



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 12/16/2025

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors and Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District Board of Directors

Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Regional Parks and Ag + Open Space

Staff Name and Phone Number: Bert Whitaker, (707) 565-2041; Misti Arias, (707) 565-7264

Vote Requirement: Informational Only

Supervisory District(s): Countywide

Title:

Athletic Field Turf Workshop

Recommended Action:

Receive a presentation from staff on athletic field turf alternatives, including Regional Parks' athletic field inventory; Ag + Open Space Community Spaces Matching Grant Program criteria related to athletic turf and field inventory; and information about the benefits and drawbacks of artificial turf and natural turf.

Executive Summary:

This item is a Board of Supervisors Workshop to discuss athletic turf fields. Regional Parks will provide an update of its current athletic turf field inventory and future planned athletic fields. Ag + Open Space will provide updates on the current athletic field grants that have been approved and a discussion about the current grant criteria. The presentation will also include an update from the recent action by Zero Waste Sonoma directing their staff to develop a model ordinance to ban or place a moratorium on artificial turf and provide information about the benefits and drawbacks of artificial and natural turf materials for athletic fields.

Discussion:

The Athletic Field Turf Workshop presentation provides an overview of current and planned athletic field resources across Regional Parks and those with Ag + Open Space Community Spaces funding. Currently, there are 23 athletic fields managed under Regional Parks, with 19 being natural turf and four artificial, plus three additional fields in planning.

Ag + Open Space provided funding for three artificial turf fields managed by the City of Petaluma and accepted grant requests for three additional fields in Santa Rosa. The workshop will highlight strategic planning around turf development and maintenance and overview the role the Community Spaces Matching Grant Program plays in funding these public fields.

A comparison of natural grass and artificial turf is central to the presentation. Natural grass offers benefits including biodegradability, lower construction costs, and cooler surface temperatures but comes with higher maintenance demands, vulnerability to weather, and field closure requirements. Alternatively, artificial turf enables consistent, nearly year-round use, reduces watering needs and supports tournament hosting; though it poses environmental concerns such as microplastic pollution, heat retention and has a finite lifespan for components such as fibers and shock pads.

Agenda Date: 12/16/2025

Cost comparisons and environmental impacts underscore the trade-offs between the two turf types. While natural turf supports ecosystems and may be perceived as safer in terms of softness, it requires intensive resources to maintain. Synthetic turf offers economic advantages in the long run due to lower maintenance and extended usability but carries concerns regarding health, environmental safety, and eventual disposal.

Zero Waste Sonoma (ZWS) conducted a hearing on November 20, 2025, to discuss the findings from their AB 939 Local Task Force. That hearing included robust information and research related to the environmental impacts, disposal, public health and safety, and the financial impacts of natural versus artificial turf. The ZWS Board directed their staff to develop a model ordinance to ban or place a moratorium on artificial turf for future consideration by local public agencies. That process is anticipated to require approximately 12 months for research, drafting, and stakeholder engagement before ordinance consideration.

Strategic Plan:

N/A

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

Not part of the 2025 Significant Items Calendar version evaluated for Racial Equity Toolkit application.

Prior Board Actions:

None

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

N/A

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Athletic Field Turf Workshop PowerPoint Presentation Slides

Attachment 2: Zero Waste Sonoma, November 20, 2025 Discussion on the Development of a Model Ordinance to Ban or Place a Moratorium on Artificial Turf

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

None