

Municipality of Chatham-Kent
Infrastructure and Engineering Services
Parks, Fleet and Facilities

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Ian Clark, Manager, Parks, Recreation & Cemeteries
Date: June 24, 2024
Subject: Field of Dreams Baseball Project

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Field of Dreams Committee be authorized to fundraise for the capital cost of constructing a new fully accessible regulation size baseball diamond, pending final Council approval of location and municipal budget impacts.
2. The current Kiwanis Stadium soccer field beside Fergie Jenkins Field at Rotary Park in Chatham be identified as the preferred location for the new baseball diamond subject to design work and final approval from Council.
3. The costs to perform design work of \$35,000 for the new baseball diamond and future site requirements at Fergie Jenkins Field be referred to the 2025 Budget Update.

Background

On January 15, 2024 Council directed administration to explore and assist The CK Community Field of Dreams Committee with the planning, feasibility and a potential location for a new regulation sized baseball diamond capable of hosting events for players aged 14+ and Challenger Baseball programs.

Comments

Municipal employees from Parks, Recreation and Cemeteries met with the Field of Dreams Committee ("Committee") on January 24 and April 11, 2024. The following is a summary of the goals expressed by the Committee:

- Construction of a new regulation size baseball diamond to accommodate higher-age and adult baseball.

- A fully accessible design – including artificial turf infield and potentially outfield – to accommodate Challenger Baseball (for those with cognitive or physical disabilities including use of a wheelchair).
- A development-ready location within Chatham or proximity to accommodate tournaments also hosted at Fergie Jenkins Field.

Location

A standard baseball diamond requires 5 to 6-acres of land, without parking, depending on configuration. Administration has not been able to locate a municipal property of sufficient size within the urban boundaries of Chatham without disrupting or eliminating existing assets. The below options were discussed with the Committee:

1. Purchase of new land
2. Pain Court's Centennial Park
3. Kiwanis Stadium soccer field

The Committee did not prefer the purchase of new land due to the unknown period to acquire land and its added capital cost. If Council prefer this option, it is recommended this project be referred to the Parks & Recreation Master Plan process currently ongoing in 2024 and expected for completion in Spring 2025. The Master Plan will identify and prioritize land requirements for new recreational assets and developments for Council's future consideration.

The Committee did not prefer locating the new baseball diamond at Pain Court's Centennial Park due to the relative inaccessibility of the location. Challenger Baseball is expected to be a significant program offered at the new facility. The Committee is of the opinion that participation in this program may be reduced if it is not in a location serviced by accessible transit and complimented by other built-in park accessibility features. If Council prefer this option, it is recommended administration conduct design work to determine the feasibility and capital costs of renovating or twinning the current Pain Court baseball diamond to meet the specifications of the Committee as well as improve overall park accessibility features. Costs for this exercise would be referred to the 2025 Budget Update.

The Committee preferred locating the new baseball diamond on the current Kiwanis Stadium soccer field, abutting Fergie Jenkins Field at Rotary Park. This location best meets their expressed goals. It is recommended this location be identified as the preferred location for the new baseball diamond. Final Council approval will be dependent on design work to better identify impacts to existing assets outlined herein.

Location Impacts

The Committee's preferred location is expected to result in two impacts to existing recreational assets:

1. Memorial Arena Parking Lot

Preliminary designs show a loss of between 1,500 to 2,900 m² in surface area at Chatham Memorial Arena's 10,000 m² western parking lot, depending on field configuration. This parking lot services events at the arena, Kiwanis Stadium, and Fergie Jenkins Field, as well as hosts its own special events (e.g., annual fair). During the design phase administration will explore if options are available to limit the impact to the parking lot while permitting future field expansion depending on Council's long-term direction for the arena.

2. Soccer Field

A new baseball diamond will eliminate the current soccer field. Kiwanis Stadium features a full-size soccer pitch dividable into two smaller fields. It experiences approximately 80-100 hours of annual permit-use by organized groups as well as casual use by the public. It is anticipated the loss of soccer inventory at this location could be moved to the future rugby/soccer pitch to be constructed at the new Regional Park along Bear Line Road by 2027. An analysis of the Municipality's long-term soccer needs will be done in the Parks & Recreation Master Plan.

Cost and Specifications

The Committee estimated a total fundraising requirement of \$2.5 M for the field's capital construction. This includes outdoor lights which could be deferred to a future construction phase. All construction costs are proposed to be the responsibility of the Committee. It is recommended costs for detailed design and engineering services be Municipal responsibility for the following reasons:

- Ball diamond will be owned, operated, and maintained by the Municipality and final design specifications will impact those ongoing costs.
- Diamond infrastructure will be included in the Municipal Asset Management Plan.
- Final location and layout will impact abutting municipal assets and added or enhanced infrastructure may be necessary to mitigate those impacts (i.e., additional netting, higher fences).

Through ongoing conversations with the Chatham-Kent Barnstormers, it is apparent that Fergie Jenkins Field may require new infrastructure to improve accessibility, capacity and gameday operations. Those improvements should be identified in advance so new development at this abutting property does not limit those opportunities. It is recommended that site plan design for the new ball diamond at the preferred location also include site requirements at Fergie Jenkins Field. Up to \$35,000 to perform this work will be referred to the 2025 Budget Update. Once site layout, infrastructure impacts, and mitigation strategies are determined administration will return to Council for final location approval.

Council Term Priorities

This report supports the following Council Term Priorities:

			
Deliver Excellent Service	Promote Safety & Well-Being	Grow Our Community	Ensure Environmental Sustainability
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Consultation

The CK Community Field of Dreams Committee was consulted regarding the content in this report.

Communication

Approved recommendations will be communicated to the Committee in order to fundraising to be initiated.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ)

A new ball diamond will increase available supply for all groups interested in hosting their baseball programs. This is intended to be Chatham-Kent's first fully accessible ball diamond which will increase recreational opportunities for residents with physical limitations.

Financial Implications

The costs to perform design work of \$35,000 for the new baseball diamond and future site requirements at Fergie Jenkins Field will be referred to the 2025 Budget Update.

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Consulted and confirmed the content of the consultation section of the report by:

Michael St. Denis, Financial Analyst, Financial Services

Attachment: Appendix A – Preferred Location