



June 15, 2016

Sam Hubbard – Development Planner
Village of Arlington Heights
33 S. Arlington Heights Road
Arlington Heights, Illinois 60005

Re: Plan Commission Meeting Comments (June 8, 2016) – Park District
Responses for
Sunset Meadows Park Protective Netting Project

Dear Mr. Hubbard,

Pursuant to the Plan Commission and resident comments and concerns that were heard and discussed at the June 8 meeting, this letter is provided for response.

1. Please clarify if a different location for the new soccer field can be provided elsewhere on Park District property, which may reduce the need for the safety netting along Kirchoff.

The Arlington Heights Park District proudly owns, operates and maintains more than 25 soccer fields, of various sizes, throughout Arlington Heights. This number varies depending on the time of year and the number of participants in the park district in-house and travel programs. The programs are always in need of more fields for practices and games, and the Park District is continually seeking ways to rest and rejuvenate fields by not using all of the fields annually. Needless to say, a tremendous amount of planning and funding goes into determining the locations for fields.

The grass athletic fields developed at Sunset Meadows Park approximately eight years ago were originally intended to serve the soccer and football programs in Arlington Heights. Unfortunately, the fields have not been able to be used to their full extent. The park district has not been able to use the grass fields for programs in the spring and summer because the fields constantly need maintenance by way of reseeding grass and rejuvenating the turf, getting the grass ready for the football program in the fall. Then, the football usage tears up the grass again and the whole process starts all over again, limiting the availability for soccer in spring. This was the main reason for renovating the athletic fields in their current location. By

converting the natural grass to synthetic turf, the new synthetic turf will provide the park district with more availability and flexibility in programming throughout Arlington Heights. It opens the Arlington Aces soccer program to more guaranteed, and much needed, field time for practices and games. The Sunset Meadows location also has existing additional amenities not available at other parks, such as flushable toilets, a large parking lot and a picnic/storm shelter.

2. Please explore a different orientation to the new fields, which new orientation may reduce the need for the safety netting along Kirchoff, or potentially a smaller net along Kirchoff.

The use of the fields has been discussed further with the park district Recreation Department responsible for programming and scheduling field usage. Following are the plans for fall and spring soccer usage at Sunset Meadows:

1. In the Fall - The schedule has not been finalized, but both Soccer and Football will be played on the east and west athletic fields in the fall. The East field will be used for football practices AND games, and the west field will be used for football practices. The west field will be used for older age soccer games and both fields will be scheduled for practices.
2. In the Spring – The soccer program will use both fields for a mix of practices and games.
3. Soccer games played north/south will be limited to ages 11 and under.
4. Older age groups may practice going north/south, but will not be kicking at a goal in that direction.
5. When teams are practicing north/south they will be working on drills that focus on speed, agility, footwork, and endurance.
6. In both the spring and fall, there may as many as three teams practicing on each field at one time, limiting the opportunity for players to kick the ball too powerfully in any one direction.
7. The majority of teams using the Sunset Meadows fields will be part of the Arlington Aces travel soccer program. These teams are led by professional staff coaches vs. parent run house league teams, therefore the AHPD has more control over the plans for practices.

3. Re-evaluate the need for the 2 pedestrian gates along Kirchoff. If they are necessary, please explore the option for lockable gates or a more secure means to prevent young children from slipping out and chasing balls across Kirchoff.

The current proposal includes two (2), 4-foot wide openings (with no gate) along the existing 6-foot tall aluminum fence, to provide access from the park to the parkway along Kirchoff Road. As discussed on June 8, the safety netting was to have Velcro openings at the two (2) proposed fence opening. Currently, the existing fence does not provide openings, and the users have had to retrieve balls by walking around the entire perimeter fence. The Park District has received comments in the past regarding the inconvenience of walking around to retrieve errant balls.

The Park District would like to propose a modification to the opening previously discussed. In lieu of simple 4-foot wide openings in the aluminum fence, the Park District will install 4-foot wide gates at these two (2) locations. The gates will be hinged and latchable. The latch will be mounted at a height (5' above ground) limiting access for small children, only allowing adults to unlatch. The Park District will also work with the netting installer for an alternative to Velcro.

Park District staff will also inform all coaches and team managers in the athletic programs that the gates are intended for adults only.

The Park District is confident the proposed changes will meet the needs of the users and maintain, and even, strengthen the safety aspects of the project.



4. Explore the option of landscaped area on the outside of the fence to provide some screening to the neighbors across Kirchoff.

The 25' wide parkway property located between the public walk and W. Kirchoff Road is owned by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and maintained by a special use agreement between IDOT and the Village of Arlington Height Public Works Department. Prior to, and following, the public hearing on June 8, the Park District contacted both IDOT and the Village Forestry Department regarding the parkway property. It was the intent and goal of the Park District, from the start of the athletic field improvement project, to reincorporate trees in the parkway along Sunset

Meadows Park. Many of the trees were removed by the Village in recent years due to the Emerald Ash Borer and old age. Trees have simply not been replanted on this section of road, to date. It is still the intention of the Park District to have parkway trees planted along this stretch of land. The trees would help to address the concerns regarding the negative aesthetics. The new trees will draw attention away from the netting and soften and “break up” the area, providing a more aesthetic view for drivers along Kirchoff Road and neighbors to Sunset Meadows Park.

The Park District will prepare planting plans for trees to be located 48’ on center (lined up with the netting poles) the entire length of the park along Kirchoff Road. The Park District will work with IDOT and the Village to determine viable tree varieties for this location, including varieties that will not interfere with the existing power lines along Kirchoff Road. The Village of Arlington Heights Forestry Department has agreed to assist with these plantings, and trees will be targeted for planting in the fall of 2016.



Existing parkway trees along Kirchoff Road, just east of Dwyer & Kirchoff intersection. This is the size tree proposed.



Existing parkway looking east along Kirchoff Road.

5. Explore the option of retractable netting that can be easily raised only during games and practices, or a removable netting system that can be taken down at the end of the season.

The park district explored many options to prevent balls from leaving the park and going onto Kirchoff Road. Among the options were various netting and fencing solutions. The decision to install permanent to semi-permanent netting was based on a number of factors.

1. In our research, retractable netting is actually more visible when in use. The retractable style nets tend to be less tight and therefore move and wave in the wind and tend to have more slack and sag. They are just not as aesthetically pleasing as tight, permanent netting.
2. The retractable netting and pulley system is more expensive, and would negatively affect the limited project and Park District budget.
3. The Park District has limited available staff to raise and lower netting based upon usage, including both programmed and drop in usage.
4. Multiple fencing and netting professionals have indicated netting that is raised and lowered has a drastically reduced life span and requires more replacement and repair than permanent or semi-permanent netting. Netting that is repeatedly lowered simply wears out faster.
5. Portable protective netting was a suggestion. However, unless custom made, our research shows portable systems only have a maximum height of ten feet. Portable netting systems come with and without wheels. Either way, with the distances needed to move these, and with the uneven topography surrounding the turf fields, it would make it very difficult for park district staff to place and remove this type of system. Currently there is not a place large enough to store this type of system on-site at Sunset Meadows.

The netting proposed for installation is semi-permanent in nature. The netting can be removed and stored during the winter months, if necessary. However, because of wear and tear and required labor hours, the park district is currently not planning to remove the nets, similar to how golf course protective netting and baseball netting is left up in other residential areas of Arlington Heights.

6. Evaluate if the netting must be 20' in height, or if a shorter version is a viable option.

The new synthetic fields at Sunset Meadows will provide the park district with much needed flexibility of usage. Not only will the fields serve the needs of our soccer and football groups, but the fields will also provide endless potential for other sporting events, clinics, workshops, games and practices.

In previous internal planning discussions, taller netting, as much as 30-feet, was proposed. However, at this time, the park district is confident that 20-foot safety netting will meet the needs of the many potential users and uses at Sunset Meadows. Netting systems that are taller than 20-feet require larger poles such as the 30-foot netting system recently installed at St. Viator High School. The Park District does not feel netting taller than 20-feet is necessary at this location.

Safety is the main concern and driving force for netting along Kirchoff Road, and the park district feels reducing the height below 20-feet could potentially reduce safety of the users on the site and for those driving on Kirchoff Road. The Park District would like to reduce and hopefully eliminate the potential of any accidents along Kirchoff Road.

7. Are there any protective netting systems at other sites, near residential areas, within the Park District?

The Park District is aware of three other existing protective netting locations within residential areas of Arlington Heights. Two of the locations are on the Park District's golf courses; Arlington Lakes Golf Course and Nickol Knoll Golf Course. Both of these courses have permanent netting in several areas of the course, adjacent to homes. Aside from occasional requests for repairs, there have been no complaints about aesthetics.



St. Viator baseball netting

A second protective netting application in Arlington Heights is located at St. Viator High School along their athletic fields, near Frederick Street and Dryden Avenue. The permanent safety netting in this location was recently installed and is over 30-foot high, also in a residential area. Please see the attached photos, and note the size of the poles. The poles at St. Viator High School are more than twice the diameter of the poles proposed at Sunset Meadows.



8. Prepare a graphic that shows the appearance of the netting at different heights as viewed from across Kirchoff Rd.

Please see the attached graphics drawn by our park district Planning Division staff.

Sunset Meadows Artificial Turf Fields
Barrier Net System Perspective View



Sunset Meadows Artificial Turf Fields
20' High Barrier Net System



The Park District understands the concerns of both the Plan Commission and the neighbors to Sunset Meadows Park. We are confident in our research and planning for safety netting at this location. We will continue to maintain the park and its amenities at a high standard, a standard that keeps the Park District in good standing with the Village, our users and our neighbors.

The Park District will be in attendance at the Plan Commission Meeting scheduled for June 22, and hope to gain approval of the safety netting from the Plan Commission at that time.

If you or the Plan Commission need any additional information or have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (847)506-7145.

Sincerely,

Alann Petersen, CPRP
Director of Parks & Planning