

Edgewater may reopen Veterans Field in spring, with artificial turf on ball field and sod planned for other areas

NOVEMBER 12, 2014 LAST UPDATED: WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2014, 8:51 AM

BY LINH TAT

STAFF WRITER |

THE RECORD

EDGEWATER – In an attempt to appease those who would like the Little League field reopened as quickly as possible while catering to residents who would prefer natural grass, borough officials have decided to install artificial turf on the baseball field while placing sod over other areas of Veterans Field, the borough's main park.

The combination of turf – which requires less time to install – and natural grass strikes a "nice balance" among competing interests, Councilman Anthony Bartolomeo said Monday. Council members voted 4-0, with Michael Henwood and David Jordan absent, to proceed with the plan.

By using artificial turf, the baseball field can reopen during the upcoming Little League season. Baseball players have been using a field in Leonia the last few years.

"It hasn't been pleasant for the council ... to send all the kids to Leonia," Borough Administrator Greg Franz said. "The council is committed to getting a field up and running for the 2015 playing season."

The area has been closed for work to remove contamination at the site. The borough's environmental consultant and its engineer told the council that work to remove and cap contaminated soil on Veterans Field should wrap up in January, followed by about three months of work on the baseball field. With a synthetic turf, the field would likely be ready to play on by spring, they said.

The southern portion of Veterans Field, which includes a children's playground and a larger field area, would take about six months to complete, said borough engineer Michael Neglia.

Veterans Field closed in fall 2011 due to soil contamination. Cleanup efforts continued until October 2013, when officials learned that the contractor, Waterside Construction, had brought new contaminated materials onto the site. The owner of Waterside has said the company wasn't aware at the time that the concrete it brought onto the site was toxic.

Work remained stalled for a year as the borough and Waterside tried to reach a resolution. The council ultimately fired Waterside in September, and activity resumed last month under a new contractor.

Several residents told the council this week they were opposed to synthetic turf, and some questioned whether there are any health hazards associated with such a field.

But Councilman Luis Vidal pointed out that the president of the Little League had indicated his preference for an artificial field and noted that such fields are used at schools and among college and professional teams nationwide. Proponents of artificial turf cite lower maintenance costs associated with such surfaces and the ability to play after a rainstorm. Natural grass fields can be soggy after rain, delaying games.

In addition to voting on the turf-grass combination, the council voted to bring additional fill onto the site to stabilize the land after excavating the unclean soil and for raising the field 13 feet to conform to new Federal Emergency Management Agency standards for flood prevention.

The council also authorized the new contractor to start work before 7:30 a.m. to reduce the number of large trucks traveling along River Road during rush hour.

Email: tat@northjersey.com