

Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3/4G

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Lafayette Field Resolution
February 6, 2024

BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

1. At the outset of the renovation and enlargement of Lafayette Elementary School, in 2015, the ballfield immediately to the east of the school was signed, mapped, permitted, and understood as part of Lafayette Park. The first 15 presentations to the School Improvement Team led with a cover slide titled "Lafayette: A School on the Park." To allow students to remain in the neighborhood during construction, rather than having to travel across town, the community agreed to give up use of most of Lafayette Park, including both the ballfield and the upper field, for 18 months. The ballfield would be used for trailers for students; the upper field would be their play area and site of a gym/cafeteria "bubble." In return, DCPS and DGS promised to rehabilitate both fields in the park.
2. During the course of the construction process, title searches revealed most of the ballfield to be DCPS property, with only the backstop and north part of the track in DPR property.
3. In the winter of 2015-2016, DGS and DCPS discussed the surface of the ballfield with the community and School Improvement Team. After hearing from many constituents who felt strongly in favor of natural grass, DGS and DCPS agreed to rebuild a natural grass field. This decision was announced publicly, including at the [March 9, 2016 Community Meeting](#). (slide 7)
4. Although DGS and DCPS provided detailed plans and opportunity for review and discussion by the School Improvement Team for every other aspect of the school renovation and expansion, DGS and DCPS refused to provide detailed plans or specifications for the ballfield or upper field at the Park, which they had promised to de-compact. The School Improvement Team members who asked to discuss the fields were told that the plans were not available, but that the fields would have sufficient drainage.

5. As detailed in the memo presented to Mayor Bowser, DGS, DCPS, and DPR in the July, 2023 walkthrough with Friends of Lafayette-Pointer Park and ANC, problems with construction were almost immediately observed and reported by the SIT members, FOLP, and ANC to city agencies and the prior Ward 4 CM Todd. (14 pages of contacts). Problems of maintenance and results of faulty construction continued to be reported for 6 years, with multiple walkthroughs at the fields, but the city did not remediate either field. Even when specifically asked to advocate on behalf of the lower ballfield, the Lafayette Principal declined to reach out to city agencies, stating in email that she had no mechanism to contact the city. Failure to remediate has led to enormous erosion problems throughout the park and into neighboring streets and gutters, as well as subpar playing areas for our children and community.
6. In the July 2023 walkthrough, the mayor and agencies committed to remediating erosion on the top of the hill and down towards the ballfield. They committed to working with the FOLP and community in designs of erosion control and improvements, and to keep the community informed with respect to any planned remediations or other improvements in the park and field area.
7. ANC commissioner Zeldin, FOLP Board members, and former staffer for Ward 4 CM all recall DCPS' representative affirming a rehabilitated grass field behind the school during the September 2023 meeting with city agencies regarding progress on maintenance issues at the Park and field.
8. In January's ANC meeting, ANC Commissioners inquired of the mayor's representative as to whether the city had developed plans for the remediation of the Lafayette fields. The MOCR confirmed that the city was considering replacing grass with artificial turf on the ballfield, in contravention of the agreement made in 2016 for grass. The mayor's representative refused to say when a community meeting would be; furthermore, the requests of Councilmember Lewis-George, the ANC, and the community to review plans have been denied.
9. The exchange below between CM Lewis George and CA Donahue during his performance oversight hearing earlier this month (video here at 2:16:10 mark): https://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=57&clip_id=8672 sheds light on the issues raised in this resolution.
 - CM Lewis George: Parents and residents near Lafayette elementary school and recreation center are concerned that DPR and DGS may be about to install an artificial turf field. I've asked to see the scope of work and for DGS, DPR and DCPS to hold meetings with the public to get their input, and yet those requests have been denied.

- CA Donahue: "I certainly am committed to making sure you have a scope and there's community engagement from those agencies. If I could just add 30 seconds on this issue, I don't believe there's been a final decision made. From my understanding in meeting myself with some of the field engineers, the tradeoff of natural grass is that even with drainage improvements, the 12-month use of the field, it's a very popular field as you know, it'll be impossible to have the field maintained, its integrity and its look and feel, over as long a term as a field typically does when it's closed for the winter or closed off for non-school purposes. So that's just the tradeoff – turf lasts longer, artificial turf lasts longer. Natural grass, even with improvements, will likely deteriorate in the course of 3-5 years, before there might be the capital budget to infuse it for a renewed surface. But to your specific question, yes, I'll make sure there's engagement with the community and there's transparency about what the two options are."

10. While the above response is helpful, it is concerning in a number of ways that require further elaboration/clarification. For example,
 - a. Implicit in the answer is that a preliminary decision has been reached without community engagement. As such, it is the view of the ANC that the city is in violation of the spirit, if not the black letter laws of transparency, that the past engagement efforts were intended to ensure.
 - b. Lafayette has never been permitted as a 12-month field so the issue of survivability on a 12-month basis is inapposite.
 - c. Maintaining the look and feel of the field over the long term can be sustained by a proper sports-field management group. To this exact point, names of such groups were given to DGS eight years ago and we have no indication that there was any follow up.
 - d. Artificial turf fields require on-going maintenance and specialized equipment. See for example the maintenance program used by Montgomery County Public Schools in the link below. Given the track record of the city in maintaining such things as the bio-retention facilities, permeable pavement, and general park maintenance (we have been waiting for years for the repairs to be made to Lafayette Park) it defies credulity that the city will maintain the artificial turf fields. Unmaintained fields presents an increased hazard to the community.

<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/athletics/programs/default/542923/>

11. It is crucial that the city lives up to its commitments to its residents. The city has failed to honor three commitments: a) the installation of a properly built and well-drained natural field; b) the decompaction and rehabilitation of the upper field; and c)

opportunity for community review and input on any redevelopment plans for Lafayette-Pointer Park and Lafayette-fields.

RESOLVED:

1. ANC 3/4G insists that DGS post the plans on their website. The URL for the page below on the DPR modernization project could work: <https://dgs.dc.gov/page/lafayette-recreation-center-modernization>. Regardless of the specific publicly accessible website to which DGS chooses to post the plans, what it is imperative is that all impacted stakeholders in the community have access to copies of the scope of work and specifications in the plans for Lafayette-Pointer Park grounds and Lafayette ES field within one week of the passage of this resolution.
2. The ANC requests that all relevant city agencies (incl. DGS, DPR, and DCPS,) entrusted with the maintenance and rehabilitation of Lafayette-Pointer park grounds and school field appear before the ANC to answer any and all questions the community has.
3. ANC 3/4G insists that the city honor its 2016 commitment to a natural grass ballfield behind Lafayette, and that the city not use the results of its own poor construction and lack of maintenance as justification for renegeing on that commitment.
4. The ANC insists no rehabilitation occur before the impacted stakeholders in the community have had a meaningful opportunity to review and comment upon the plans, and that the comments of the Friends of Lafayette-Pointer Park, who have been vigilant in their observations and persistent in their efforts to have the responsible agencies correct shoddy work and conditions, be given great weight.

APPROVED at a regular public meeting, notice of which was properly given and at which a quorum of four () of seven () members were present on February XX 2024 by a vote of () yes, () no, and () abstentions.

Lisa R Gore, Chair

Bruce Sherman, Secretary
