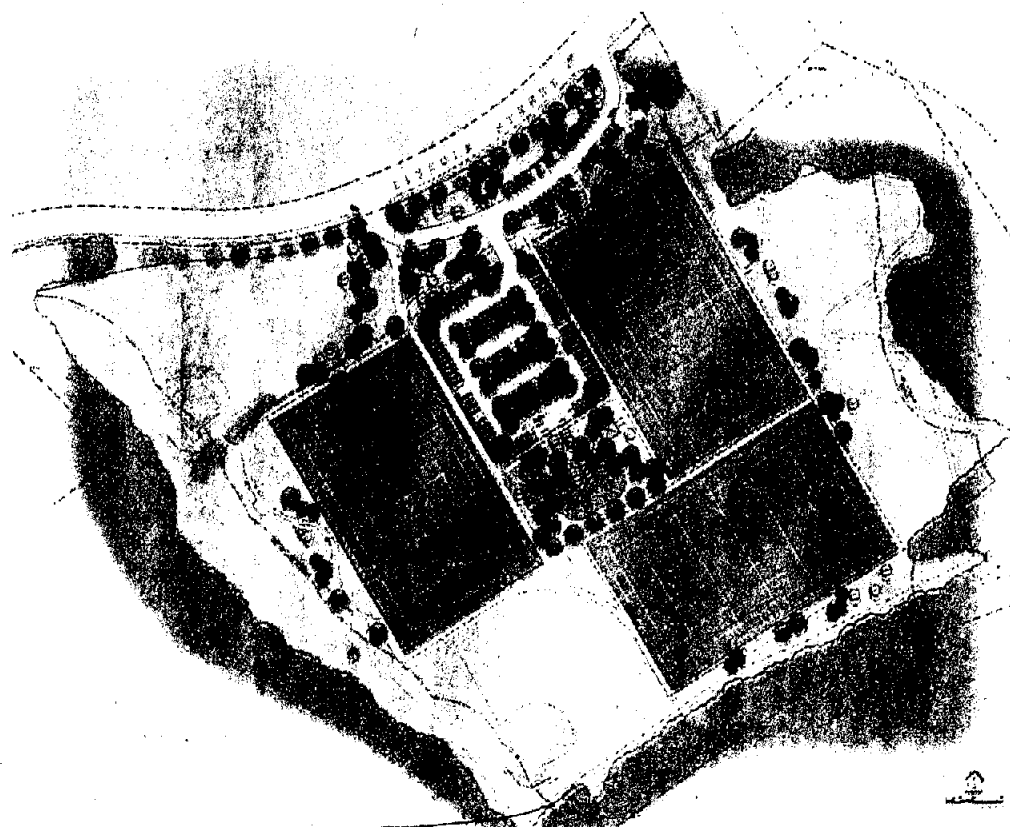
"We've gone out to bid," White added. "Bids will be in Jan. 2. We'll be making an award shortly thereafter. ... At this point in time, I'm not sure that anything can be done."

John Frey, a member of Concerned Lexington Citizens, countered: "I know they [bids] are out there. But they don't have to accept the bid as far as I know. If they do accept the bid, they can make change orders."

Frey said that the group wants just one artificial playing surface installed instead of three.

However, some members of the

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GELLER SPORT INC. DRAWING

A diagram of the proposed athletic fields and parking at Lincoln Park in Lexington.

Petition may be withdrawn

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group are having second thoughts about a special meeting.

After last Monday night's meeting with the Board of Selectmen and a meeting Tuesday night with the Recreation Committee and Conservation Commission, the group is considering withdrawing the request.

"Having a special Town Meeting is a major undertaking, and some selectmen have asked that we reconsider," said Rod McNeil, a member of the group.

But according to Selectwoman Dawn McKenna, the request can be withdrawn only if those who signed the petition write to the Board of Selectmen and ask that their names be removed.

Precinct 5 Town Meeting member Andrew Friedlich has already sent his letter requesting the removal of his name.

"I took it off Tuesday morning because I had spoken with a couple of the people and had told them that I did not think having another special Town Meeting would be thought of well," Friedlich said of the \$8,000 cost to convene Town Meeting. "Their best chance for making their case was at the meeting last night" at the Recreation and Conservation meetings.

One problem for the group is the synthetic surface proposed for three soccer fields. The "infilled" turf is a well-padded mix of rubber

and sand that is said to replicate the characteristics of playing on grass.

"There are a number of issues that are still of concern," McNeil said Tuesday.

A major worry is the approximately \$430,000 replacement cost every eight to 12 years. McNeil and others want to make sure everyone has the entire financial picture.

"It certainly hasn't been clear to me," he said.

What everyone does agree on is the need to renovate the fields. Lincoln Park, located on the former town dump on Lincoln Road, was closed in the 1960s, capped and filled, and used as a field. Over time, glass and other debris have made their way to the surface. Soccer coaches at the Recreation Committee's meeting Tuesday night spoke of walking the fields before every game and picking up large chunks of glass.

Wearing Lexington's blue-and-yellow colors, the coaches dotted the crowd and supported the new drainage system, and the infilled system that would cover and soften the now rocky fields.

"My son would not have had a concussion if it had been an infill turf," said Hugh McLaughlin, a father and referee.

McLaughlin added, "Please make it easier on the referees. I hate to tell people after they have driven an hour that there is no game" because the fields are some-

times unusable.

Even McNeil agreed something needs to be done. "There are reasons we have to move fast but there are also reasons we need to be considerate and thoughtful," he said.

His concern is finances, and he was disappointed the conversation was never steered in that direction.

"There aren't only two choices," he said of the grass versus infill argument. "We have three fields. I would like a package that makes sense for our athletic use as well as our parking."

Patrick Maguire, of Boston-based Geller Sport, displayed the various layers and drainage system of the infill surface and spoke of its successful use at Boston College and Belmont High School.

While town officials wait to see if residents remove their names from the petition, Town Manager White will prepare for the special Town Meeting.

"As it stands now, we're planning on going ahead," White said. "We have a legitimate appeal; we have no other option according to the law. You can always call anything off, but once the mailing goes out there would be a meeting," he said of the notice that occurs three weeks before a scheduled meeting.

If the mailing goes out and the petitioners have a change of heart, then White said, "It would be opened and closed."

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