

February 23, 2009

New soccer fields put on hold

By SHAWN LOGAN, Sun Media

Soccer enthusiasts will have to wait to hear whether city council will commit to funding new artificial turf fields after a pitch for immediate cash was kicked aside.

City council heard yesterday (MON) that a request to set aside \$2.75 million to help build five new weather-resilient turf fields isn't possible without scuttling other approved projects to push it up the priority list, prompting aldermen to put the motion on hold.

The federal government is still trying to work out the details on a \$500-million recreation fund, which could see as much as \$15 million available for Calgary but it may still be another month before any money is accessible.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart said the city has thrown money at dubious projects like \$25-million for an iconic pedestrian bridge over the Bow River, so squeezing a few million more out of lower priority areas for desperately needed fields makes sense.

"If you can spend \$25 million on designer bridges, why not send \$2.75 million so we can leverage that for a much more expensive project," she said.

"We missed a golden opportunity to make a shovel-ready project that would be operational by the summer."

The Calgary Soccer Federation has made the pitch to city council to chip in for the \$11-million project, while seeking the rest of the cash from the provincial and federal governments, private partners and fundraising.

With the five new fields, slated to be built at the Calgary Soccer Centre at 7000 48 St. S.E., the artificial fields could run a total of 3,000 hours during the year versus the estimated 550 hours available for regular grass fields.

Ald. Ray Jones said the Calgary Sports Council is in the midst of setting up its own priority list so pushing artificial turf fields to the top without a full accounting is unfair.

"We shouldn't be looking at any projects until the sports council comes back with a policy," he said.

Abby Rogers, 13, plays for Calgary minor soccer and was disappointed after hearing council



wouldn't make an immediate commitment.

"It would be really nice to have — we missed two or three games last season and our team was very upset about it," she said.

"I think the turf would help a lot because sometimes the fields have puddles and they're muddy so we can't play."

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