

TURF,

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“It was a really strange situation,” said Willis. “To this day, I couldn’t tell you why. OSU was restructuring a lot of its state-wide 4H structure at the time, and they now have a new director of the 4H program, so it could have been part of that. It was really strange – one month we were meeting and it was the greatest thing ever, the next month they said they were ending this program with no explanation.”

Willis then contacted the player’s families, who expressed how important it was to them, so the county asked the local communities if there was any group able to take on the program as it was, without OSU or 4H support.

“To their credit, what was then Keizer Soccer Club said ‘Yeah we’d be willing to take these kids and help the program continue,’” said Willis. “And then COVID hit.

“One of the ways they would play is they would go and purchase time on different fields that the school district owned around the area, and when COVID happened those field weren’t available anymore. They weren’t able to play for almost two years.”

Willis said that in deciding how to spend ARPA funds, one of the things that came up with the Marion County board was the ability of kids to have a place to play and for this type of program to continue. He said the county wanted to support kids whose parents might not have enough money to play competitive sports, otherwise.

Willis met with Keizer and other local communities, searching for a place to put the fields, and Keizer Rapids Park came up.

“They talked about how this was a park that had planned to have fields for a while, and this was a good place for us to invest money,” he said.

After meeting with the West Keizer Neighborhood Association to talk about their concerns, Willis said he felt the community wanted the fields as long as

the disruptions were minimized.

“I have personally facilitated and fundraised for two turf fields in our community to support kids – the McNary turf field and the McKay turf field,” said Marion County Commissioner and Keizer resident, Danielle Bethell.

She described the McNary project as huge.

“It cost a lot of money,” she said. “But the reason we needed to do it is because we took a field that had approximately 180 uses a year if that based on weather, to 1,800 uses or more a year for our kids.”

Bethell described the difficulties and challenges surrounding youth athletics during the pandemic, and how the turf fields would help address a regional need. The school district, she said, is constantly restricted by space.

“Our community is growing and we do not have enough resources to support our growth,” she said. “So these two fields are going to have a significant regional impact to our community.”

Bethell said the county is taking \$2 million out of a \$68 million bucket, and providing it for activities that can impact families and benefit local community for generations.

“We can’t give these dollars to other communities because they don’t have a master plan and a parks plan that calls for this – and you do,” she told the council. “You’re the community that I know best that can get this done, because I’ve seen you do it.”

While the current parks plan doesn’t actually call for two new turf fields, the council is currently considering the request. Due to the nature of the ARPA grants, the money has to be spent in allocations by the end of 2024 and then again in 2026, or the city loses access to the current \$7 million basket.

Bethell and Willis both told the council the county had a finance team that would help track and manage the ARPA funds, going forward – Bethell said she wanted to create a partnership between the county and the city going forward.

A number of other speakers also advocated for the project, including former city mayor Lore Christopher and representatives from the Mid-Willamette Valley Soccer Club and McNary High



McNary was one of two turf fields added to Marion County in the past (McKay also has a turf field). The two new fields would be located at Keizer Rapids Park.

Photo by Charles Glenn

School. Nobody appeared at the meeting to speak against the project.

“Things could go a lot faster once we get to the point of go,” said Mayor Cathy Clark. “Once that happens, we’ll work out a contractual agreement with Marion County.”

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Cat of the Week



Name: JEZZY

Age: 1



HISTORY: Jezzy is a black domestic short hair. She has had kittens in the past that have been adopted.

PREFERRED HOME: This cat is very friendly and mellow. She is okay around kids of any age.

WE HAVE MOVED >>> Our new location is 4157 Cherry Avenue, Keizer <<< 503-362-5611