



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**

**KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR**

JILL LATHAN
COMMISSIONER

ERIC WEISMAN
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

TO: Open Space, Environment, and Energy
FROM: Commissioner Lathan
DATE: April 17, 2024
Re: City Council Order 24-0472

Dear Members of the Open Space, Environment, and Energy/City Council,

The following information from the Department of Public Works (DPW) is being provided to the members of the committee, in response to the item below.

Order 24-0472 - That the Commissioner of Public Works update this Council on the condition of Conway Field and the displacement of infill that is occurring there during extreme rainfall events, as well as the schedule for regular grooming and maintenance of the City's artificial turf athletic fields.

In periods of very heavy rain the Purefill infill at Conway field is migrating more than an acceptable amount. This has only been observed in one field. We are not witnessing this in other fields in Somerville, which are filled with Brockfill infill. Both are plant based infills.

As per Massachusetts law, when a contract is put out to bid, the City is not allowed to issue a "propriety specification." This means that we cannot specify which infill material, or other material, be used. We can, and did, issue a "performance specification" which outlines the characteristics of the desired product. (eg. plant-based, natural infill, etc.) Per MA purchasing law there needs to be an opportunity to provide and "or equal" to assure competitive bidding.

During construction, Quirk Construction Company proposed "Purefill" "a cork-based product made and installed by [FieldTurf](#) as an equal. PSUF worked with Procurement and Contracting Services and the Law Office to contact the Attorney General's office to see if we could reject the product because we were unfamiliar with the system and we had anecdotal concerns about this system. We were told that we were required to accept it because it met all the specifications.

Before doing so, Luisa Oliveira, Director of PSUF and Ben Waldrip, DPW Director of Operations, had an extensive telephone call with David Quirk, owner of Quirk Construction Company, and Andrew Dyjak, the representative from Field Turf. During this conversation, we specifically asked about the floating properties of cork and were assured that after the first few rainfalls, there would be no extraordinary movement of the infill. Both Quirk and Dyjek said that it has never been a problem. We also spoke to other fields who had installed the system.



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In this past year, we have witnessed two severe rainstorms, and the cork has indeed migrated more than is acceptable. Director Waldrip and Director Oliveira have been in conversation with Field Turf, and they sent two representatives out last week. Given that the subsurface of the field is 2-3' of crushed stone (this is the legal cap to the materials below), we cannot understand that there could ever be a subsurface drainage issue. The representatives that came out agreed and we are waiting to hear from Mr. Dyjak on solutions to this condition.

The Conway field is groomed every 3-4 weeks, which is recommended by the manufacturer. We will continue to contact Field Turf to offer a solution. The turf field is safe, it has not been taken offline and, other than the fact that we are losing infill, there is no serious concern at this time. We are aware of the condition and will hold Field Turf accountable. We ask that people please be patient while we continue to work on this.

