

NEWTON PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURE DEPARTMENT

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NICOLE BANKS
COMMISSIONER

Memorandum

Date: February 17, 2022
To: City of Newton Councilors
From: Derek Mannion, Superintendent of Public Grounds Maintenance
Cc: Commissioner Nicole Banks
Subject: Proposal to Use Herbicides on Public Property

Since 2003 the Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture has sparingly used herbicides on public property. All pesticide use is overseen by the IPM Advisory Committee and follow the City of Newton IPM Policy and Procedures. These documents were adopted by Mayor Cohen in September 1997. Our Parks, Recreation & Culture Department has been at the forefront of limiting the use of pesticides on public property for almost 20 years. During that time, we have tried a pilot organic turf program, contractual turf programs and departmental turf programs with very little pest control success. Every year for nearly two decades, thousands of Newton athletes have had to play on suboptimal fields due to pests in our athletic fields.

In December of 2018, field users began discussions with our department about improving athletic fields. In the three plus years that followed, the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department, along with the IPM Committee, have been working towards one common goal: to listen and to act on field user concerns to improve athletic field safety and playability. This can only be accomplished through our IPM Committee and with community engagement. The IPM Committee works to ensure the process of any herbicide application is thoroughly vetted. Our IPM Committee regularly meets and reviews any documents that are presented in the herbicide application process. Community engagement ensures we are cognizant of Newton residents' comments and concerns. Approved herbicide applications adhere to all federal, state and City of Newton regulations. Newton's regulations are the most demanding of all three. In June of 2020 the City of Newton IPM Advisory Committee approved an herbicide application at three locations. After our 2020 herbicide pilot program was reviewed, we became acutely aware of two things. First, herbicides on athletic fields work. Our pilot program showed that weed levels were dramatically reduced, and some weeds (white clover) were eliminated. Second, there are a high number of athletic fields that have surpassed our IPM pest threshold limit.

With the documented positive results and the cost benefit of our pilot program, the PRC Department has developed a three-year timeline to continue this valuable process to improve the City of Newton's irrigated athletic fields. In this timeframe, there will be a three-tiered approach to our program: increased monitoring of irrigated athletic fields, increased contractual turf work on irrigated athletic fields and increased herbicide applications to the irrigated athletic fields which exceed our IPM approved pest threshold limit. Our monitoring process will observe and document pest populations, our contractual turf work will focus on fifteen irrigated sites for calendar year 2022 and our herbicide application locations will occur at four of these fifteen contractual turf sites. These herbicide applications will only target weeds in our athletic fields and immediate surrounding area, not the entire open space area. This approach over time will improve our athletic fields by reducing pest thresholds and creating a better playing and more enjoyable playing surface. As athletic fields improve, the need for future herbicide applications should diminish. Year two of our expanded herbicide program will include four locations (Burr Park, Newton Highlands Park, Newton North High School and Newton South High School) and year three may include four locations (Albemarle Field, Lincoln Warren, Lower Falls Community Center and Nahant Park). Herbicide timelines and locations are determined by pest thresholds. Next year please know that all IPM correspondence can be found at our ipm webpage: <https://www.newtonma.gov/government/parks-recreation-culture/maintenance/integrated-pest-management>

