

SnowGlobe turns S. Lake Tahoe grass fields into dirt



Fresh sod was laid on this field last fall. This is what it looks like after SnowGlobe. Photo/LTN

Updated at 8:04pm:

By Kathryn Reed

Just weeks ago the brand new sod fields in South Lake Tahoe were green and a dormant brown color. Now it's raw dirt.

What happened? The three-day music festival SnowGlobe.

"I am horrified by the condition of the field. We were told that SnowGlobe was going to invest \$1 million on a covering that would protect the field. Clearly that did not happen," Councilwoman Brooke Laine told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Lake Tahoe News on Jan. 2 emailed all five councilmembers for a comment about the field, as well as Ray Jarvis whose

department at the city is responsible for the field, and concert promoter Chad Donnelly.

Donnelly, who rarely communicates with *LTN*, did not respond to the email, nor did Councilmembers Jason Collin and Austin Sass.

Councilmembers Wendy David and Tom Davis issued a joint statement: "In our deliberations on the SnowGlobe contract, it was of concern to us what damage might occur to the fields. Per your question, we can see that there was an impact to the new fields. There was considerable discussion prior to the final contract and it addresses these concerns."

This was the seventh year for the festival, which is always Dec. 29-31. This was the second year at the new fields. Prior to 2016 it had been on the synthetic soccer field at Lake Tahoe Community College. In 2016, it was on the new ball field, but at that time it was just dirt. The sod was laid last fall.

The contract with the Colorado-based promoter says, "Promoter shall reimburse the city, within 30 days of receipt of city's statement of costs, for city's documented cost of repairing any damage to the property caused by the promoter. In addition to any costs and expenses described herein, and unless otherwise specified herein, promoter shall bear the sole risk and pay all costs and expenses of whatever kind and nature which arise from this agreement and rental."

So, while any damage to the field will be the responsibility of the promoter, the fact is right now it is not a grass ball field, but instead a muddy mess. And with rain in the forecast, it is only going to get worse.

It means locals whose tax dollars paid for the field don't have a place to recreate this winter; at least not until it snows or there is always the mud.

“To a certain extent, the appearance of the fields may be worse than the actual damage. For instance, directly in front of the main stage where thousands of festival-goers were dancing it’s pretty likely there is damage to the turf. However, when standing in the same spot from which (the photo was taken) the field looks the same all the way to the main stage yet the impacts are very different,” Jarvis, director of Public Works, told *LTN*. “As people were dancing in front of the main stage the grass was getting pushed down, forcing fine soils up through the grass. The dirt also moved around the site as attendees moved to other areas away from the main stage, which creates the appearance of more extensive damage than what is likely real damage.”

LTCC’s contract with Donnelly was only good through this past concert. That elected board and staff are distancing themselves from SnowGlobe, with little of their property used for the event.

The statement the mayor and mayor pro tem provided to *Lake Tahoe News* further states, “We do not plan or intend to replace the turf each year so we will be watching how the turf recovers and what repairs are needed as a result of SnowGlobe this year. After determining what level of restoration is necessary, additional turf protections may be needed for the future.

“As a council and as a city, we continue to look at the noise and the field impacts and how to further mitigate both in the future, listening to residents and businesses in regards to this event. SnowGlobe is a large, economically successful event for our tourist based economy, positively impacting lodging, restaurants, grocery stores and all of our visitor based businesses and their employees.”

Donnelly wants a 10-year contract for SnowGlobe as well as the opportunity to bring other events to this same location at other times of the year.

For now, the city electeds have agreed SnowGlobe can come back in 2018, but beyond that they want to see how the field holds up. That assessment usually comes in the spring after the snow melts. Right now there is no snow. Time will tell if any grass sprouts back.

Donnelly initially told city staff he would spend nearly **\$1 million on a cover**. The council on Jan. 2 found out he didn't buy a cover, but instead spent about \$100,000 to rent one. But the cover clearly did not span the entire field.

It was always going to be questionable if such a cover would help or harm the field. The grass was going to be matted down by equipment, structures and more than 10,000 people each night dancing on it. The hope was the field would spring back to life by using the cover.

Right now there doesn't look like there is much life to the field.