

Ashley Wayman

From: Alexandra Robinette <alexrobinette@mac.com>
Sent: Sunday, December 11, 2022 12:38 PM
To: gmassingill@rollingwoodtx.govgov; Kevin Glasheen; Alec Robinson; Phil McDuffee; Brook Brown; shutson@rollingwoodtx
Cc: Ashley Wayman
Subject: Turf in Rollingwood Park

Dear Council Members,

I wanted to share some additional thoughts on turf at Hatley Field.

A cursory satellite survey of City of Austin parks, schools, athletic centers, as well as private school campuses and nearby high schools, shows only Westlake HS and St. Michael's Academy have artificial turf used specifically for baseball/softball fields, notably both are high schools; and only two locations out of roughly 20 listed on googlemaps have specific little league turf fields - WAYA's Joseph Field, and Mabson Field. Not having a turf field for little league play does not appear to be a hardship, but rather having one is a very unique privilege.

If the primary concern is the quality of the field, then bringing this issue forward is a great step towards finding community-wide support to fixing the problem. I support the thoughtful and creative efforts to improve our existing soil and exploring alternative irrigation strategies as council member Glasheen is proposing. Plant some additional trees in the process.

I get that some people really just want turf, someone is willing to pay for it, why not just do it, what's the big deal? The problem is, as a community, we don't all share the same set of ideas about what the park needs, frankly, most of us don't even get to the share the park. My kids play soccer, and yet they can't use the park to practice or play soccer, and no one can really play in an area regularly used by dogs. The City of Rollingwood has one open green space, as compared to 300+ City of Austin parks. We currently divide this shared space into a number of uses, very little of which is simply a natural green space to enjoy. I think that a park should not necessarily be defined by the many ways in which you can develop its entirety, but that just letting expanses of it provide natural relief and beauty, along with space for impromptu uses is reason enough. The bulk of our visible park is fenced in by little league fields with looming backstops, a condition most of us have come to accept, even though it is not exactly pretty or useable by most residents. We all just walk or drive past our park, we are not invited in, literally or visually. The Little League is only for certain times each year, but we have to hold much of our park hostage to that limited usage, it's like an on-going ACL. I'm a retired professional athlete, I place a huge value on all athletics and the dedication of kids' sports in particular, I am not anti-little league, and I'm not against a dog park, or ACL. There is just not a sufficient argument for why the aggressive install requirements of unnatural turf is really needed in our supposedly shared natural park space.

Regarding the use of turf as a safety improvement, I've spent many weekends sweltering on the sidelines of turfed soccer fields. Tournaments are unbearable with multiple games in one weekend. We set up a field hospital for the kids at every game making sure they have adequate shade, hydration, wet towels soaking in ice water, and chairs to keep the kids from burning themselves by sitting on the sidelines, or filling their clothes and shoes with ground-up tire tread. My daughter burns her feet through her shoes on turf and has to do an in-place dance to keep them from burning further. Right now my son has a sizable forearm "turf burn" from sliding on the turf. Every team my kids have been on really don't like playing on the turf and are relieved when it's a grass game. The parents agree. Plenty has been said about the environmental and health concerns, which should be reason enough.

Along with the NFL, FIFA and MLS are working to ban turf.

In 2008, when I served on the Park Commission, I worked to implement the plan to put in a walking trail. I purchased cans of spray paint and, along with Sandra Ferrell, we laid out the trail surrounding the upper park that we have today. I made signs and organized a volunteer day to start the install. I've put in the time and sweat to help to create a community asset to our park as so many others have done. As far as I recall, no one was against having a trail because it was clearly intended to have broad public support.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for your dedicated service. Please share with Park Commission members.

Sincerely,
Alex Robinette
2500 Hatley Dr.