

DAILY BREEZE

Manhattan Beach's Marine Avenue Park to get new turf sports field

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PUBLISHED: May 16, 2013 at 12:00 a.m. | UPDATED: September 6, 2017 at 7:08 a.m.

A successful fundraising drive and a lower-than-expected construction bid will not only give Manhattan Beach a new synthetic turf sports field late this summer, but also an array of extras: new lights, soccer goals and a donor wall.

A groundbreaking ceremony is planned at 11:30 a.m. Saturday at the Marine Avenue Park soccer field – which comes just about a week after the City Council approved a construction contract paving the way for new turf.

The American Youth Soccer Organization approached the council in July 2011, promising to raise the \$1 million needed for the turf by February 2012. When that didn't happen, the group went back before the council last fall. Members gave the group a one-year extension to drum up the money and said field usage would be allocated based on contributions received.

Earlier this year, AYSO presented the city with \$520,000, the Manhattan Beach Sand and Surf soccer club contributed \$200,000, Vistamar School in El Segundo pitched in \$100,000 and the Manhattan Beach 10K pledged \$25,000. Expecting the turf to cost at least \$1.3 million, the council authorized the use of up to \$508,000 of city capital improvement funds to match the donations received.

But the construction bid from Asphalt, Fabric & Engineering Inc. came in much lower than expected – \$737,496 – allowing the city to include new lights, team and spectator canopies, field lettering, a donor recognition wall, storage shed and new soccer goals. The additions total \$225,000 and include additional tree removal at the north side of the field.

Because about 30 pine trees will have to be removed from the site to make room for a standard-size soccer field, residents within 500 feet were notified, and the trees have been posted, Public Works Director Jim Arndt said.

“This is going to be one of the best (fields) now,” said Johnnie Morgan, the turf project consultant and fundraiser. “This AstroTurf product is being touted as their latest and best product on the market right now. We’re going to get a really nice field. “

The sports groups in town have said the time is now for the field to be repaired. Many sections are barren and uneven, making maintenance difficult. And when it rains, the field becomes a mud pit and is often unusable.

“It’s just not safe anymore,” Morgan said earlier this year.

The groups and city staff have cited the benefits of synthetic turf, which was installed at the Manhattan Village field more than five years ago.

“It’s safe, it’s playable 24/7, there’s very little maintenance to it and almost zero dependence on water,” Morgan said. “They’re very resilient, and it minimizes injuries because it’s a level playing surface that’s very consistent. “

Annual use of the new field will be allocated based on contributions made to fund the turf – with 1,050 peak hours going to AYSO, 240 hours to Sand and Surf, 120 hours to Vistamar and 790 available to the city – but AYSO has historically had priority usage of the field. “AYSO has a large youth population playing soccer – 3,500 kids – so prior to this project, they’ve always had a certain amount of hours on the field,” Morgan said. “When we created this project and struggled to find supporters, they essentially gave up some of their time so other groups could participate. “

Although the youth soccer groups will have priority over the fields during peak hours (4-8 p.m. on weekdays and 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekends) from Sept. 1 to Dec. 1 and from March 1 to June 1, Morgan said there will be plenty of extra time in the off-season or nonpeak hours, from 8-10 p.m. daily, for adult soccer leagues or others like flag football and lacrosse.

“When you put a field in like Aviation field, everyone starts noticing, ‘Hey, that’s a nice field, let’s rent that one.’ And it enjoys a high usage,” Morgan said.

The city will likely bring in more revenue with the new turf; it costs \$25 per hour for leagues to rent the natural turf, but the city will charge \$100 per hour for the synthetic field and \$150 per hour for nonresidents, Parks and Recreation Director Mark Leyman said. Morgan said the city will now place its order to AstroTurf – the inventor of synthetic turf – so production can begin.

“It takes awhile to produce it, and there’s a special process for testing the turf to make sure it meets our project specifications for strength and all that,” Morgan said.

Installation is expected to begin in late May and wrap up by Aug. 15. Leyman said the soccer fields are typically closed during the summer months for maintenance, so the field’s closure for turf installation will have minimal impact on summer programs.

A grand opening ceremony will take place in late August or early September before the start of the AYSO season the weekend after Labor Day, he said.