

## **Saanich plans three all-weather fields.**

### **Conversions carry stiff price tag, but will extend soccer season through Island's rainy season**

**Kim Westad, Times Colonist**

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Saanich could well be home to three more artificial turf fields by next summer.

Council unanimously approved applications from three soccer clubs to partner with the municipality and convert three grass fields to artificial turf, so clubs can play year-round and not have to worry about rainouts.

Artificial fields cost more than \$1 million, almost double the traditional grass fields. But they pay off over the long run, say soccer players, who often face rained-out games on fields where the grass grows in sand or soil.

"We're very excited about it," said Rae Roer, Saanich's parks manager. "It will help us address some of the sport-field capacity challenges in Saanich."

The new fields will be at **Lochside Park, Tyndall Park and Braefoot Park.**

Last year, Saanich's five soccer clubs had 5,500 players registered, from youths to adults. The clubs use Saanich fields, as well as renting fields from school districts, other parks and the University of Victoria to get enough time for practices, games and tournaments.

But a few days of Victoria-style rain can see grass fields turn into small swamps. Sometimes by mid-season, the grass is virtually gone from the field, making it unplayable.

So artificial fields have become increasingly popular, despite their high price tags. Saanich is one of the first municipalities to partner with sports organizations to fund the fields. It has one at Hampton Park and is putting the finishing touches on a second one at Layritz Park. That field should be ready for play by mid-November, Roer said.

The University of Victoria has one as well, as well as one in Victoria at Topaz Park.

As it did with the Hampton Park and Layritz Park fields, Saanich provides \$100,000 per field from the parks capital budget. On top of that is a \$250,000 interest-free loan from Saanich that is repayable over five years.

It's up to the clubs to generate the remainder.

That means the Cordova Bay soccer club, Gordon Head soccer association and the Lakehill soccer association will be out en masse fundraising and applying for provincial grant money.

They needed Saanich's approval in order to make grant applications. The fields vary slightly in size and terrain, so have different total costs.

The Lakehill field is estimated at \$1 million, the Cordova Bay field at \$1.2 million and the Gordon Head field at \$1.25 million.

"This will allow uninterrupted play. Without field closures, it will hopefully decrease the pressure put on the remaining grass fields," Roer said. "From a financial investment, it's a good return for Saanich taxpayers."

Detailed design drawings will be presented to the public once funding is complete.

Construction will begin only after each club demonstrates to council that they have successfully secured their funding and have a viable financial repayment plan, Roer said.

The clubs are hoping to have the fields completed by next summer.