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Beach Chalet artifical turf opponents file lawsuit

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The seemingly endless turf war between supporters and opponents of installing synthetic fields and lights at Golden Gate Park’s Beach Chalet soccer fields is headed to court.

Turf opponents, worried about the environmental effects of replacing the four grass soccer fields with an artificial surface, have been shot down at the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, Recreation and Park Commission and the Board of Appeals. The lawsuit filed Oct. 12 charges that the certified environmental impact report is legally inadequate because it failed to disclose the health risks of the chemicals used in the turf and didn’t fully consider alternative solutions.



A gopher hole at the Beach Chalet soccer fields. (Michael Macor/The Chronicle)

The SF Coalition for Children’s Outdoor Play, Education and the Environment, which filed the suit in San Francisco Superior Court, argues that city officials overlooked the health risks because of the need to replace the muddy, gopher hole-ridden fields.

“We’re not opposed to soccer for kids, we just don’t think kids should be playing on toxic soccer fields,” said attorney Richard Drury, who said an alternative plan to replace the Beach Chalet fields with grass and build pitches in West Sunset with safer turf was also not adequately considered.

Supporters and opponents of the turf spoke for hours at a July Board of Supervisors meeting, in which 10 out of 11 supervisors determined that the environmental impact report sufficiently considered alternatives to the \$14 million plan.

Drury is also representing a separate group that has appealed the project to the California Coastal Commission.

Construction on the new fields was slated to begin in January 2013, but Drury said the commission issued a stay against the city earlier this month.

“I don’t think there’s any scenario where they start construction in January,” he said, noting that both appeals could take at least a year.

The city is confident it will prevail.

“The Environmental Impact Report was a thorough study that was certified by the Planning Commission and upheld by the Board of Supervisors,” said City Attorney spokesman Matt Dorsey in a statement.

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