By Amy Sylvestri

San Leandro Times

Construction on the new $16 million Pacific Sports Complex is set to be completed at the end of this summer – but the city is scrambling to find the money to run the facility because they did not include it in the budget.

At a City Council meeting Monday night, the city and the school district discussed how they would fund maintenance on the new fields and wound up asking city staff to go back to the drawing board for ideas to get money to run the complex.

The facility will include the Burrell Field football stadium – home of the San Leandro High Pirates. The Pacific Sports Complex will also feature a track, baseball field, and tennis courts and other features to be used by students, private leagues, and the public.

The football field is school district property, and the rest of the fields are city property.

Aside from the football field, the facilities are open to the public. The city used to spend $80,000 a year running the sports complex, but running the new, upgraded facility could cost up to $180,000.

But the city did not put any money in this year’s general fund budget to fund the facilities, not even the amount it has set aside in previous years.

It’s because the opening of the new facility is a good opportunity to look at alternative funding sources, according to City Manager Chris Zapata.

Zapata told the City Council that, with the new facilities opening, the city is looking to get the maintenance paid for by advertising and rentals of the facilities.

Zapata said it is hoped that a company will sponsor a digital billboard, which could bring in $100,000 in advertising revenue annually, though he admitted that figure was “optimistic.”

“There are a lot of unknowns as to what the costs will be in regards to the fields,” said Zapata. “There are a lot of unknowns as to revenues as well.”

Superintendent Cindy Cathey said that naming rights to the fields could also be a source of revenue.

But public speaker Martin Capron – who headed the Measure M bond efforts – said that money from the city’s general fund must be used and that getting all the necessary revenue from signs and advertising is unrealistic.

“The city has used the fields for a number of years, so why does that $80,000 vanish now?” asked Capron. “The sign is pie in the sky. You can’t count on that revenue.”

In general, the council members said they were upset the money for the fields hadn’t been budgeted.

“I am dismayed to see the $80,000 is gone (from the budget),” said Councilwoman Pauline Cutter. “For 30 years the city has used the fields. They are community fields. Our goal is to make San Leandro a world class place to live and if we cannot open a field, it says a lot about us.”

Councilwoman Diana Souza has been vocal about not using city money to support the sports complex, calling it the school district’s problem. She has said in the past that over 30 percent of the city (those in the San Lorenzo school district) didn’t get a chance to vote to approve the complex, so she is hesitant to fund it with their money.

“I didn’t support Measure M from the beginning,” said Souza. “There were a lot of funding questions that were never answered. This is a case of very poor planning.”