

# HALIFAX

P.O. Box 1749  
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**Item No. 14.1.5**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**August 2, 2016**

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by 

**SUBMITTED BY:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
John Traves, Q.C. Acting Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed by 

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jane Fraser, Acting Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** July 15, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Graves Oakley – Permanent Rugby Facility

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## **ORIGIN**

January 6, 2016, Committee of the Whole motion:

Moved by Councillor Adams, seconded by Deputy Mayor Whitman that the Committee of the Whole request a staff report to assess the feasibility of establishing Graves Oakley as a permanent rugby facility; and that staff consult with but not limited to, the local rugby community, present users, provincial rugby association, the local community, and the university groups.

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

## **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

***Halifax Regional Municipality Charter***, Section 79(1): Council may expend money required by the Municipality for: k) recreational programs; (x) lands and buildings required for a municipal purpose; (y) furnishing and equipping any municipal facility; and (ah) ... ice arenas and other recreational facilities.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to develop a multi-year capital plan for Graves Oakley that increases one sport field to regulation rugby size and adds amenities for all sport uses.

## **BACKGROUND**

The 2008 Community Facilities Master Plan (CFMP) indicated rugby groups are interested in appropriate sized fields both in length and width to accommodate their sports. Based on their size, the CFMP outlined that school fields could make good sites for rugby, making schools a natural partner for their programs. Rugby users reported difficulty in travel times to access fields outside the Peninsula and the need for more sites of appropriate size. They identified the need for more washrooms, change rooms, storage facilities and drinking water at these sites.

On June 23, 2015, Halifax Regional Council approved an event grant in the amount of \$50,000 to the Nova Scotia Rugby Football Union for the 2015 Canada v Glasgow Rugby event to be held on August 25, 2015 at the Wanderers Grounds in Halifax.

Despite the work that went into preparing the Wanderers Grounds for this event, the site was deemed unsuitable by event organizers and the event was relocated to Graves Oakley Memorial Field. The event had an overall attendance of 4,812, no negative feedback was received regarding the venue, and feedback from the surrounding local Spryfield community was positive.

After the event, Regional Council received feedback from the local rugby community regarding potential opportunity to establish the Graves Oakley site as a permanent exhibition venue. Subsequently, during the Parks & Recreation budget presentation during the January 6, 2016 Committee of the Whole meeting, Council requested a staff report on the feasibility of establishing the Graves Oakley field as a permanent rugby facility.

## **DISCUSSION**

Graves Oakley Memorial Park is an urban park with sport fields located on Leiblin Drive in Spryfield. The park includes 2 baseball diamonds (1 diamond has lights for extended use), horseshoe pits, 2 rugby fields, sport field and a tennis court (Attachment 1).

In order to provide Regional Council with an informative and evidence based report, four key areas of analysis were undertaken:

- (a) Consultation with stakeholders: DiscNS, local rugby community, provincial rugby organization and universities to gain further input on their needs and priorities;
- (b) User group access and usage statistics;
- (c) Site Development; and
- (d) Mandate for service delivery.

### **Consultation with Stakeholders**

The key findings of the consultation with stakeholders were as follows:

- Based on the current demand and usage of sport fields, there appears to be no immediate need for a dedicated field exclusive to rugby;
- Although the current availability identifies that there is not an overall requirement for exclusive usage, there is a requirement for a more effective mechanism for accessing, scheduling and allocating time to better utilize the current inventory;
- There is no strategic plan regarding sport field management to maintain the sport fields in good playing condition, which has resulted in closures for extended periods for maintenance;
- High school football teams appear to be adequately served;
- Participation numbers for rugby are increasing according to Rugby NS statistics;
- In order to continue to enhance participation, barriers such as accessibility and transportation need to be addressed;
- The lack of availability of practice fields during the regular season is a barrier for some clubs;

- There is an interest by some clubs and the provincial organization to partner with HRM to accommodate their programs;
- Future growth will be limited without access to year round training facilities and clustered fields with supporting amenities;
- Wanderer's Grounds is the preferred site for competition for university play;
- Transportation for university players and equipment to Graves Oakley is a barrier and a significant cost to the athletics budget. Additionally where transit options are limited, it is difficult to maintain a fan base. Lack of amenities is a concern;
- Wanderer's Grounds is a convenient location as it is within walking distance of the universities, there is access to washrooms/change rooms and lights for extended usage. Lack of parking was described as a barrier; and
- Lack of changing facilities and access to power at fields discourages clubs from hosting tournaments and events.

User Group Access and Usage Statistics

There are currently 21 fields available for booking which can accommodate rugby. Upon completion of the Cole Harbour artificial turf field, there will be an additional field that will have lights allowing for extended hours of play. Currently 25% of all rugby field usage is hosted at Graves Oakley fields with an additional 15% played at Wanderers Grounds. The remaining hours are played at a variety of other fields noted in Table 3 below.

While there are certain days and times for which demand for fields for rugby is high, the analysis determined that there are hours available to be booked. However, some of those hours are not attractive as a result of location. The following tables represent the hours booked at Graves Oakley fields for all sport usage (Tables 1 and 2) and the facilities that have been booked for rugby in the last five years (Table 3).

Table 1 Graves Oakley Field #1 Hours Booked

<b>Type of Use</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Football	3	90.5	14	26	12	4
Rugby	60	63	64	130	86	115
Ultimate Frisbee	28	4	28	68	56	61.5

Table 2 Graves Oakley Field #2 Hours Booked

<b>Type of Use</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Football	3	8	6	12	0	0
Rugby	20	33	59	57	145	163
Ultimate Frisbee	28	54	28	90	28	24

Table 3 Facility bookings for Rugby

<b>Facility</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Bedford Turf	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	47	48
Dartmouth Turf 1	156	203	159	137	92	94
Dartmouth Turf 2	0	28	21	17	9	0
Halifax Turf 1	0	0	0	7	0	0
Halifax Turf 2	58	87	98	99	95	97
Auburn	0	0	0	0	0	0
Conrose Park	0	0	20	104	20	60
Dartmouth High	0	0	0	0	3	0
Don Bayer	38	46	37	41	65	9
Eastern Shore District High	0	18	54	36	36	37
Georges P Vanier	52	84	78	52	52	54
Graves Oakley 1	60	63	64	130	86	115

Graves Oakley 2	20	33	59	57	145	163
LeMarchant	0	0	70	36	n/a	85
Lockview	39	25	6	0	0	0
Merv Sullivan	23	24	10	39	24	8
Range Park	0	0	22	17	20	19
Rockingstone Heights	124	190	171	0	102	76
South Common	0	10	191	9	33	54
St Francis	36	94	142	154	0	0
Wanderers Grounds	70	77	79	88	129	169

In 2015 Rugby NS had 1237 participants, a 7% increase compared to 2013. The greatest increase has been at the mini-level (youth from ages 6-12). High school programs have seen a similar increase as well, whereas university has seen a decline. This trend is expected to continue due to three key factors:

- 1) Rugby is now an Olympic sport. This has significantly increased the awareness of the sport across the country.
- 2) Rugby culture is a highly inclusive and diverse sporting culture and community.
- 3) It is a low cost sport compared to hockey, soccer and football (played on artificial turf).

Disc NS Proposal

In response to the direction of Regional Council regarding Graves Oakley, Disc NS submitted a proposal which outlined additional recommendations (Attachment 2), including:

1. Develop a long term sports field strategy/plan;
2. Establish a multi-field/multi-sport hub;
3. Develop and publish a clear planning document specifically for the future of Graves Oakley;
4. Install basic amenities including washrooms, shade shelters and drinking fountains at Graves Oakley;
5. Increase accessibility and connectivity of Graves Oakley to the surrounding network; and
6. Use of movable goal posts at Graves Oakley and other municipal fields.

Some of the recommendations outlined in the proposal will be addressed in other upcoming strategic initiatives such as the update of the Community Facility Master Plan (CFMP2) and the Moving Forward Together Transit plan. An approach for the implementation of the recommendations that relate specifically to the Graves Oakley site would be undertaken should Regional Council approve staff's recommendation to undertake a capital project for site improvements.

Site Development

As noted, Graves Oakley is an urban park with various fields located on Leiblin Drive in Spryfield. The site includes 2 baseball diamonds, horseshoe pits, 2 rugby fields, sport field and a tennis court. Current amenities on the site are limited. While there are permanent washroom facilities on the site, they have not been operational for a couple of years due to their condition. Therefore, at this time, temporary washrooms are provided during the playing season. There is no access to drinking water. The location of sewer and water piping in the area restricts the ability to locate amenities on the majority of the site.

One ball field has lighting to allow for extended use. The rugby and sport fields do not have lighting. There are no permanent bleachers or amenities for spectators. Some of the fields are located on a construction fill site which could limit opportunity for any significant amount of disturbance in that area.

In order to establish the site as a permanent location for rugby, changes to the configuration of the site would be required, as well as installation of various amenities. Generally speaking, Graves Oakley would require significant capital investment to bring the sport fields up to a competition site level and provide amenities such as change rooms, washrooms storage areas and drinking water. High level cost estimates to complete those changes would be in excess of \$1 million dollars. Those costs would be further increased as a result of the need to extend water and sewer services on the site with costs

ranging from an estimated \$100,000 to \$200,000 depending on the location of the washrooms/change rooms.

While an overall site redevelopment would require significant costs and a multi-year approach, short term improvements to the site could be undertaken. These improvements could include changes to one field to make it regulation size for rugby, exploration of additional temporary washroom/water facilities, and opportunities for flexible sport equipment (i.e., movable goals that would accommodate all sports).

In addition to capital costs, additional operating funds would be required to maintain the additional amenities. The total amount would be dependent on the type and number of amenities.

#### Mandate for Service Delivery

The Recreation Blueprint is the guiding document for service delivery for HRM's Parks & Recreation, and has a focus for ensuring fair and equitable access to participation activities for children and youth. The current review of the Community Facility Master Plan has further enhanced that guidance and identifies that facilities should be designed and built for multiple purposes that can accommodate and appeal to as many users as possible and at a reasonable cost. As a result, HRM's focus and mandate continues to be on recreation and ensuring fields are safe, efficient and effective for recreation programming. Designation of a municipal field specific to one user group would eliminate opportunities for other users and programming.

Enhancements for elite sport should be the role of provincial sport organizations and clubs to enhance HRM's mandated recreation programming. Generally, sports clubs and organizations, as well as provincial and national sport organizations, develop programming and provide facilities for competitive and elite levels, often through partnerships. The development of the indoor soccer facility on the Mainland Common is an example of a partnership between HRM, Soccer Nova Scotia and the other levels of government for the development of an indoor facility on the Mainland Common that enabled both municipal recreation service and enhanced sport capabilities. That distinction should be maintained in this case, rather than HRM transferring its focus and, in this case, changing one of the municipality's popular recreation sites to a more elite sport focus.

Staff will be exploring the establishment of an informal sport committee in partnership with provincial staff and Sport NS. Since the province holds the overall mandate for sport, the municipality needs to ensure that infrastructure investments meet the recreational needs of our citizens first but, also align with the aspirations of the sport community, when possible. The committee will help achieve that aim and tournament facilities to support sport tourism will likely be a priority topic.

#### Summary of Analysis

Based upon the analysis, there is insufficient rationale to establish Graves Oakley as a permanent rugby facility. Further, the establishment would diminish HRM's overall recreation service delivery. Therefore, it is recommended that Regional Council not establish the Graves Oakley fields as a permanent rugby field and further direct staff to work with the sport organizations to improve the current sport field conditions at Graves Oakley and provide amenities through partnership opportunities and capital investments.

Improvements to the scheduling of fields will be explored through the implementation of a centralized scheduling software. Process improvements that will be undertaken in preparation for that implementation are expected to clarify and improve access to sports fields. As well, initial work has started to improve the strategic management of the maintenance of HRM fields. Development of a multi-year capital plan for the Graves Oakley fields would be in alignment with that work.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Should Regional Council direct that HRM undertake a project on the site, funding would have to be reallocated within the current approved multi-year capital budget.

It should be noted that during Parks and Recreation COW budget presentation, it was indicated HRM has in excess of 300 sport fields of which are in need of upgrade or full rehabilitation. Staff is focused on improving that situation over the next 5 years and budgets have been aligned to do so. There has been ongoing deferral of state of good repair projects required for existing recreation assets such as St. Andrew's Centre, St. Mary's Boat Club and Beazley Field. Given the significant increased investment in recreation infrastructure planned over the next 5 years with 7 new ice surfaces, 1 new all-weather turf field and a major rehabilitation of the Dartmouth Sportsplex totaling over \$100 million, there is limited capacity within the current capital budget allocation to absorb additional recreation projects without further delaying state of good repair work or decreasing investments in other municipal assets.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Consultation was carried out with local rugby community, provincial rugby organization, universities and DiscNS to gain further input, advice on their needs and priorities

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

As a previous construction fill site, the composition of the site may present unknown future challenges.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

- Alternative 1: Regional Council could choose to make Graves Oakley the permanent rugby field for competition. This is not the recommended course of action as it would exclude other sports such as soccer, football and ultimate Frisbee from utilizing the sport fields.
- Alternative 2: Regional Council could direct staff to incorporate a project for Graves Oakley site improvements into an overall sports field master plan rather than a site specific project.
- Alternative 3: Regional Council could choose to make Wanderer's Grounds the permanent rugby field for competition. This is not the recommended course of action as it would exclude other sports from utilizing the facility.

### **RISK CONSIDERATION**

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations in this Report. The risks considered rate Low. To reach this conclusion, consideration was given to financial, operational and maintenance risks.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

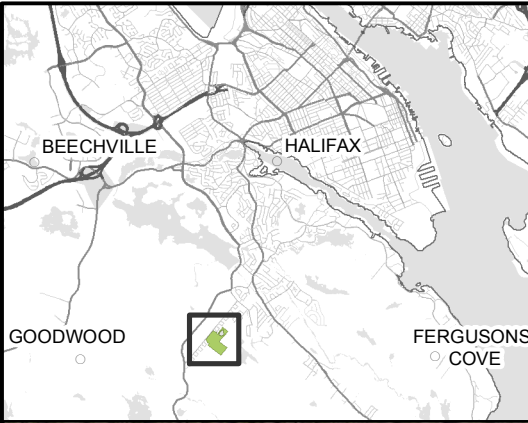
- Attachment 1: Site Plan – Graves Oakley Sports Field  
Attachment 2: Public Submission – Graves Oakley Sports Fields

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

Report Prepared by: Rosalyn Smith, Manager, Administration Services, Parks and Recreation,  
902.490.4422

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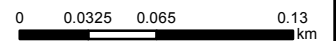
### Attachment 1 - Graves Oakley Site Plan

- Sportfields
- Ballfields
- Tennis Courts
- Horeshoe Pit
- Playground
- On-Site Parking
- Graves Oakley Memorial Park Boundary

**HALIFAX**



Produced by Parks & Recreation  
Policy & Planning



The accuracy of any representation on  
this plan is not guaranteed.

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**From:** Jeffrey Blair  
**Sent:** March-21-16 6:25 PM  
**To:** Anguish, Brad; Adams, Stephen; Office, Clerks; Mayor  
**Cc:** Newson, Chris  
**Subject:** Graves Oakley Submission  
**Attachments:** Graves Oakley Submission - DiscNS.PDF

Hi Mr. Anguish, Councillor Adams and Mayor Savage,

I've attached a submission from Disc Nova Scotia regarding the January 6 motion regarding Graves Oakley (and cc'd the clerks' office here as well so that they can distribute it to council).

Long story short: We like the idea of upgrading the sports fields, but not necessarily just for rugby.

There are 6 recommendations that I'd like to draw your attention to:

City-wide:

1. Develop a long-term sports field strategy/plan for the City of Halifax.
2. Establish a multi-field, multi-sport hub in Halifax.

Graves Oakley specific

3. Develop and publish a clear planning document (i.e.: A Master Plan) specifically for the future of Graves Oakley.
4. Installation of basic amenities, including washrooms, shade shelters, and drinking fountains at Graves Oakley.
5. Increase accessibility and connectivity of Graves Oakley to the surrounding transportation network.

City-wide & Graves Oakley

6. Utilize movable goal posts and nets to facilitate other sports' use of Graves Oakley and other facilities.

Thanks for your time and I look forward to reading the report in June. In the mean time, I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Warm Regards,

Jeff Blair





## Public Submission: Graves Oakley Sports Fields

### Introduction

On behalf of the disc sports community, I am pleased to make this submission to Halifax staff and councillors regarding the motion of Regional Council/Committee of the Whole adopted on January 6, 2016.

The motion, which requested "a staff report to assess the feasibility of establishing Graves Oakley as a permanent rugby facility" also indicated that staff should "consult with but not limited to, the local rugby community, present users, provincial rugby association, the local community, and university groups."

Ultimate (also known as Ultimate Frisbee) and rugby share similar space requirements, primarily the need for a large open space that is free of obstructions. Other field sports, such as soccer, football and field hockey, share these requirements as well. All organizations that run these sports programs in Halifax have, at some point or another, expressed serious concerns about the shortage of prime field space and field time in the municipality. While some recreation infrastructure plans developed by the city, namely the Community Facilities Master Plan, seek to address these concerns, no existing plan focuses specifically on sports fields. The lack of a field-specific focus in current plans has left Halifax without the management and technical proficiency needed to develop and sustain a vast inventory of high-quality playing fields.

#### **Recommendation 1: Develop a long-term sports field strategy/plan for the City of Halifax.**

On principle, the establishment of a large, permanent field facility is beneficial to the sporting community. However, limiting the facility to just rugby can radically hinder other sports' usage of the fields at Graves Oakley Memorial Park. Consequently, the disc sports community cannot support the conversion of the sports fields at Graves Oakley into a facility solely dedicated to rugby. We can however, offer a meaningful alternative in recommending the development of a multi-field, multi-sport facility, either at Graves Oakley or elsewhere. We hope that this recommendation will satisfy the needs of the rugby, soccer, football, field hockey, disc sports, and the broader sports community.

#### **Recommendation 2: Establish a multi-field, multi-sport hub in Halifax.**

In addition, we can offer suggestions about the current needs of Graves Oakley should some sort of renovation or expansion proceed.

### Background: Graves Oakley Memorial Park

Graves Oakley Memorial Park is located on Leiblin Drive in Spryfield. The park itself is primarily dedicated to organized sports uses, although there are other recreation/leisure opportunities (playground, urban garden) nearby. Until 2015, the facility consisted of:

- 1 rugby field
- 1 soccer field and 1 adjacent rugby field
- 2 baseball diamonds



In 2015, a special rugby event, the Battle for New Scotland, necessitated the conversion of the soccer field and adjacent rugby field into a large showcase rugby field. Consequently, while the actual area of field space hasn't changed, the bookable fields inventory has been reduced. There has been ongoing discussion as to whether to make this change permanent, or to re-convert the park to its original layout. In addition, the 2008 iteration of the Community Facilities Master Plan drew attention to the low number of booking hours at the ball diamonds, with some speculation as to whether they should be replaced.

**Recommendation 3: Develop and publish a clear planning document (i.e.: A Master Plan) specifically for the future of Graves Oakley.**

There are no basic amenities, such as washrooms and drinking fountains, at Graves Oakley. As a result, public urination and occasionally defecation in the areas surrounding Graves Oakley is not uncommon. In addition, there are no shade or rain shelters for participants or spectators. In addition, a significant amount of litter (from water bottles) accumulates in the areas surrounding the sports fields and baseball diamonds.

**Recommendation 4: Installation of basic amenities, including washrooms, shade shelters, and drinking fountains at Graves Oakley.**

The area is poorly served by transit and the park is largely inaccessible to pedestrians, cyclists, and other modes of transportation. A single, infrequent bus route services the surrounding neighbourhood, which is impractical to use on evenings and weekends. In addition, there are no bike lanes or sidewalks on Leiblin Drive. While accessing the park requires the use of a car, there is insufficient parking during major events and cars will generally park (sometimes illegally) on Leiblin Drive.

**Recommendation 5: Increase accessibility and connectivity of Graves Oakley to the surrounding transportation network.**

## Ultimate (Ultimate Frisbee) in Halifax

There are a number of defining features of ultimate in Halifax, including:

- Over 800 registered league players in Halifax and surrounding areas
- Typically played 7v7 but with 5v5 and 4v4 modifications
- Year Round programs with Indoor and Outdoor leagues run by Halifax Ultimate and Halifax Sport and Social Club
- Men's, women's and co-ed divisions in different age groups ranging from juniors (under 19) to masters (over 33 men's/over 30 women's)
- Three elite, touring teams in the Halifax Area that usually attend the Canadian Ultimate Championships every August.

While introductory and pick-up ultimate can be played anywhere, organized leagues have very specific space requirements. A single game requires a 100 metre by 37 metre playing area, and an additional 5 metres of buffer space surrounding the field (APPENDIX A). However, there are very few fields in Halifax that can accommodate these requirements. Consequently, ultimate fields in Halifax are scaled to fit available space.



## Ultimate at Graves Oakley

Organized ultimate is played regularly on the sports fields at Graves Oakley. Prior to 2015, Graves Oakley allowed for six games to be played simultaneously: two on each of the rugby fields and two on the soccer field. On weekday evenings during the playing season, ultimate would be played on one or two of the sports fields (between 2 and 4 games). In addition, the occasional weekend tournament necessitated the use of all three fields at facility (up to 6 ultimate games).

While Graves Oakley is the single largest facility for ultimate in Halifax, it is far from an ideal facility for multi-sport use. The permanent installation of goal posts and soccer nets necessitate the reduction in playing area as these pieces of equipment present serious hazards to ultimate players. In addition, there is no room for buffer space between fields. As such, for league play and regular events, ultimate is played on smaller fields, with the approximate dimensions of 90 metres by 32 metres. These dimensions are significantly smaller than the standard dimensions used for general league play.

The 2015 conversion of Graves Oakley for the Battle for New Scotland rugby event allowed city staff and local Halifax Ultimate (HU) league organizers to experiment with the layout of the sports fields for ultimate use. With some modifications to the facility, staff were able to create three regulation size ultimate fields and an additional two reduced size fields, for the local leagues' playoffs weekend event. However, these changes were not permanent as the rugby posts and soccer nets needed to be re-installed. The layout of rugby fields and location of permanent soccer and rugby goal posts presents serious safety risk for ultimate players (and other sport players as well) forcing the community to adjust by playing on a smaller field. A simple solution in a multi-sport/multi-use facility would be to use non-permanent, movable nets and goals that can be stowed during periods when they are not being used.

**Recommendation 6: Utilize movable goal posts and nets to facilitate other sports' use of Graves Oakley and other facilities.**

## Conclusions

Sports groups in Halifax generally share a very similar requirement: open field space. Finding appropriate spaces in Halifax for organized sports is a major challenge as several facilities that are considered 'sports fields' are either (1) too small or (2) too poorly maintained for use by organized leagues and clubs. Compounded by the lack of a "showcase" facility, the rugby community's request for a dedicated facility is certainly justified. While the disc sports community echoes this sentiment and desire for upgraded facilities, we believe that facilities dedicated to a single sport/single user are not the most appropriate use of public resources. Rather, we believe that there are meaningful alternatives available that will meet the needs of and benefit the broader sports community

I hope that these recommendations are helpful in determining the future of Graves Oakley and I would be happy to address any questions or concerns about the content or recommendations of this submission.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Blair  
Disc Nova Scotia



APPENDIX A

Standard Regulation Size Ultimate (Ultimate Frisbee) Field

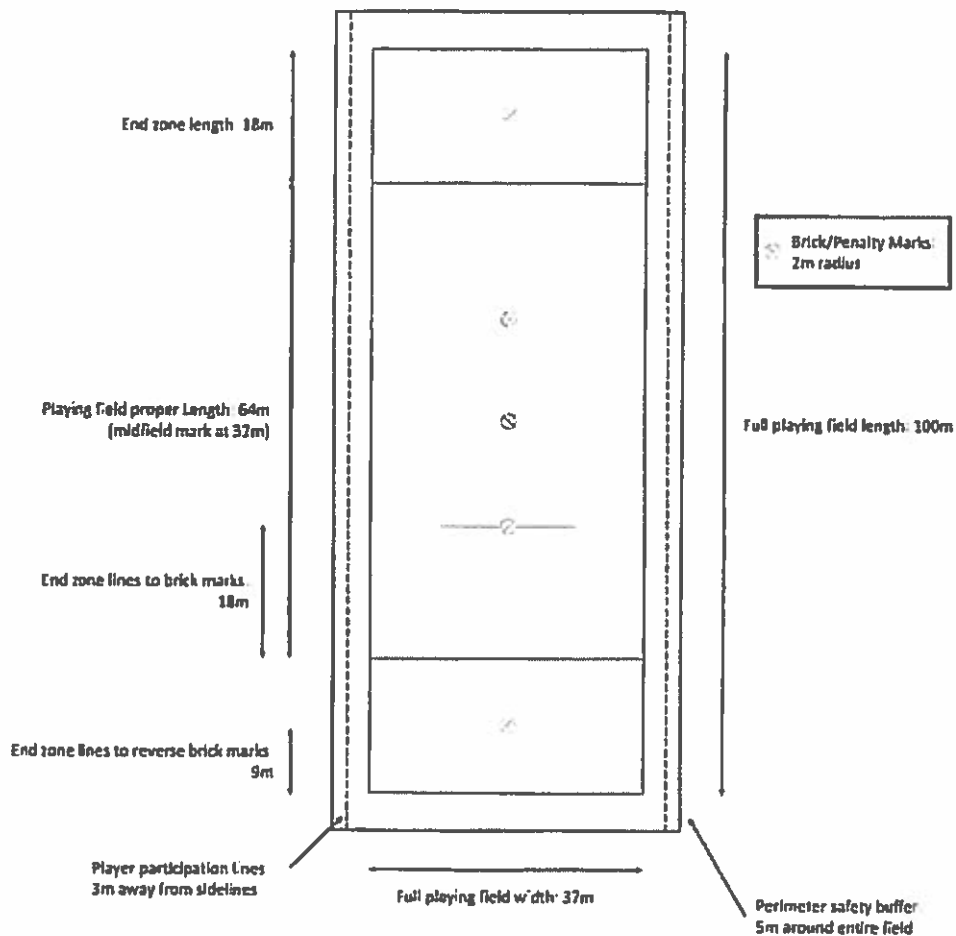


Figure 1 - Regulation Size Ultimate Field