

Report from: Community, Recreation and Culture Services

Report Date: January 30, 2020 **Meeting Date:** March 11, 2020

Report Number: CRCS-B010-2020 **File:** 68.31.8

Subject: City's Ball Diamond Inventory and User Groups

Recommendation

That Report CRCS-B010-2020, regarding the City's Ball Diamond Inventory and User Groups, be received for information; and

That staff be directed to include \$75,000 for the development of a Sports Field Strategy in the Draft 2021 Operating Budget for consideration; and

That staff be directed to include \$280,000 for the development of a new ball diamond at Pic Lesson Park in the Draft 2021 Capital Budget for consideration.

Summary

The City is currently experiencing an upward trend in youth participation in baseball and softball. An example of this upward trend is that the St. Catharines Minor Baseball Association is reporting a 105% increase in players since 2012. The increased participation in ball sports accompanied by aging ball diamond infrastructure and environmental factors (such as rain and wet conditions) has resulted in a ball diamond inventory deficiency for the needs of local user groups. A more diverse ball diamond inventory will allow for more levels of play and the promotion of continued growth in ball sports. In addition, a Sports Field Strategy is recommended by staff as there are significant health and safety concerns with the City's aging ball diamond infrastructure and condition assessments are required to help mitigate the risk to the corporation as well as provide future guidance with the Parks Renewal Plan.

Background

At its meeting on [January 22, 2020](#), the Budget Standing Committee approved the following report request:

That staff report back on deficiencies with the City's baseball fields and the associated costs with correcting the deficiencies.

Report

Current Ball Diamond Inventory and Age Categories

The City's ball diamond inventory consists of 20 fields which accommodates both minor and senior hardball as well as minor and senior softball (Appendix 1). Each of the 20 fields vary in size (Appendix 2) and are designed to accommodate certain age categories as outlined below:

Category Description	Ages
Blast Ball	3-4 years
Tee Ball	4-5 years
Coach Pitch	5-6 years
Machine Pitch	6-7 years
Rookie Ball	8-9 years
Mosquito	10-11 years
Peewee	12-13 years
Bantam	14-15 years
Midget	16-18 years

Recommendations to Address Ball Diamond Deficiencies

Staff are recommending multiple options to address the ball diamond inventory deficiencies and to satisfy the needs of local user groups. These options include the reconfiguration of existing ball diamonds and the construction of a new ball diamond to ensure more levels of play. If all of the recommended options were to proceed, ball diamond user groups would have 2 ball diamond reconfigurations to increase playability for all levels (John Dempsey #2 and Pic Leeson Park #1) and 1 new ball diamond which will increase playability for all levels (Pic Leeson Park #2) to meet the increased ball diamond demand. Staff have prioritized the recommended options below based on asset condition (present and future), health and safety considerations, estimated project costs and relevance to more levels of play.

1) John Dempsey #2 and Pic Leeson Park Reconfigurations

John Dempsey #2 and Pic Leeson Park ball diamonds currently have grass infields with pitching mound configurations which does not allow for a diverse level of users to utilize these fields. In 2019, these two ball diamonds were not booked for use by local baseball organizations for age groups requiring pitching mounds. It is recommended that these fields have the grass infield and pitching mounds removed and replaced by all dirt infields. The reconfigurations to John Dempsey #2 and Pic Leeson Park fields will provide 2 additional ball diamonds for a wider age range which were previously not able to utilize the fields. The estimated cost for these reconfigurations is \$11,000 and will be accommodated through the Council approved 2020 Operating Budget.

Operational Considerations

There are no additional operating considerations as these parks and fields are currently maintained by Parks Operations Staff.

2) New Ball Diamond at Pic Leeson Park

Since 2016, soccer field #2 at Pic Leeson Park has been permitted for an average of 65 hours per season or 3 hours per week. Staff recommend that the soccer field be replaced with a new ball diamond at Pic Leeson Park (to be referred to as Pic Leeson Park #2 ball diamond). The location has outfield sod that drains well in wet conditions, a large parking lot and the addition of Pic Leeson Park #2 would create a small hub for baseball at Pic Leeson Park with the now two ball diamonds at Pic Leeson and the adjacent two ball diamonds at John Dempsey. The estimated cost for the new ball diamond is \$280,000.

Operational Considerations

There are no additional operating considerations as the soccer field at Pic Leeson Park is currently maintained by Parks Operations Staff. The current staffing would be reassigned from the soccer field to the ball diamond.

3) Douglas Park Relegation

Similar to soccer fields, staff recommend the creation of a 'Type C' ball diamond classification which would provide ball diamonds that are not lined and suitable for practice use only. Staff recommend that Douglas Park be relegated to a Type C ball diamond because of the many challenges it currently faces. The Douglas Park ball diamond is in poor condition and is often unplayable after periods of rain. In 2019, despite staff's best efforts to ensure playability, the Douglas Park ball diamond was closed due to weather related incidents for 26% of the available booking hours. In addition, Douglas Park has a limited type of ball diamond user as only children 8-9 years old can play at the field. Since 2017, Douglas Park has averaged \$1,736 per season in revenue. If Douglas Park is relegated to Type C status, the current user group would be accommodated elsewhere so the impact to the user group and revenue would be nominal.

Through the City's annual rates and fees process, staff will recommend that Type C fields for baseball, softball and soccer be free for community use. Currently, the fee for a Type C soccer field rental for minors is \$2.65 per hour and \$16.65 per hour for adults. Since 2017, Type C soccer fields have average \$1,097 per season in revenue.

The estimated costs associated with improving this ball diamond would mirror that of a newly constructed ball diamond but as noted above, for limited users. If Council's recommendation is to continue the operation of Douglas Park as a Type B ball diamond, staff would recommend at minimum improvements to the outfield. The estimated cost for these improvements is \$150,000.

Operational Considerations

There are no additional operating considerations as this park and ball diamond is currently maintained by Parks Operations Staff.

4) Anticipated Decommissioning of Cameron Park Ball Diamond

Staff anticipate that the ball diamond at Cameron Park will be decommissioned for passive park space in the near future for the GO Station. The new GO Station will present many challenges for this ball diamond such as increased traffic, limited parking and park reconfiguration. In 2019, this diamond was utilized for 2.5 hours per week which will be accommodated through the above recommendations in the future. The estimated cost to decommission this ball diamond is \$20,000 and includes the removal of the existing ball diamond / related amenities and reinstatement of sod.

Operational Considerations

There are no additional operating considerations as this park is currently maintained by Parks Operations Staff. The staffing will be reassigned from the ball diamond preparation to grass cutting of the new passive park space.

Sports Field Strategy Recommended

In addition to the ball diamond inventory recommendations within this report, staff recommend the City procure the services of a consultant to develop a Sports Field Strategy (SFS) similar to the recently completed Arena Strategy. A SFS is recommended by staff as there are significant health and safety concerns with the City's aging ball diamond infrastructure and condition assessments are required to help mitigate the risk to the corporation as well as provide future guidance with the Parks Renewal Plan. The scope of the SFS would include items such as the review of programming, utilization, comparator municipalities, industry leading practices and the evaluation of the City's existing provision of sports fields including detailed recommendations of the number of sports fields and physical locations, for the next 5, 10, 15, and 30 years, with order of magnitude costs.

Staff would work in consultation with the Recreation Master Plan Advisory Committee, to finalize the project scope for the procurement of a consultant to develop a Sports Field Strategy.

Partnership Opportunity for Ball Diamonds

Partnership opportunities with the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) and / or other organizations for the use of their ball diamonds has been explored by staff but are not recommended at this time. There is the possibility of partnerships in the future, but the budgetary costs associated with such partnerships would need to be considered. Historically, the City has assumed full responsibility for the ball diamonds maintenance and costs in these types of partnerships.

Seasonal Staffing Requirements

If the City were to add ball diamonds from a partners' inventory, there would be significant operating considerations as these parks are not currently maintained by Parks Operations staff. The estimated staff requirements to maintain 2-3 new ball diamonds would be the addition of 1 Seasonal Park Operator and 1 Seasonal Student. The estimated total cost for both of these positions is \$55,000 per year.

The seasonal staff would also require equipment such as a pickup truck, trailer and mowers. The estimated total cost for the equipment would be \$110,000.

Parks Renewal Plan

The City's Parks Renewal Plan ([Report PRCS-B002-2018](#)) prioritizes asset condition, including health and safety considerations, as the greatest factor in determining renewal priorities, with the assets in the poorest condition being prioritized for replacement. Previously, ball diamonds and soccer fields were not included within the Parks Renewal Plan.

With the March 28, 2019 Council approval of the update to the FADS Policy for Outdoor Play Spaces Design Requirements ([Report PRCS-049-2019](#)), the total funding required for red category playground replacements over the next five years (2019 to 2023) is \$6.48 million which does not include basketball courts or tennis courts. The Council approved 2020 Capital Budget for the Parks Renewal Plan is \$330,000 and will replace one playground at Happy Rolph's Animal Farm.

Recreation Facility and Programming Master Plan

In 2015, the Recreation Facility and Programming Master Plan (RFPMP) advised that no additional ball diamonds were recommended for the City. However, since the RFPMP publication, there has been an upward trend in baseball registration and increased demand on the City's ball diamond inventory.

Though the original intent was not to repurpose lower quality and underutilized ball diamonds into more active ball diamonds, the RFPMP did recommend the repurposing of existing ball diamonds for other priority needs which ball diamonds now have become:

#18. Explore opportunities to repurpose lower quality, underutilized or informal ball diamonds to other needed uses.

Financial Implications

Ball Diamond Deficiencies

Subject to Council's approval with the 2021 Capital Budget deliberations, the estimated cost of each staff recommendation to address the immediate needs of the ball diamond deficiencies is listed below.

Staff Recommendation	Ball Diamond	Estimated Cost
No Financial Request - Accommodated through 2020 Operating Budget		
1	John Dempsey #2	\$5,500
1	Pic Leeson Park #1	\$5,500
Council Funding Approval Required		
2	Pic Leeson Park #2*	\$280,000
Council Funding Approval Required - Not Recommended by Staff		
	Douglas Park	\$150,000
Council Funding Approval Required - Future Consideration		
	Cameron Park	\$20,000

*Estimated cost includes an additional 25% for engineering, testing, inspection, contingency and taxes

Sports Field Strategy

Subject to Council's approval with the 2021 Operating Budget deliberations, the estimated cost for a Sports Field Strategy would be a maximum of \$75,000.

Conclusion

This report identifies multiple options to address the ball diamond inventory deficiencies in both the short and long-term to satisfy the needs of local user groups. There are significant health and safety concerns with the City's aging ball diamond infrastructure and condition assessments are required to help mitigate the risk to the corporation as well as provide future guidance with the Parks Renewal Plan. The options in this report will provide a more diverse ball diamond inventory that will allow for more levels of play and the promotion of continued growth in ball sports while ensuring the safety of all participants.

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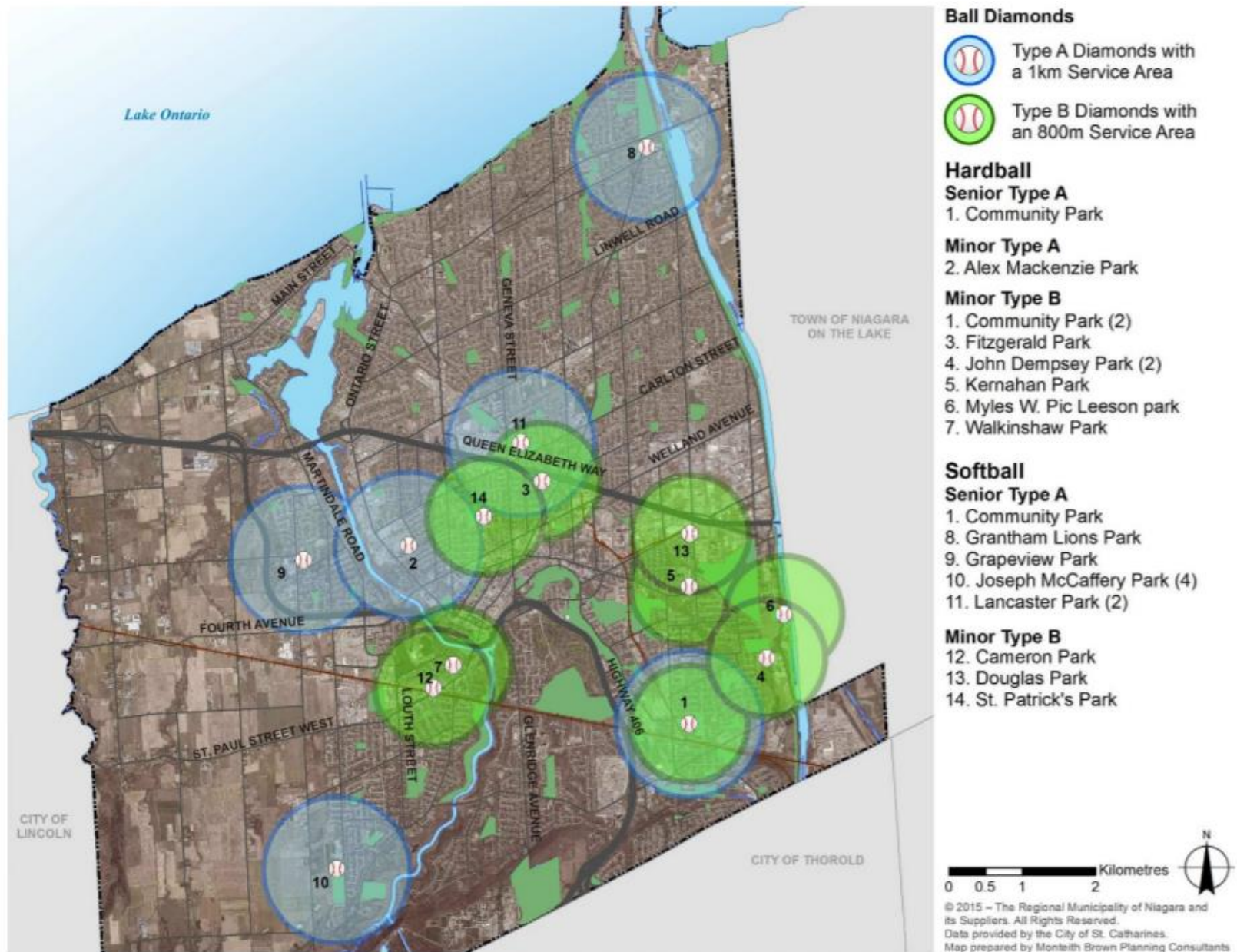
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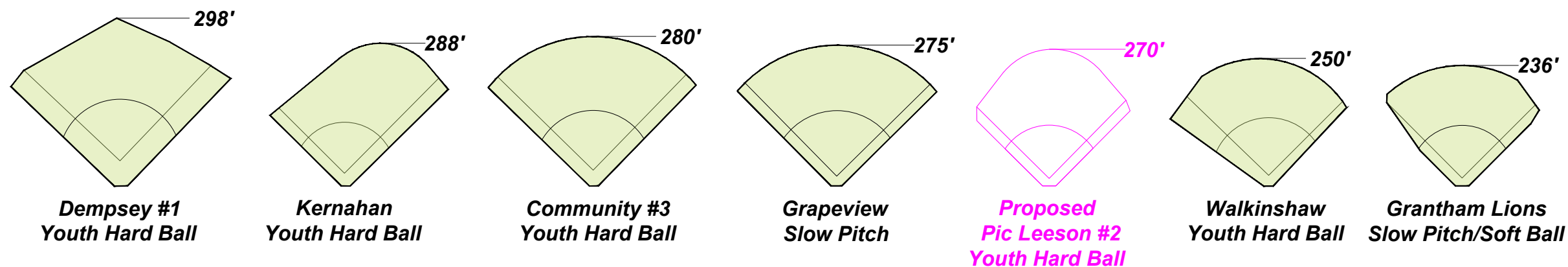
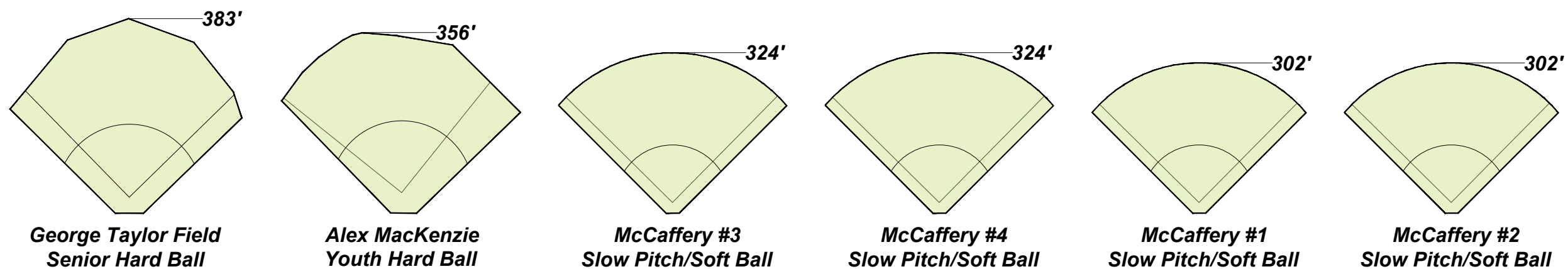
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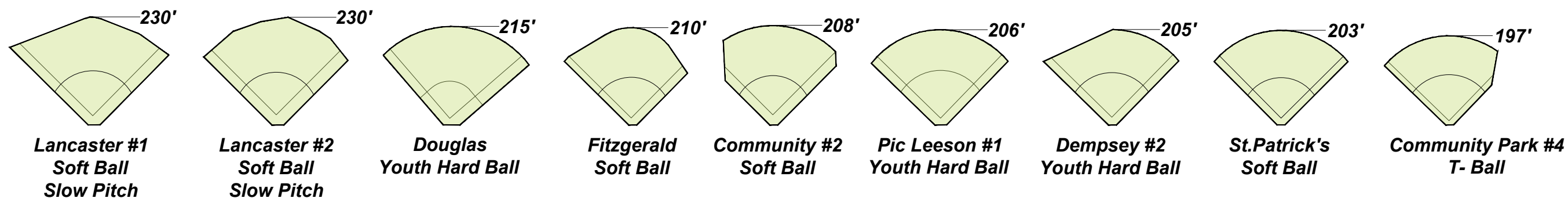
Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Ball Diamond Inventory Map
- Appendix 2 – Ball Diamond Size Comparison Chart





Following have back stops
Wembley Park
Realty Park
Cameron Park
Lincoln Park
Harcove Park
Berkley Park
Clifford's Creek Park



Size Comparison of Baseball Parks