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Artificial soccer fields a real need say proponents

By SHAWN LOGAN, Sun Media

The city will look at giving a financial kick start to plans to build five artificial turf soccer fields in southeast Calgary.

Representatives of the city's soccer community made their pitch for the manufactured pitches before the community and protective services committee Wednesday, asking the city to chip in for half of the estimated \$11-million price tag.

And despite city administration telling committee members there are no extra funds to be spent on the project, aldermen called for an installation and funding plan for the five fields, which are intended to be built at the Calgary Soccer Centre at 7000 48 St. S.E. and ready by July.

Rob Savard, chairman of the expansion committee for the Calgary Soccer Federation, said the group has already squirreled away around \$2 million and any financial boost from the city would be money well spent.

"With an economic downturn you get concerned about corporate dollars and the province and the municipal governments have to show some restraint," he said.

"However, these projects benefit so many people simultaneously for a relatively low cost that we think it's probably the best economic bang for your government dollar."

Committee members heard with no need to shut fields down due to weather or rest periods, an artificial field could run a total of 3,000 hours during the year versus the estimated 550 hours available for regular grass fields.

That would lead to a spike in revenue as well as allowing the city to attract international tournaments and other events.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart said with federal recreation dollars and corporate naming opportunities available, she doesn't anticipate the city will be on the hook for the full \$5.5 million.

"This is relatively low cost, it's sustainable, it has all kinds of benefits that go along with it and it's one of those low hanging fruits that we should grab and run with," she said.

"I'm quite optimistic we can make this happen."

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