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## Millions kicked around for city soccer turfs

By SHAWN LOGAN, Sun Media

Two aldermen are hoping city council will help kick start a plan to transform seven Calgary soccer fields into artificial turf surfaces.

Ald. Andre Chabot and Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart will ask their council colleagues on Monday to hand over about \$5-million in provincial infrastructure dollars to help upgrade hard-to-maintain grass fields to high-tech turf that will maximize usage and potentially attract world-class events.

Chabot said with the city already setting aside \$40-million out of \$3.3 billion in provincial funding for recreation, investing in fields that will allow athletic activities rain or shine has some good bang for the buck.

“It would increase the viability and profitability of these fields and ensure they get the best usage,” he said.

“With artificial turf you would have this constant surface that can be used over and over even if there’s a lot of rain.”

If approved, the city would work with the Calgary Soccer Federation — which includes Calgary Minor Soccer and both the men’s and women’s adult leagues — on a \$15-million plan to have five artificial turf fields at the Calgary Soccer Centre in the southeast and two more at the Calgary West Soccer Centre by next October.

Sharon Evens, a member of the federation’s artificial turf committee, said last year rained out fields resulted in 20 days with no activity and providing an artificial alternative will help level the playing field.

“Because it’s artificial turf it doesn’t need to rest so we can rent it out every night of the week and we could extend our season from 22 weeks to 30,” she said.

“If we had an artificial turf field we could also have really high calibre teams come.”

Evens noted Edmonton has six artificial fields and Saskatoon has two while the Greater Vancouver area has 25.

Calgary had hoped to attract the U-16 nationals to the city two years ago but was shunned in favour of Edmonton because it didn’t have enough facilities, something Evens said she hopes would not happen again if this plan goes forward.

In addition to the city money, she added the soccer federation will be hitting up the province as well as its own associations to raise funds and is already expecting a significant private donation when all the other cogs fall into place.

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