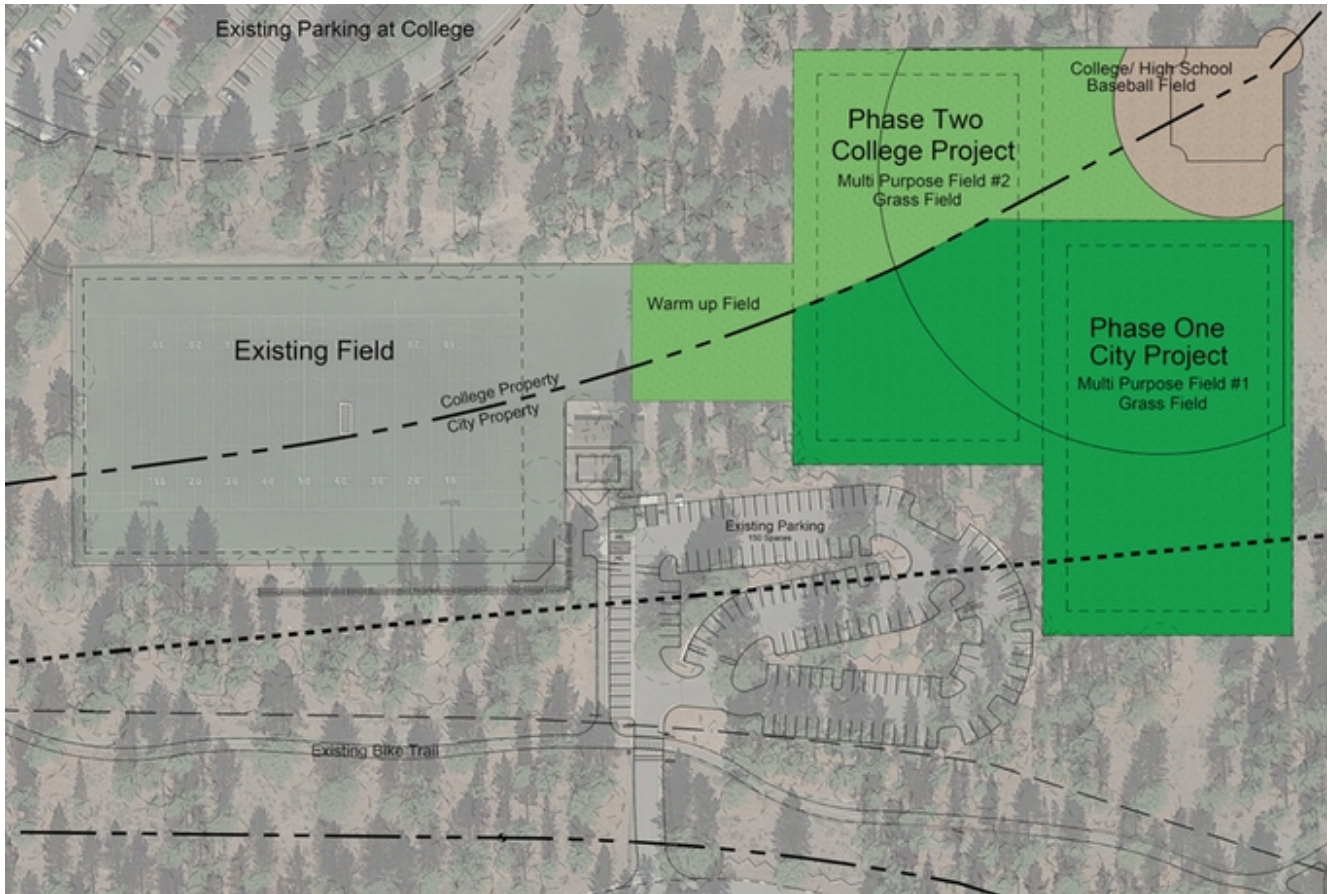


SLT, LTCC, LTUSD working to build ball fields



The proposed fields are in green and brown. The existing community field is to the left in grey. Rendering/Design Workshop

By Kathryn Reed

By the end of 2016, there could be two new ball fields in South Lake Tahoe – and not a dime of additional taxpayer money is needed to build them.

Designs are such that the fields could be used for football, soccer or baseball – just not all at the same time.

When Measure S was passed in 2000 it said four community ball fields would be built. Only one ever was. In large part this had to do with the recreation measure not generating enough

money and the ice rink costing more than originally planned. When it was revised to be Measure R, it said three ball fields.

The Measure S field is next to Lake Tahoe Community College, with the property being owned by the college and city. The new fields would go to the right of that field if looking at the area from the community ball field parking lot.

The project is a joint endeavor between the city, college and Lake Tahoe Unified School District. To do so the three are creating a recreation joint powers authority. This proposal is on the July 7 City Council agenda. The college board should vote on it in August. The school district time line and funding source are unknown because Superintendent Jim Tarwater did not return a phone call.

Once the respective boards approve the JPA, permits will be sought with the goal of construction starting in May. The exact work plan will be devised to have the least impact on the current field users.

The city on Tuesday could allocate \$1.2 million to the fields project. This money is from excess budgeted hotel taxes. Through April, the transient occupancy tax is up 19 percent. For the fiscal year, an excess of \$2 million is expected to be collected.

"All of our community surveys say collect taxes from tourists and spend it on things that are valuable to residents. We are delivering on that without asking for new taxes," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The partnership will in effect deliver what Measure S/R intended to do. It will also help resolve scheduling problems.

The new fields are expected to be grass. One reason for grass is to not have to contend with Tahoe Regional Planning Agency coverage stipulations.

Kerry also said artificial turf is expensive, there are potential negative health side effects, and that it's hard to keep clean.

"The college believes this is a way to bring multiple agencies and funding to facilitate the recreational fields that were promised years ago under Measures R and S. The college realizes that our soccer program has strained the use on the community field, and by collaborating, the community, LTUSD, and the college are all getting more recreational space," LTCC President Kindred Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Our next steps will be to bring easement documents to the board for dedication of the 5.62 acres to the new joint powers authority, draft an agreement for a new joint powers authority that includes appropriate language so the college can invest bond funding in the community field as we promised in Measure F. This is anticipated to start in early August."

Measure F, which was approved by voters last fall, includes funds for recreation facilities. A caveat is that money cannot be spent on facilities the college does not own. The college has \$1.1 million for the fields, some of which will be spent on new artificial turf at the current field. There is \$300,000 in Measure S/R money that is also dedicated for turf replacement.

Besides the turf, bleachers are also expected to be built. Murillo said artificial turf is less expensive to maintain and that it is safer for soccer conference play.

Other field improvements are also in the works.

"We are still looking at investing bond funds on the field at South Tahoe Middle School. Under the stipulations of bond funding we must have irrevocable rights to use the field for the length of the bond funded improvements," Murillo said. "The rationale is that it will expand use of the field for the community, LTUSD, and our soccer program. We are working on a

shared facilities agreement between LTUSD and LTCC which will leverage the taxpayers dollars by not duplicating facilities.”

After Tuesday’s meeting, the city and unified district will then work on a plan that is likely to come before the council in August. This has to do with amending the agreement between the entities so the school district is paying for the lights and water for its fields. Currently, the city is doing so.

“The end result will be more efficient management and operation of these fields,” Kerry said.

A side note, this will be last year SnowGlobe, the three-day outdoor concert, will be at the current field even though this is only the second year of the three-year contract. It’s possible the festival could be on the new grass fields. That type of hardscape is more conducive to such activities. The city is also considering 30 acres near the airport for outdoor events.