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Brighton to private entity

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 7, 2012 11:58 AM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Governor Deval Patrick has signed **controversial legislation** allowing the state to

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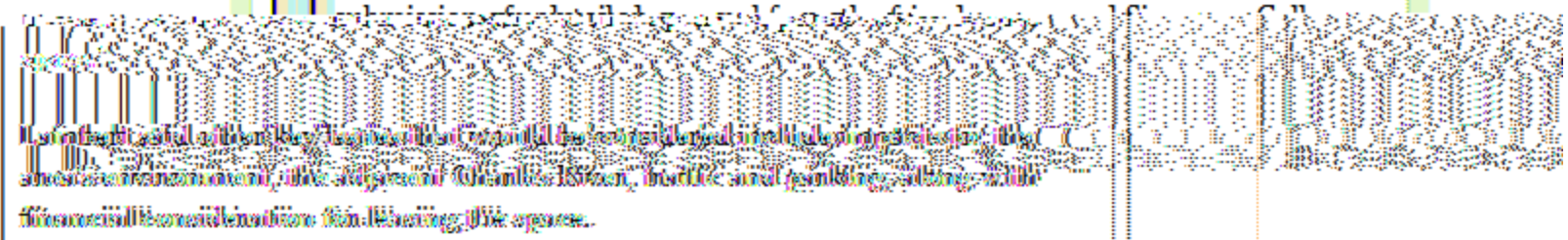
lease Daly Field in Brighton to a private, nonprofit group and to have Simmons College renovate the run-down, 8.6-acre green space.

The law Patrick signed Monday **has been criticized** because it allows the state to designate times when Simmons, Brighton High School, and the Allston-Brighton Little League would have the chance to use the site, a set-up that some worry could severely restrict general public use. Others are concerned about potential environmental impact of leasing the public Charles River waterfront property to a private entity.

The law allows, though does not require, the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation to lease Daly Field to the newly formed nonprofit Allston-Brighton Friends of Daly Field, which is led by a 15-member board of residents and city, state, and Simmons representatives.

"The legislation does not bypass any permitting process that may be required under state or local law for the site — it merely enables those processes to start," Senator William N. Brownsberger of Belmont, the bill's sponsor, **wrote on his website** recently.

In a phone interview Tuesday, Edward M. Lambert, Jr., Commissioner of the Department of Conservation and Recreation said the next step will likely be the



"If there's going to be consideration of such a lease, there will be a very, very public process that will include a range of stakeholders," he said.

If the plan moves forward, Simmons **would spend \$5 million** to renovate the property to create a multi-purpose outdoor sports complex with two new synthetic fields, a running track, tennis courts, river path, lighting for the entire parcel and other amenities for athletes and spectators, officials said. The college would also give \$500,000 for restoration work along the Charles River in Watertown.

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The worn-down green space is flanked by river to the north and Nonantum Road to the south. It currently features space for softball and soccer. The rebuilt athletic complex would allow for uses including football, soccer, field hockey, lacrosse, rugby, softball, and tennis.

The lease would be for 20 years with an option for a 10-year extension and would allow the friends group to oversee the property. The legislation stipulates that scheduling of the field's use would be controlled by the state's conservation and recreation department.

The bill explicitly reserves full use of the site for Simmons from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. on weekdays from March to May and from mid-August to November.

Brighton High football would have the space reserved from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. on weekdays and on Friday nights from mid-August to November for its practices. The Allston-Brighton Little League would reserve weekdays from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. from May to July.

Saturdays would be shared by Simmons College and the local and abutting communities. Sundays would be reserved for local community use.

"The general public will continue to have access to the fields, even during these times, if not in use by the identified users," Brownsberger wrote on his website previously, adding that "the site would continue to remain open and accessible — no closed gates."

Some legislators have said that the field is currently underutilized. The state said that the field is in use about one-third of the time by permit holders and is also used often for pickup games, the Globe has reported. And those who use it said it is very popular with softball and soccer teams, among others.

"The biggest change for most people will be that the fields will be in good shape," Brownsberger wrote. "My personal expectation is that use of the fields by the general public will increase substantially as a result of this partnership."

Daly Field was once home to Brighton High School football. But due to deteriorating conditions, the team abandoned the space more than 20 years ago. Since then, the Bengals have used other sites, most recently White Stadium at Franklin Park. But football team has not had a home field since it left Daly Field

Last week, the House voted 155-0 to pass the bill. The Senate voted 34-3 to approve. Gov. Patrick gave enacted the legislation when he signed it on Aug. 6, according to his website. The law is now part of Chapter 223 of the Acts of 2012.

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