

City of Huntington Park

Park Facility Maintenance

**Prepared as part of the City of Huntington Park
Parks & Recreation Master Plan
May 2008**

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The Consultant has reviewed the level of maintenance within all of the parks (documented by periodic photographs near the start and completion of this Master Plan Report), has met with the City’s Field Maintenance Supervisor (within the Field Services Department) as well as the Maintenance Contractor’s Supervisor (from TruGreen LandCare), and has reviewed the City Tree and Grounds Maintenance Agreement in order to develop a better understanding of the level of maintenance services under contract, and gain insight from those with hands-on involvement in the provision of those services.

Field Overview of Parks’ Turf

The City’s park landscapes have significant deficiencies throughout most of the park system, with the tell-tale results being bare soil and patchy turf in numerous areas. Extreme cases, with little or no healthy turf, are the following:



1. Salt Lake Park “Soccer Circle”



2. Salt Lake Park General Picnic Areas



3. Westside Park Open Multi-Purpose Field



4. Freedom Park Open Multi-Purpose Field

The Grounds Maintenance Agreement dictates that all turf areas, throughout the parks system, are to be aerated immediately prior to the semi-annual fertilization program. These horticultural practices should promote aggressive turf establishment for the warm season grasses prior to peak summer uses, and cool season grasses for the remaining year’s scheduled and casual activities.

Again, photographic documentation was collected near the commencement and near the completion of the preparation of this Master Plan Report. No significant improvements are recordable, with the exception of the front of the Recreation Center, Ball Diamond #4's infield turf, and Civic Center Park, which have been renovated with overseeding of cool season grasses. This exceptional work is consistent with the Maintenance Agreement's requirements.



Civic Center Park - Currently Under Renovation

For all remaining turf areas throughout the parks system, the Consultant team did not experience observing any activities, or see the obvious evidence of an aerification program in the eight-month development of the Master Plan. This includes not seeing the soil plugs scattered throughout the turf nor seeing new turf attempting to establish. This leaves the Consultant experiencing a significant “disconnect” between the maintenance program discussed in the meetings with maintenance management personnel and the field observations and photographic documentation. The following are before and after photos:

Salt Lake Park Soccer Circle



04/18/2007

Salt Lake Park Picnic Area



04/18/2007

Freedom Park MP Field



04/18/2007



12/13/2007



12/13/2007



12/13/2007

Westside Park MP Field



04/18/2007

Westside Park MP Field



04/18/2007



12/13/2007



12/13/2007

A further audit of actual maintenance practices appears to be warranted to confirm the level of compliance being attained by the Maintenance Contractor. Should the audit confirm that the specified horticultural practices are in compliance, there are other dominant factors that are preventing the on-going occurrence of healthy turf throughout the parks.

Periodically, there may be a need to adjust scheduled maintenance activities due to unforeseen conflicts. The rescheduling of that particular maintenance activity needs to be subject to a mutually-agreed upon date with the Parks Maintenance Supervisor, the Parks & Recreation Director / designated representative, and the Contractor's representative.

Regardless of the current practices, likely causes of limited healthy turf conditions can be categorized into three scenarios:

1. Intense use of turf areas throughout the year, with little or no annually scheduled Rehabilitation Periods. These are critical periods that are dedicated solely to the re-establishment of optimum growing conditions and turf redevelopment.

The exceptions are scheduled rehabilitation periods for the Ball Diamonds at Salt Lake Park, as follows:

- a. Infield Turf – for a 90-day period, in January through March
- b. Diamond #4 – for a 60-day period, in February through March

Also, there is a scheduled rehabilitation for the fenced Soccer Field at Salt Lake Park, as follows:

- c. Soccer Field Turf – for a 90-day period, in May through July

Given the year-round intense use of the City's parks, the Rehabilitation Programs should focus on the establishment of cool season grasses (Ryes and Fescues), starting in October, and re-juvenation of warm season grasses (Common Bermuda), starting in April.

2. The required semi-annual aerification and immediate fertilization program of park turf is not frequent enough to maintain necessary horticultural conditions within the soil to sustain healthy park turf. Of critical importance are the following activities:
 - a. Air movement in the soil,
 - b. Nutrients readily available to the turf root system, and
 - c. Free movement of water to a 6" depth for a healthy turf roots system.

This is assuming that the Specifications are being executed as detailed in the Maintenance Agreement. The City's Field Maintenance Supervisor indicates that some turf areas, such as the fenced Soccer Field at Salt Lake Park, receive *monthly* aerification programs, with limited results.

3. The third scenario is the non-sports and passive / leisure recreation activities, such as Carnivals and Circuses, being allowed on park turf areas. These activities create severe compaction problems that the turf cannot overcome, given the current horticultural practices being provided. The weight of heavy vehicles and equipment, extraordinary volumes of people, and the required 3-week halt of normal irrigation programs to accommodate the move-ons, the multiple-day Carnival and Circus events, and the move-offs, all contribute to creating conditions that continue to prove making it impossible to sustain healthy turf in these use areas.

A major improvement to the ability to sustain healthy green turf, within the City's sports fields, will, unfortunately, require additional sports fields that will allow the rotation of intense uses between fields. Each field needs to have a minimum down time of 60 days before the community can expect to experience a durable improvement in turf quality.

Review of City's Maintenance Agreement's Scope of Work

As indicated above, the Consultant team thoroughly reviewed the *City Tree and Grounds Maintenance Agreement*, currently executed with TruGreen LandCare, to gain appreciation of specified levels of maintenance services, and a photo-documented field review of the resulting success in achieving healthy park plant materials. This Master Plan Report did not attempt to conduct a detailed accounting of the level of compliance between the Maintenance Agreement and actual field practice. In an interview with the City's Field Maintenance Supervisor, as well as the Maintenance Contractor's Supervisor, it was stated that services performed are in compliance with contracted service levels.

Prior to the City undertaking an expansion of services through an increase in maintenance service levels, a detailed accounting of current service levels is appropriate. The City should consider awarding an independent park maintenance study and recommendations by a qualified horticultural consultant who has proven familiarity with public park turf management.

Development of Appropriate City Park Maintenance Standards

To improve upon the attainment of more desirable results, it is the recommendation of the Consultant that Park Maintenance Standards be established that can be observed for compliance by both Field Services contract managers, and the Recreation Supervisor and Recreation Coordinators; both as they provide services within the facilities, and interact with the sports user groups and general public.

These measurable maintenance standards involve setting standards (acceptable to the users, general public, and City policymakers), for the condition of parks, public facilities, median islands and playgrounds. These “physical characteristic” maintenance standards, focusing on performance-based results through interactive maintenance management decisions, should be established and agreed-upon between the Field Services Department’s maintenance staff and the Parks & Recreation Department’s recreation staff. Once agreed upon, the City’s maintenance staff should confirm the appropriate requirements are within the *City Tree and Grounds Maintenance Agreement* to achieve these targeted results. Currently, the *City Tree and Grounds Maintenance Agreement* describes, in detail, the frequency of maintenance practices and materials that are required during the contract year. Unfortunately, the Contractor is not held responsible for achieving interdepartmentally-approved standard physical conditions of the playing fields and casual activity turf areas within the parks system.



For measurable compliance reviews, undertaken by multi-departmental observers, critical maintenance standards should read as follows:

Playing fields shall be safe; having 98% of the playing field covered with healthy, green turf mowed at ½ inch, which is relatively weed-free, level, and is 95% free of

bare spots, holes and ruts, rocks, and other obstructions which would impact the playability of the area.

Playing fields shall be in a condition that the Department of Parks & Recreation receives less than 10 complaints from users in any given "sports user season".

Parks maintenance shall include Best Horticultural Practices for maintaining healthy park turf which includes 95% of irrigation systems on playing fields shall be in good working condition, providing adequate irrigation coverage 98% of the time.

Should the City desire to refine multiple levels of park maintenance, including such highly-visible areas as the front of the Recreation Center, Civic Center Park, and highly-scheduled sports fields, such as the infield turf areas of Ball Diamond #4, the Scope of Maintenance Work needs to be re-structured to describe levels of tolerances in the frequency of achieving spelled-out physical conditions of various activity areas throughout the parks system. As an example, the highest maintenance level would require mowing at a frequency that requires mowing more frequently



(during the most rapid growth periods for each seasons grasses), so that maximum turf height does not exceed (as an example: $\frac{3}{4}$ inches); soil aerification, re-seeding, and fertilization would be performed as frequently as required to always have healthy, lush turf without bare spots; and litter removal and container servicing at an appropriate level that never allows trash to remain on the grounds or overflowing the receptacles, regardless of the use intensity.

This Master Plan Report was not commissioned to conduct and summarize an in-depth Park Operations and Maintenance Study. Should the City determine it appropriate to have a consultant conduct the park maintenance study and recommendations, discussed above, a report should be prepared to include such an in-depth analysis.

Review of City's Maintenance Costs

The Consultant team reviewed the annual contracted park maintenance costs for the Huntington Park public park system. Before discussing comparative costs with those incurred by other municipalities, the Consultant wishes to raise a question of whether the City is receiving any adjustments to monthly invoices from the Contractor, for those areas which photographic documentation indicate are not receiving efforts for mowing, edging, fertilization, or soils aerification. During the development of this Master Plan, current invoices (April to December, 2007) have not been available for review. An audit of these billings would be appropriate prior to the commencement of a new Maintenance Contract year.

As a part of the City's park maintenance costs review, the Consultant has gathered data from other southern California municipalities to provide a level of comparison of budgeted monies for park maintenance.

Annual Parks Maintenance Costs Comparison:

- City of Huntington Park \$13,110 / acre / year
- City of Bell \$13,900 / acre / year
- City of Yorba Linda \$13,930 / acre / year
- City of San Clemente \$12,100 / acre / year
- City of Poway \$12,870 / acre / year

This research has confirmed that Huntington Park is paying park maintenance costs for contract horticultural maintenance which is very consistent with the southern California region.