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1 message

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Is Artificial Turf Safe for Our Kids and Our Environment?
An Expert Panel and Community Discussion
March 26, 7-8:30PM
Zoom Only – [Register](#) for the Link

The program is in response to rising neighbor concerns about artificial turf proposed for playing fields at both Lafayette Elementary and the Episcopal Center for Children. Look for additional details in the coming days.

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DC proposes artificial turf at Lafayette; neighbors react
Major media publish exposés on turf-PFAS links
ANC addresses parking, transportation, education
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Plus:
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DC proposes artificial turf at Lafayette. Before we get into particulars of the Lafayette meeting, let's step back and frame the issue at hand. It's not only Lafayette that's in question. Artificial turf (nearly four acres of it) is also in the offing at the Maret School sports complex about to be built at the Episcopal Center for Children. What we hear in the community is two-fold: folks want both access to durable, reliably playable athletic fields for school and recreational sports programs, and they want to ensure the safety and well-being of youth athletes and the environment. Increased [injuries](#), [heat effects](#), [disposal challenges](#) (despite recycling efforts) have long been concerns about artificial turf. New worries have emerged over [plastic pollution](#) (artificial turf is plastic) and, above all, [PFAS](#) "forever chemicals" ([all artificial turf](#) contains PFAS). Even though artificial turf has been around for some sixty years and is prevalent across DC, including in our neighborhood, the emerging science is raising new questions. One area of optimism is the many recent technological advances in growing and sustaining natural grass fields. We needn't look far to see these. The Maryland Soccer Plex in Germantown operates the [Sports Turf Institute](#), which is leading the way locally in sustainable natural grass fields. [Subair](#) and [DrainTalent](#) are commercial firms that have pioneered aeration, soil management, and irrigation systems to produce state-of-the-art natural fields used by a host of college and professional sports teams.

Now, to the Lafayette meeting. The District's turf proposal was part of the overall field renovation plan that the Department of General Services (DGS) and Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) rolled out to some 50 community members at the school on Wednesday night (March 13). I attended. The presentation focused on two separate but related aspects: (1) to mitigate storm water runoff and erosion from the upper field to the lower field and (2) to redo the lower field, using artificial turf.

On both counts, participants complained that DGS and DPR had failed to honor promises to engage the community, specifically Friends of Lafayette Park (FOLP), which has maintained the very substantial park grounds and plant beds for years. FOLP has long asked the District to make good on a series of promises to maintain the field. But neither DGS nor DPR had reached out before announcing their plans.

To address the water runoff and erosion, the District proposes various bioretention beds on the embankment between the two fields. Community members had questions but largely saw the runoff and erosion control measures as warranted. The proposal to use artificial turf met a very different fate, however. Community members took District officials to task for having failed to show cost comparisons (between artificial and grass turf), to undertake the necessary health and safety as well as environmental impact assessments (given PFAS), and to heed pending litigation by the DC Office of the Attorney General against 25 chemical companies for PFAS contamination of District natural resources.

Community members in opposition to the District's plans were not the only voices in the room, however. A representative of the Lafayette Home and School Association (HSA) said most of the HSA's board supported artificial turf. He noted what many believe to be true, that only turf, not natural grass, can withstand the heavy use the lower field sees from children during school hours and sports organizations and residents at other times. Another neighbor, representing Cap City Little League, said their organization respected the environmental concerns and needed access to playing fields, which are often in short supply. No doubt other community members not in attendance share these views. Again, they point up a tension and need for balance between ensuring playable fields and safeguarding our children and the environment.

My colleague Michael Zeldin, who represents the district where Lafayette is located, asked DGS and DPR representatives if they had given "great weight" to ANC 3/4G's February 26 resolution calling on the District to use natural grass on the field. They demurred. Commissioner Zeldin is now drafting a second resolution agreeing with but seeking further details on the proposed bioretention beds while once more asking the District to use natural grass for the lower field. Action on the resolution awaits the next regular ANC meeting on March 25.

Major media further investigate artificial turf-PFAS links. The irony of the District's position is that just last week The Washington Post, The Philadelphia Inquirer, and The Guardian all carried major stories on artificial turf and its links to PFAS, among other things. The Inquirer recapped a series it began a year ago with eight takeaways, including: "**Modern turf fields still contain PFAS**," debunking notions propagated by turf companies and the Synthetic Turf Council that new types of turf don't have PFAS; "**The NFL players union has 'considerable concerns' about PFAS in the league's turf fields**;" and "**Parents and coaches of cancer-stricken youth athletes are worried about turf fields**."

The Post and Guardian both noted new PFAS research by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). PEER's release on its study leads with this: "Soccer players and coaches on artificial turf pick up toxic PFAS on their skin ... All brands of artificial turf tested contain PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) in carpet grass fibers and these chemicals leach off these surfaces, even on brand new fields." The lead researcher at PEER is Kyla Bennett, who discovered PFAS in artificial turf in 2019 and is today the country's foremost authority on the subject.

Where to start if you're just learning about PFAS? See the following excerpts from the articles by the Environmental Protection Agency, The New York Times, and Bloomberg with associated links.

For a primer on PFAS: "PFAS are a group of manufactured chemicals that have been used in industry and consumer products since the 1940s because of their useful properties. There are thousands of different PFAS, some of which have been more widely used and studied than others ... One common characteristic of concern of PFAS is that many break down very slowly and can build up in people, animals, and the environment over time." <https://www.epa.gov/pfas/our-current-understanding-human-health-and-environmental-risks-pfas>

For a deeper dive on PFAS: "PFAS lurk in so much of what we eat, drink and use. Scientists are only beginning to understand how they're impacting our health — and what to do about them." <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/16/magazine/pfas-toxic-chemicals.html?searchResultPosition=4>

For one woman's story about the discovery of PFAS: "In the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, (Kyla) Bennett was stuck in bed, recovering from surgery to remove a baseball-size tumor that had been pushing against her brain. It was the first spring in 30 years she didn't visit the vernal pools (Hockomock Swamp, Easton, MA). She'd kept working nonetheless, as the director of science policy at PEER, a nonprofit government watchdog. In addition to advocating against pesticides, she'd turned her attention to an enormous class of toxic, man-made chemicals called PFAS, short for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances." <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2023-11-16/one-woman-s-war-against-forever-chemicals?sref=QlICl3VSe>

ANC 3/4G addresses parking, transportation, and education issues at its Monday (March 11) meeting. The zoning special exception for the parking lot behind CVS at Connecticut and McKinley has been up for renewal, and the owner has been seeking a permanent exception instead of the 10-year limited approval in effect to date. The Board of Zoning Adjustment will hear the case soon. The ANC's role is to review and provide a recommendation, or not. After long discussion, the Commission resolved to only support a five-year extension. This was to preserve options for rationalizing use of parking lots overall in Chevy Chase going forward to alleviate reductions in parking that could be necessary with bike lanes and redevelopment of the Civic Core site. In other business, the Commission approved the

chair (Commissioner Jim Nash) and two co-chairs (ANC residents Cal Simone and Michaela Platzer) for a new Transportation Committee, to be discussed further at the March 25 regular ANC meeting; considered upcoming DC budget testimony with a focus on support for DCPS (District of Columbia Public Schools) and Lafayette, in particular; approved a letter of support for the Commission's RASE (Racial and Social Equity) Committee to create a window display on local area African American history; and debated how best to respond to bidders seeking to engage the ANC regarding the current RFP for the Civic Core site. The Commission will meet next on Wednesday, March 20 in administrative session, starting at 7PM.

More neighbors request traffic-calming while other neighbors protest speed bumps. Last week, I again got calls and emails both for and against speed bumps (humps and tables). I will look to running a community survey soon to sample broader neighbor opinions. Meanwhile, Chatsworth (Unicorn Ln) residents are among the latest to request them. I've responded, explaining the District's process, which I reiterate here: DDOT (District Department of Transportation) operates what's called the [Traffic Safety Input](#) (TSI) system. It's an online portal where traffic safety-related requests are managed, tracked, and adjudicated. To enter a request, go to DC 311 at 311.dc.gov. At the site, log in, creating an account (email and password) if necessary. Then follows the prompts: first "Request," then "All Service Requests," then (scrolling down) "Traffic Safety Input" to describe the problem (e.g., speeding) and file the request. DC has hundreds of TSI requests on file. DDOT prioritizes them using a matrix of pre-set criteria. Crash data and racial and social equity factors constitute 50% of the weighting. We've learned we need neighbor engagement at scale to move the TSI needle. That means getting as many folks as possible to file TSI requests.

Area crime, already low, drops further. In the week that Mayor Bowser [signed into law Secure DC](#), the District's new [anti-crime bill](#), we heard at Monday's ANC meeting from the Mayor's Ward Three [MOCR](#) Matthew Barclay on the drop in crime District-wide. He cited data showing serious crime was down 12% and homicides were down 32%. This caused me to take a closer look at crime data for our [Police Service Area 201](#). I went back and checked the daily crime reports from MPD's Second District. They capture when, where, and what type of crime occurs. Since the first of this year, there have been 12 reports of crime in our PSA. Eight of these occurred along Connecticut Avenue within the 5100-5600 blocks. Only four took place in nearby neighborhoods. There was just one in our [Single Member District 02](#), a vehicle theft in the 2900 block of Rittenhouse on January 12. Notably, we have seen a dramatic drop-off of car break-ins. That said, not all crime gets reported, and data don't tell the whole story of how secure folks feel. On Thursday, a neighbor called me to say she'd encountered aggressive panhandlers behind the CVS at Connecticut and McKinley. I noted I'd raise the matter with my fellow Commissioners who represent the Connecticut Ave corridor and speak to MPD. Which I'm doing now.

Announcements

Assessing senior living options. [Chevy Chase Community Association](#) and [Northwest Neighbors Village](#) will be holding an online community panel discussion on Wednesday, March 20 to address common questions such as whether to downsize now or wait until others insist, what help is available from the community, how to get an aide if staying at home, and what kind of facility to move to if a move is desired. The panel will feature Stephanie Chong, executive director, Northwest Neighbors Village; Jennifer Brown, senior living industry expert; and Lisa Ridner, manager at [Iona Senior Services](#). Click [here](#) to register.

Earning college course credits while in high school – for free. DC's Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) supports high school students who wish concurrently to secure college credits through [The DC Dual Enrollment Consortium Program](#). Qualifying students enroll in approved college courses at selected postsecondary institutions. Nearby American University participates as do many others. See the complete list and required GPAs [here](#). OSSE covers the cost of tuition and books for up to two, three-credit courses per semester. This is high-value opportunity for to get a jump on college at zero cost to their families.

Getting an e-bike rebate, maybe.

DDOT's (District Department of Transportation) has announced the much-anticipated [District E-Bike Incentive Program](#), offering vouchers for up to \$2,000 to purchase an e-bike, cargo bike, e-bike maintenance, or other qualified accessories at authorized retailers. In the first window, April 1–15 (2024), only Preferred Applicants ([SNAP](#), [TANF](#), Medicaid, [DC Healthcare Alliance](#)) can apply. Recipients will be selected at random. The program budget is \$500K. If there's money left, a second window will open for all interested applicants.

Registering for spring Department of Parks and Recreation programs. DPR offers a host of free and fee-based programs year-round. [Registration for spring programs](#) is now open. Programs run the gamut for all ages: aquatics, fitness, sports, dance, music, performing arts, visual arts, etc. Residents can attend classes anywhere in the District. Programs offered at and through the Chevy Chase Community Center can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Donating used sports equipment for low-income children. [Temple Sinai](#) is sponsoring a sports equipment donation drive Saturday night, March 23, from 7-9PM and Sunday, March 24: from 10AM-3PM at the synagogue's location at [3100 Military Rd NW](#) (drop-off box in the lobby). [Leveling the Playing Field](#) will distribute the equipment to its network of low-income schools, leagues, and sports programs in D.C., MD, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. All types of equipment

are welcome: baseball, softball, tennis, golf, hockey, lacrosse, football, soccer, cleats, and everything else except bicycles. To volunteer to help, contact Larry Mishel at lmishel@epi.org; to contribute funds, go to <https://www.classy.org/campaign/rays-ball-shed-in-memory-of-ray-scannell/c529623>.

Fixing the Wilson Pool, finally (hopefully). In case you haven't hear, here's the latest from a recent [newsletter](#) from Ward Three Councilmember Matt Frumin: "The Department of General Services (DGS), in partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), is pleased to provide an update on the HVAC replacement project at the Wilson Aquatic Center. This \$2.5M project is steadily progressing, with all necessary HVAC components arriving and construction beginning in January. The scope will include new rooftop units, fans, and ductwork. DGS is also redesigning the HVAC system to allow for more efficient and timely maintenance and inspections. In addition to the HVAC replacement and redesign, DGS is evaluating additional repairs before a spring 2024 reopening. DGS and DPR will announce a planned reopening date as we get closer to completion."

Playing Scrabble in the neighborhood. The official DC Scrabble club ([featured](#) in today's WPost) meets weekly in Chevy Chase. Anyone up for competitive games is welcome to join on Tuesdays, starting at 5:30PM at The Avenue, [5540 Connecticut Ave](#), second floor.

Finally, [here's](#) the latest weekly newsletter from CM Lewis George's office.

As always, be in touch with any comments, questions, or requests for service.

Best, Bruce

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Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner

ANC 3/4G Single Member District 02

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