

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Monday, June 10, 2013, for the purpose of discussing Playground Surfacing.

Mayor Davis started the meeting at 8:03 p.m. It was held in the Council Room of the Municipal Building.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Emmett V. Jordan, Leta M. Mach, Silke I. Pope, Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; David Moran, Assistant City Manager; Joe Doss, Parks and Playground Supervisor; and Cindy Murray, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Steve Lienesch, Game Time Sales Representative; Theodora Scarato, Bill Orleans and others.

Mr. Moran provided a history of the new playground at 2 Laurel Hill/12 Hillside which is in the process of construction. He advised the playground surfacing chosen was shredded rubber mulch which the City has used in several playgrounds. When the rubber mulch was installed, it was the wrong color and during the process of the mulch removal, several residents began to express concern regarding the safety of this material. Completion of the playground was then placed on hold while staff researched the concerns expressed about the surfacing material and a work session was scheduled.

Mr. Moran summarized the Comparison of Playground Surfacing materials included in the work session packet. He noted there were advantages and disadvantages to using engineered wood chips, rubber mulch and poured in place as playground surfacing materials.

Ms. Scarato urged Council to follow a precautionary principle in light of the accumulating data from studies on rubber mulch surfacing. Mayor Davis thanked Ms. Scarato for bringing the information to the attention of Council. She added that staff had contacted the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) but they were unable to provide a representative to attend this meeting.

Mayor Davis referenced several of the reports provided by Ms. Scarato were on rubber crumb material. Mr. Moran explained that crumb material (also made from recycled tires) is used on artificial turf fields as an infill product between turf fibers. Ms. Mach noted the rubber crumb material is similar in size to grains of sand. Ms. Scarato advised both rubber crumb and rubber mulch are made from the same materials.

Mr. Herling and Mr. Jordan asked about poured in place surfacing for playgrounds. Mr. Doss said the City has three playgrounds with this material, two of which have been in place for approximately 10 years and have held up well. Mr. Doss added that he hasn't received any complaints about this surfacing material. There was discussion regarding rubber tile playground surfacing.

In response to a question from Mr. Jordan, Mr. Doss said he would recommend use of poured in place surfacing if funding were available. He noted the safety aspects of this material along with the low maintenance costs.

Mr. Roberts expressed concern that the wood barriers that are placed around playgrounds with wood chips (to contain the material) are tripping hazards. He also noted that installation of a poured in place surface initially is about the same cost as wood chip surfacing since the wood chips need to be replaced every few years.

Mr. Jordan asked about the odor associated with rubber mulch. Mr. Lienesch said rubber mulch has been packaged for several months prior to being placed and this may contribute to some of the odor. He added that in over 13 years of selling this product, it had never been removed because of smell. Ms. Pope asked if there is an odor to the poured in place surfacing. Mr. Lienesch said no since the rubber is bonded with polyurethane binder.

Mr. Putens said he had spoken to toxicologists at his workplace who advised the rubber mulch pieces are washed and coated with an oil substance to prevent them from sticking together. He expressed concern that the oil substance may be absorbed into the skin.

Mayor Davis stressed that providing safety on playgrounds is Council's primary goal. She mentioned that many children are hurt every year through falls from playground equipment. Mayor Davis noted that the use of wood chips as a playground surface is an ongoing cost and workload impact since wood chips require frequent replenishment.

Mayor Davis questioned what additional work would be required if Council decides to go with a poured in place surface material for the new playground at Laurel Hill/Hillside. Mr. Doss said that the equipment would not have to be moved but that approximately four to five inches of gravel base would be needed for this surface.

Ms. Scarato noted her opposition to poured in place or rubber tile playground surface. She asked that the health effects be taken into consideration especially given the large number of children with allergies. Mayor Davis and Ms. Mach expressed concern about the health problems associated with mold and fungus on wood chips especially in wet and shady playground areas. Mr. Moran added that wood chips have to be maintained at the correct depth, which is dependent on the height of the playground equipment.

Mr. Orleans, Greenbelt, suggested that Council appropriate the necessary funding to provide wood chips as playground surfacing material. He also suggested that funding be provided for appropriate maintenance including drying out (turning) of the wood chips when necessary.

Mr. Roberts asked if there was any surfacing material made out of virgin rubber product. Mr. Lienesch said no, not that he was aware of.

After further discussion, most members expressed their preference for a poured in place surfacing material. Council requested staff to work up cost estimates for using this material. Council also requested staff look into rubber tile surface and provide a cost estimate for use of this material.

The meeting ended at 9:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Cindy Murray
City Clerk*