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Seeds being sown for Field of Dreams project

EAMONN MAHER
emaher@theifp.ca

Local baseball, slo-pitch and softball players could see their Field of Dreams become a reality by 2020 in a best-case scenario, as long as some stipulations are met.

The Halton Hills Minor Baseball Association (HHMBA) and the Georgetown Slo-Pitch League (GSL) recently reached an agreement in principle with the Town of Halton Hills for the construction of three new lit diamonds at the Trafalgar Sports Park complex at a cost of \$2.8 million, which would help alleviate a shortage of ball-related venues in the municipality.

Just one new diamond has been built in Halton Hills since 2001, and that came through a partnership between the town and the GSL.

Also, there is currently only one mounded diamond available for use in town by the 13 teams in the older minor baseball age groups and registration continues to soar, with the HHMBA predicting 10 per cent annual growth rates in its registration.

The GSL had approximately 1,200 players registered last season and the HHMBA had just under

1,100, with several other user groups - including Halton Hawks girls' softball, Georgetown Ladies' Powderpuff League, A League of Our Own, Halton Hills Men's Slo-Pitch, Halton Hills 3 Pitch League and the Ballinafad Ladies' 3 Pitch League - jostling for additional diamond time as well.

"We're a bit of an anomaly in Halton Hills, in that a lot of communities are not seeing the growth in baseball, but for whatever reason, we are and these groups are proof of it," said Kevin Okimi, manager of parks and open space for the Town of Halton Hills.

"There are some groups that are on marginal-sized diamonds and what we're hoping to do is reallocate things, so the people who need to be on the big diamonds are accommodated, and perhaps free up some intermediate diamonds for other teams that have been playing on small diamonds. That would give us some flexibility there."

The HHMBA did host two Baseball Ontario championship tournaments on the Labour Day weekend this past season, but creating a four-diamond complex with the proposed addition of three new multi-purpose playing fields

The original master plan for the Trafalgar Sports Park indicates a long-term vision for at least four ball diamonds at the site and that could finally come to fruition in the next couple of years.

would allow the town to host many more, Okimi added.

The organization has a portable mound, and if the project gets the nod, it would purchase two more.

The project would progress in two phases, with construction on the three diamonds to begin this summer if the HHMBA and GSL can secure an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant within the next couple of

months.

Phase 2, slated to get underway in 2020, would include a permanent concession building with washrooms.

However, in order for a detailed design of the Field of Dreams Joint Project to move ahead, council must give approval of a detailed financial strategy by the user groups and fundraising targets have to be met.

The groups have com-

mitted to raising \$772,000 for the town-financed project and plan to acquire up to \$300,000 by obtaining the Trillium grant, as well as generating \$20,000 per year through capital levies, \$10,000 per season from the Sweet Spot concession stand at the fairgrounds, \$45,000 through corporate and local business contributions and \$10,000 via town-approved banner advertising on outfield fences.

"It's a big amount and basically we're trying to raise as much as we can. So, every dollar helps, and the more that the user groups contribute, the sooner we can get it done," said HHMBA president Larry Fitzgerald.

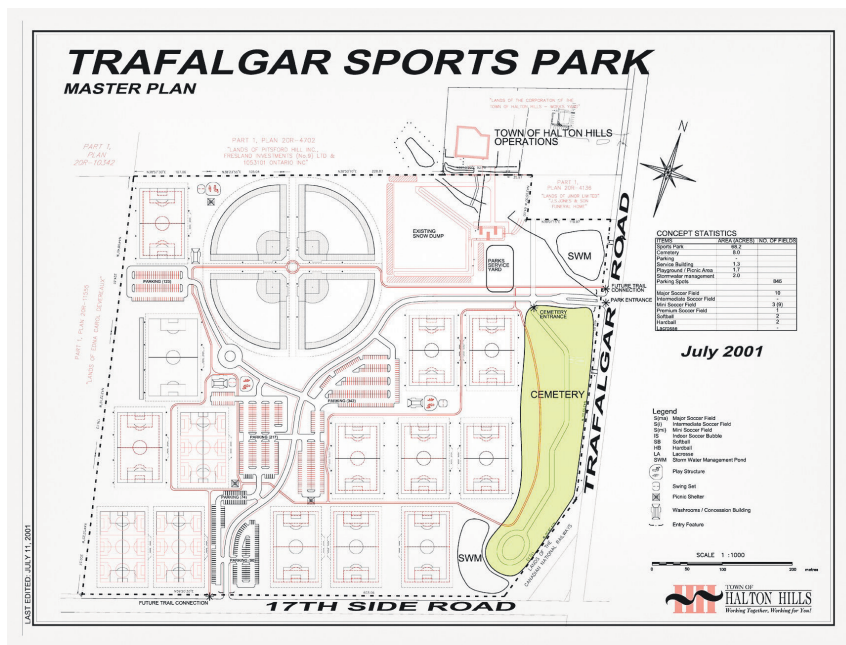
A poker night set for March is in the works, while other grant applications have been sent to Blue Jays Care and the Major League Baseball (MLB) foundations.

Fitzgerald figures the recent run of success for the Blue Jays has contributed to the rising registration rates, but noted that even after a non-playoff year by the team, the number of youths attending the HHMBA's rep tryouts in September was the most ever for the organization.

"Hopefully, the Blue Jays can have a good year again in 2018. But, the other thing going our way is the demographics and growth in Halton Hills," he said.

"We have to start getting ready for that future growth and I don't think that adding 10,000 more people to the population is too many years away."

The user groups plan to return to a town council meeting in the spring to update officials on the fundraising efforts.



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