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## Funding to build 'field of dreams'

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Friday Night Lights could soon be coming to St. Catharines with the announcement of \$2 million in funding to construct an artificial turf sports field.

The funding comes from the federal and provincial levels of government and will be go towards the building of the field in McCaffrey Park on Vansicke Road. Mayor Brian McMullan said funding for the estimated \$3.4-million project could begin as early as this fall for completion the following fall.

When it's completed, the field for football, soccer and lacrosse will feature high-intensity lights to allow for night games, an artificial turf playing surface which can handle wet weather to allow for an extended playing season, as well as a full change room, storage area and stands for 1,500 spectators.

McMullan called the project a "field of dreams" and one that will allow for "Friday Night Lights"-style games.

"This is something we've talked about in the community for many, many years," he said. "This here, when it's finished, will in my mind be one of the premier athletic facilities in the Niagara region."

McMullan also touted the environmental benefits of turf.

Beneits of artifical turf include less water usage, along with no need for grass cutting, pesticides and fertilizer. He said city staff are also looking into having on-site wind and solar electricity generation to help power the facility, along with rainwater collection to supply water to the washrooms.

McMullan was joined in the announcement Monday afternoon by St. Catharines MPP Jim Bradley and St. Catharines MP Rick Dykstra, who took turns tossing a football around and posed together on a sample of artificial turf.

Dave Howe, coach of the Niagara Spears senior varsity team of the Ontario Varsity Football League, said the new field will allow them to take to the field earlier, explaining the team currently rents space in a Niagara Falls sports dome from March to mid-May.

It will also allow for night games, he said, which will give spectators more chances to watch the games. Lights are also a pre-requisite for Ontario Varsity Football League championships, which take place at the end of August and feature double header games, with the senior game running after it starts to get dark.

Howe said he's been waiting to hear this news ever since the federal government announced its recreational infrastructure program.



**Funding to build 'field of dreams'.** Raising their arms as if to signal a touchdown, Niagara Spears senior varsity team coach Dave Howe, Mayor Brian McMullan, MP Rick Dykstra and MPP Jim Bradley celebrate a \$2-million combined investment from the federal and provincial levels of government to fund an artificial turf field.

"It's nice to see this actually happening," he said.

McMullan said the Spears, along with soccer organizations, have pledged to financially support the building of the field, though no amount has been set. Meanwhile the Kiwanis have already committed \$200,000.

Levelling and grading work could take place as early as fall, after which it's recommended the ground be allowed to settle over the winter, with the turf being laid afterwards.

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