



October 1, 2008

Letter to Council

RE: Proposed Artificial Field on South Side of the Existing Grass Field

The Board of BIFC felt it important to clarify our position to Council in regard to the ongoing debate over the construction of an artificial field, and the recent proposal to place a synthetic turf field on the south side of the existing grass field.

Given all that has transpired in recent months on the subject of an artificial turf field, perhaps it is important for both Council and the Community that the Club reiterates why it was formed and what its goals are as a club.

When we formed the Club in 2007, our original mission statement was to promote the development of soccer on Bowen Island in a healthy and safe environment, for all those who desire to be involved in the beautiful game.

Our Goals were:

- To stop the continuing drop out rate of those on Bowen Island who wish to be active in soccer but cannot do so as a result of the inconvenience of commuting off island
- To provide adequate facilities to enable those involved in soccer and the community to flourish in a safe environment, which will allow for the further development of the game.
- To provide the people of Bowen Island with a chance of becoming involved in their community through the healthy pursuit of sport.
- To encourage a self-sustaining community and to reduce the environmental damage caused by commuting off island.
- To support the local economy by encouraging individuals and families to stay on island and in so doing to foster a healthy, social environment on Bowen Island.

When we were first informed in November, 2007 of the project to install an artificial turf field next to the tennis court, we were thrilled because we would be keeping the majority of the grass field whilst adding an even, safe playing surface which would be lit and usable year round.

With the rapid rise in memberships and the desire for our players and teams to further develop by playing more competitive games, the Club believed the project represented a massive improvement to the existing facilities and that it would provide enormous benefits to the Club's membership and the larger community.

It is important to stress that the Club is a non-profit organization borne out of a sense of giving to our community and to our children, and that all of the Club's coaches and managers are volunteers. It must be stressed that though the Club obviously has a vested interest in the improvement of facilities to which it is a direct beneficiary, it supports the improvements only as a result of the positive impact we feel it would have on the community as a whole.

After months sitting on discussion groups in regards to the proposed location, and taking in to consideration a number of factors and looking at a great number of possibilities, it was clear to us that the original proposed location was the best option. This view was shared by all the stakeholders on this project and within the working group.

It allowed for a larger playable surface, it created a surface that could be used year round which would allow for the creation of leagues to be played in the winter evenings and would allow players to play soccer from November - April (which is currently not feasible). There is no way of telling how many increased members the Club would have with such a surface but judging by the number of people who have told us directly that they will not play soccer on Bowen due to the field conditions, it is likely a significant number.

The gym floor cannot be considered an appropriate surface to play on and is already completely overbooked.

The decision to shelve the project was met with a great deal of disappointment and, to be blunt, disillusionment.

The Club has now been asked to express its reactions to the new proposal, which involves installing an artificial turf field on the lower half the existing grass field.

While the Club is pleased and hopeful that Council and staff are still discussing this topic and considering viable options, we wish to categorically reassert our support of an artificial grass field as per Council's original proposal, and feel it would be neglectful for us to not point out some of the new proposals shortcomings.

1) Reducing the existing grass field does not solve the current problem of the lack of proper playable surfaces on Bowen.

2) Reducing the existing field to two halves would only allow us to continue to operate our programs for those aged 4-9 and would severely diminish the options available to those older than 10.

While the Club stands by its belief in the importance of small-sided games, it also recognizes that children 10 and older are going to require further competition than just house league. From a development perspective, players must be given the ability to challenge themselves and learn to play against other teams. This can only be accomplished by playing exhibition games or eventually league games, which will not be possible if the current grass field is split in to two fields, with neither fields meeting the field size requirements for U12 players.

If we do not wish to see our older players beginning to migrate off island for soccer (it has started already), then we must allow our current players aged 10 and over to develop and continue to pursue their soccer pursuits on Bowen by being able to host games on a surface that is at least 45 x 65 metres and meets the standards set by the North Shore Soccer Association and the British Columbia Soccer association.

Therefore, with that in mind, the BIFC Board wishes to clarify that while we welcome and support the creation of an artificial turf field, we believe that it should only occur if there is a clear, concise and certain agreement to expand the existing grass field to a regulation sized field upon completion of the turf field or within a very short period of time thereafter. It should also be stated that if this were to occur, the result would be an ideal solution to the current field crisis.

It is our understanding that the budget for the new grass field proposal is based on construction of an entirely new regulation-sized grass field that completely replaces the existing surface, as opposed to simply enlarging the existing grass field, with the extension built in a manner similar to that of the existing grass field.

The Club believes that the existing surface (and any similarly constructed additional surface) is and would continue to be acceptable, and that its maintenance and supervision could be provided by a local professional. The choice not to replace the entire surface of the expanded grass field would likely result in significant savings. The Club has spoken with the Superintendent of the BI Golf Club (Spencer Grundy) and he has told us that the existing grass field can be improved with proper care and supervision, and with a specific moderate yearly budget. Mr. Grundy has already begun to work on the field and it has improved under his care. Unfortunately, nothing can prevent its inevitable deterioration given the current overuse of the field.

One factor in preserving the grass field would be to avoid using it during poor weather. The artificial field could be used during these times to allow the grass field to recuperate as well as be closed for repairs and maintenance.

We believe that expanding existing playing surfaces would result in a clear gain to the community. So while the current proposal is reassuring in that the artificial turf project is still being discussed for its obvious merits, the Club believes that Council should not support an alternative that is in many ways potentially limiting.

Further, after looking at the proposed costs, and considering the needs of the school and the club, we wish to reemphasize our full support of Council's original proposal,

which we feel is still the best option in regard to fulfilling the needs of the soccer community and the Bowen community as a whole.

It was understood from the outset that the biggest challenge facing the Club was the lack of adequate facilities to support the Club both now and in the future. This has been exemplified in numerous ways. One has only to come out on Sundays and see the field completely covered with players of all ages to see that there is a desperate need for extra space. Some may argue that there is nothing wrong with the existing field, but I urge anyone to take a walk around the field to witness for themselves the holes, ruts and exposed sprinklers that currently cover the field, making it exceptionally challenging to find safe, playable areas (and this in September when the field has been used little in the previous weeks). Just wait until the rain starts and the 140 soccer members have been on it every single day to say nothing of the additional impacts from BICS students, IPS ultimate players and other user groups.

The primary need from a facilities point of view is a playable surface throughout the year and during non-school hours. It was with this in mind, and the pleading from parents to provide their children with the opportunity to be active outdoors after school and during the dark winter hours before 9 p.m., that made it abundantly clear that the community required an even, safe playing surface with lights.

The Club has long maintained that the priority to the development of the sport was the ability to play beyond 5 p.m. from October - April. The existing daylight outside of the school hours is not enough to fulfill the demand. If asked to choose between a lit grass field and a non-lit artificial one, the Club would choose the lights.

An artificial grass field next to the tennis courts with lights would have addressed all of these needs. Knowing that it would likely be an early casualty of budget cuts, the Club was prepared to fundraise for lights assuming the wiring and infrastructure would be in place.

We reiterate our appreciation for the efforts being made by Council to address the ongoing need for improved and expanded facilities that nobody in the community denies is a priority and a necessity, but we urge you to make the right decision and not the easy one.

If we are to support the installation of a synthetic grass field along the southern portion of the existing grass field, then we believe the existing grass field must be expanded to a regulation size and that five years is too long to wait. Council must then decide if the cost of preserving some trees is worth the additional costs of expanding the existing grass field.

Respectfully and sincerely,

BIFC Board

