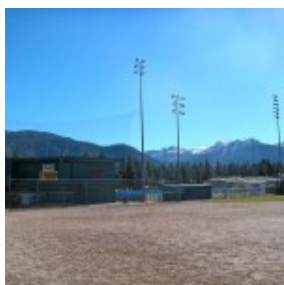


Ball field advocates take convoluted approach to decision-making

By Kathryn Reed

Recommendations for how to spend \$500,000 to improve ball fields on the California side of the South Shore are expected to be discussed in July by the board that oversees recreation Measure R.

However, the committee that is tasked with coming up with the ideas in its last two meetings did not cover everything on its agenda, so a special meeting may need to be called for the seven to complete their job.



At this pace,
no
improvements
will be made
to South Tahoe
ball fields
this season.
Photo/LTN file

About half of the May 21 meeting was devoted to discussing whether Assembly Bill 2404 is relevant. The committee said yes, though, no vote was taken.

South Lake Tahoe City Attorney Patrick Enright told them the California law is relevant.

“The statute doesn’t make a distinction of whose land it is, but how it’s used,” Enright said.

Entities have until 2015 to come into compliance.

But committee members also said it’s not up to them to determine if their recommendations comply with this California law that requires boys’ and girls’ athletic facilities be of equal quality.

Committee member Ken Riegal wondered if the money had to go to ball fields so then the whole boy-girl equity issued could be avoided.

“You are always going to have to deal with AB2404,” Enright informed the committee.

Chuck Leonard, who chairs the committee, said, “We are so bogged down with the male-female issue, we are not getting anything done.”

But that boy-girl, man-woman thing is relevant. They could be wasting their time, the public’s and potentially the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority board’s if they come up with ideas that cannot be implemented because of AB2404.

What the committee has not gotten is a legal opinion about whether inequity exists today based on the condition of the fields or even what the ruling would be when the girls’ varsity softball field is completed at South Tahoe High School.

If the area were deemed to be out of compliance, then an assessment of what needs to be done to right the wrong would be necessary.

If they are in compliance, then what's needed is to know what would tip the scale either way to ensure improvements don't inadvertently render the area out of compliance.

Instead of pursuing this course of action, the committee went over a wish list. A list that was not completed before the meeting was adjourned just after 6pm – after two hours of dialog.

Hal Cole, who is South Lake Tahoe City Council's rep to the JPA board, was at the meeting. He told *Lake Tahoe News* the committee should figure out if it makes more sense to spend the bulk of the money on one substantive upgrade or parcel it out in nickels and dimes.

Brett Long, a local landscape architect who designed South Tahoe High School's football field and the track-field at South Tahoe Middle School, spoke early about how the committee needs to have designs before a cost estimate can be relevant. He has contacted JPA staff member John Upton and board member Norma Santiago about providing some designs for free.

Steve Knoll, who is in the same profession as Long and is on the fields committee, bristled at this. At the meeting he told everyone the reason he joined the committee is because he has expertise in field design.

"The cost to do public works projects is staggering," Steve Morales, facilities director for Lake Tahoe Unified School District said. "I doubt any of the facilities are ADA compliant except for the South Tahoe Middle School and the college field."

Field improvements could trigger the need to bring dugouts, bleachers and restrooms into compliance for the disabled.

Besides Cole, the other elected official in attendance was LTUSD board member Sue Novasel. The school district is at the table because most of the fields are on land it owns. The city

maintains most of the fields.

However, it was pointed out Monday that the last use agreement between the district and city expired about a dozen years ago.

If the committee were to pay for city staff time, the half million dollars might be spent before the JPA board ever had to weigh-in. At Monday's meeting Enright was there most of the time, the assistant city attorney popped in, the paid legal intern was in attendance most of the time, the parks supervisor was at the table the whole meeting, and his boss was there much of the time. From Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Morales was the lone paid staff member sitting for two hours.

Upton does get paid. That's out of the Measure R money.

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The next ball fields committee meeting is June 25, 4-6pm in the downstairs conference room at Lake Tahoe Airport.