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2 city parks to get new artificial turf

Foundation puts up \$4.5 million, S.F. adds \$1 million

By Becky Bowman
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Soccer and baseball players at two San Francisco parks could be saying goodbye to messy, uneven natural grass fields and playing on artificial turf by September, thanks to a public-private partnership announced Wednesday.

Through the partnership, announced by Mayor Gavin Newsom and other officials at Garfield Square park, the nonprofit City Fields Foundation would spend up to \$4.5 million to renovate soccer and baseball fields at Garfield and Silver Terrace Playground, and develop a permit and reservation system for renting field time. The city would provide \$1 million, bringing total project funding to \$5.5 million.

The project would replace heavily used natural grass with synthetic turf, cutting maintenance needs dramatically and providing more consistently playable surfaces for soccer players at Garfield Square and baseball, softball and soccer players at Silver Terrace.

That's wonderful news, said Jose Trigueros, who lives three blocks from Garfield Square and has two daughters, ages 9 and 12, who use the soccer field. The field there is bare in many spots,

dusty when it's dry and muddy when it's wet.

Neighborhood children now call the field, "*el parque donde te rompes el pie*," or "the park where you break your foot," said Trigueros, because of its poor condition. "I'm very excited," he added.

Officials said they have high hopes that the turf projects at Garfield Square and Silver Terrace won't be the last for the partnership.

"This is, in relative terms, a modest first step," Newsom said.

Both the plans for the fields and the foundation's gift must be approved by the mayoral-appointed Recreation and Park Commission, which is scheduled to take up the issue today.

At Garfield Square on Wednesday, commission President Gloria Bonilla said she hopes the commission will vote to support the program and that the two fields "are only the beginning" of the effort.

The City Fields Foundation is a private nonprofit organization that was founded last year by Bill, John and Bob Fisher, sons of Gap Inc. founder Donald Fisher, to address the city's shortage of playfields. On Wednesday, foundation Trustee Bill Fisher said he and his brothers grew up playing sports in the city and now have children who play soccer and lacrosse.

"For many reasons, too often our fields look like this — dusty, pockmarked, lacking game lines,

goals or even benches," Fisher said. "Not only does that make for poor sports, it sends the wrong message to local families. It says our priorities are elsewhere."

Newsom, Supervisor Tom Amiano and others touted the benefits of the artificial turf — "no mud, no mowing and no downtime." Also highlighted were advances in synthetic turf, which is now thicker and more comfortable than the original AstroTurf, first installed at the Houston Astrodome in the 1960s. Newer varieties of artificial turf are more

like natural grass, backers of the plan said, with more cushioning and more give.

Original AstroTurf was blamed for a number of unique injuries, including "turf toe."

The newer turfs have received good reviews at two soccer fields in San Francisco — at Franklin Square in the Mission and Youngblood Coleman park in the Bayview — where they already have been installed, said Patrick Hannan, a spokesman for the foundation.

Seated near a soccer goal at Franklin Square on Wednesday,

soccer player Isaias Huchin, 24, said that though he prefers natural turf, artificial turf doesn't die under heavy usage. It also provides more consistency, he said.

"It's soft, and the ball rolls more smoothly," Huchin said.

Omar Campos, 19, waited nearby for a ride home after coming from near Daly City to practice at Franklin Square. He said he plans to join a soccer team at the park because of its field.

"It's just nice," he said.

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