

Park and Recreation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes ~ January 15, 2014

Approved 6-0; February 20, 2014

Present: Lola Skolnik, Marc Siegel, Kelly Ivy, Betty Sonneveld, Ken Blue, Les Whitmer, Chris Husker, Michael Lee, Abdul Turay.

Staff: Julie McHale, Liaison, Joe McNeal

Guests: Laura Kressler, PSAC, Matt Dirksen, Green ACES, Patricia McManus, MNCPPC-MC

Speakers: Veronika Carella, MD Environmental Health Network
Gail Dalferes, Safe and Healthy Playing Fields Coalition

The meeting was called to order by Lola Skolnik at 7:35 p.m.

Ms. Skolnik provided an overview of the agenda noting the purpose tonight is to gather information and educate PRAB on the issues related to selection of appropriate playground surfacing in Greenbelt.

Ms. Veronika Carella from the Maryland Environmental Health Network was introduced and thanked for attending the meeting to present information. A copy of the information presented is attached to these minutes.

Mr. Lee asked is the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a registry to playground surfaces. Ms. Carella advised she has spoken with the EPA and they are planning to evaluate this in the future.

Ms. Carella passed around a copy of the Maryland Playground and Water Safety Guidelines used for schools. She noted this document did not comment on possible health risks posed by playground surfacing materials.

Ms. Lore Rosenthal pointed out that the executive summary of the "Maryland Children's Environmental Health Progress Report" identified possible risks of cancer, damage to reproductive systems, harm to the endocrine systems in children, etc. by those exposed to some materials that are sometimes used in playground surfacing.

Ms. Skolnik asked if there were any health risks identified with exposure to mold that can develop in Engineered Wood Fiber (EWF) Ms. Carella advised she is not aware of any but noted that the Columbia Association only uses EWF on their playground and that children with asthma who play on playgrounds with shredded rubber are very likely to become sick. She also noted that Bisphenol A (BPA), sometimes found in plastics is a risk for those who come in contact. The highest risk of exposure is to cashiers who frequently handle sales slips with this chemical.

Ms. Carella noted that petro chemicals create the highest risk of problems. She advised that the chemical compounds used in tires are proprietary and it is almost impossible to determine what compounds are present in recycled tires because each manufacturer uses

their own chemical formulas.

Mr. Dirksen noted that mold is a symptom of a greater problem. Ms. McManus advised that if playgrounds with EWF are designed and installed with proper drainage systems, adequate sun light, etc. the likelihood of mold is diminished. However, mold can still occur in outdoor settings. It was noted that periodic application of a mixture of detergent can help to remediate mold in EWF.

Ms. Carella concluded her presentation with no further questions. She offered to provide further assistance if needed in the future.

Ms. Gail Dalferes of the Safe and Healthy Playing Fields Coalition was introduced. Ms. Dalferes advised her primary area of expertise is in synthetic turf fields but that many of the same issues relate to playground surfacing. She noted that turf fields are more expensive than natural grass.

Ms. Dalferes advised that once chemicals enter someone's system they stay. Further, that once chemicals are introduced into the environment they can impact our water, food and air. She advised it is important to get a copy of MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets) for products that are used to get a greater understanding of the product and the implications of their use.

Ms. Dalferes noted that the EPA recently amended their statements on playground rubber surfaces advising that the study done previously on rubber playground surfaces used a small sampling and only tested for levels of lead and not petro chemicals. Additional study is needed to better understand the products used and possible effects on users.

She noted that synthetic turf fields were intended to reduce injuries to players when first developed but that players in the National Football League are experiencing more injuries as a result of synthetic turf fields and it is possible law suits may be filed.

Ms. Sonneveld noted that she recalls when synthetic turf fields were first introduced on college fields and that they were "sold" as reducing the possibility of injury.

Ms. Dalferes noted that synthetic turf fields are very costly to install and very costly to remove. She advised there is currently a Bill being considered by the Maryland State Legislature to spend \$41 million to install 21 synthetic turf fields at area high schools. In addition, there is another bill that may be introduced which will lift any Tort requirements if it is found synthetic turf fields have caused users harm in the future.

Ms. Carella noted there is a risk of petro chemicals leaching into water supplies.

Ms. Scorato noted that many of the materials used in the base surfaces of synthetic playground surfaces include styrene chemicals that can cause environmental health issues.

Ms. Skolnik thanked all the speakers for attending and speaking on the issues.

Ms. Skolnik noted the need to educate the community on the issues and provide a map of area playgrounds which provide the different types of play surfaces so users could choose which playgrounds they wish to use.

There was discussion on how to best relate the possible issues given the lack of clear research on the various types of surfaces.

Ms. McManus advised the Consumer Product Safety Commissions (CPSC) is currently reevaluating the standards they use for thickness of playground surfacing materials. It is expected the guidelines will be adjusted to require playground surfacing be thicker.

Ms. Sonneveld noted that the City will need to bring playgrounds up to code as things change in the future.

Mr. Siegal asked if EWF is ADA compliant. It was noted that it is considered ADA compliant but that EWF surfacing requires greater routine maintenance to keep the surfacing compliant since materials are “kicked” out and if it is not raked back into place the playgrounds becomes less accessible.

It was suggested that the rubber mulch currently in use at some playgrounds in Greenbelt be removed and replaced with EWF because of unknown health issues. There was some dissent on this issue because the health issues remain unknown. However, because rubber mulch is not ADA compliant, PRAB member unanimously agreed that rubber mulch should be removed and replaced with EWF. It was also noted that proper maintenance is an important issue when using EWF and the City needs to address this as relates to future changes.

PRAB members noted that even after all the information that has been gathered on the issue of playground surfacing, they felt ill equipped to make a definitive recommendation on one surface versus another. Because the available research on these issues remains unclear and new technology continues to be developed, it was felt a recommendation that allowed for future adjustments and consideration be made to City Council.

Mr. Dirksen advised that he felt that the Green ACES committee would support PRAB in their recommendations.

Ms. Skolnik advised she would draft a report with recommendations which would be considered at the February 2014 meeting.

Ms. McHale advised PRAB it was time to set aside meeting time to review Contribution and Recognition Group applications. It was noted the regular PRAB scheduled meeting in March is March 19th from 7:30-9:30pm and then we will reserve March 26 from 7:30-9:30pm to review any necessary groups. PRAB members confirmed this was acceptable and asked Ms. McHale to make necessary arrangements.

Ms. McHale advised that a training meeting on the Contribution/Recognition Group application process will be either February 6 or February 13 at 7:30pm in the CC.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:41 p.m.