



Improving Barrington's Fields and Recreational Facilities

TOWN COUNCIL

JANUARY 9, 2023

Improving Barrington's Fields and Recreational Facilities

Three-Part Issue:

1. Need for an athletic field house in Barrington
2. Whether to install a synthetic turf field in Barrington
3. Overall maintenance of Barrington's fields

Problems

Barrington needs more fields and an indoor recreational space

- Barrington has a lack of fields and athletic facilities and lack of availability to use its existing fields and athletic facilities
- Fields need to be better maintained and conditioned
- Has been an issue for decades, since at least the mid-1980s. Same problems exist.
- Barrington has not sufficiently invested in recreational activities in town

Findings

2001 Recreation Land Use Ad Hoc Committee Report to the Barrington Town Council:

- “The Town’s active recreation areas are seriously deficient in both quality and quantity.”
- “The Committee’s investigation has revealed that the fields currently in use need substantial repair, followed by more and better maintenance to prevent the existing conditions from reoccurring.”
- “Moreover, additional fields are necessary to adequately service the needs of the Town.”
- “[T]he Town has not allocated sufficient financial and human resources to maintain these active recreation areas at acceptable levels. These factors have resulted in the current deficient condition of these areas.”

Findings

2001 Recreation Land Use Ad Hoc Committee Report to the Barrington Town Council:

- “Barrington’s recreational fields are used to capacity – and beyond. This is not a new problem. The issue of the need for new fields was examined by the Park and Recreation Committee in 1986 and the Open Space and Recreation Committee in 1987.”
- “Many of their recommendations for new fields were incorporated into the 1992 Barrington Comprehensive Community Plan (the ‘Comprehensive Plan’), which has been endorsed by the Town Council.”
- “The Comprehensive Plan calls for the construction of twenty additional fields.”
- “The Committee views with dismay the failure to make significant progress in implementing recommendations that were made fourteen years ago and are still embodied in the Comprehensive Plan.”

Findings

2001 Recreation Land Use Ad Hoc Committee Report to the Barrington Town Council:

- “Youth sports organizations and the school athletic director report that fields are overused, overcrowded and inadequate to meet programmatic needs.”
- “Thus, the development of new fields is a key element of a needed strategy for improved maintenance.”

Findings

2014 Gale Report – Barrington High School Stadium Field Renovations Feasibility Study:

- “The main goal for the resurfacing of the existing natural turf field is to provide the School with a true multi-purpose field that can be used all year, in varying weather conditions that can withstand intensive use.”
- “Installation of artificial turf will allow the school to take full advantage of the existing infrastructure and require minimum maintenance and upkeep.”
- “A new synthetic field would not require the rigorous upkeep and maintenance that the natural turf needs and it would allow for intensive, all year, and all weather use.”
- “The installation of synthetic turf would have the side benefit of taking usage and pressures off of other fields the School currently utilizes, as well as ease scheduling conflicts that arise due to weather limitations of natural turf.”
- “The existing field lighting adds the advantage of enabling night games for sports programs that working parents can attend, that would otherwise need to be played during the day.”

Findings

2014 Gale Report – Conclusions and Recommendations

- “The proposed installation of synthetic turf at the existing stadium affords Barrington High School the opportunity to upgrade their track and field stadium facility for true multipurpose sports use, as well as a greater level of use, while reducing maintenance costs.”
- “The new synthetic field will be able to be used year-round, will have the potential to be used all day and into the night, in all weather conditions without an increased need for maintenance.”
- “The existing field lighting adds the advantage of enabling night games for sports programs that working parents can attend, that would otherwise need to be played during the day.”
- “The project will also provide an enhanced image and venue for Town events for years to come.”
- “The existing track interior is undersized and will not allow NFHS regulation Soccer or Girls Lacrosse events.”

Findings

- 2021 Ad Hoc Athletic Fields Advisory Committee Report:

- Field Use and Scheduling Work Group: “Due to the shortage of large multi-use fields that will accommodate all of the groups that is in need of field use, it is recommended to find at least two additional large multi-use fields for use.”
- Field Maintenance & Acquisition Work Group: “The group began the work with the understanding that the availability and condition of adequately sized playing fields in Barrington does not currently meet the needs of the many athletic groups and community members that wish to use them.”
- “It is the conclusion of this work group that there are two primary obstacles that keep existing fields in Barrington from being maintained in the best possible condition:” (1) “a shortage of Department of Public Works (DPW) personnel;” and (2) “the inability to ‘rest’ fields.”
 - “Due to the limited availability of field space throughout Town, it is almost impossible to take any fields ‘offline’ for a sufficient amount of time to allow for optimal recovery and regrowth. . . . Despite the imminent return of field space at the Middle School, current field demand means that the ability to rest fields as required will not improve without the addition of new fields.”
- “Demand for and an insufficient number of full-sized athletic fields in Town indicate a need for acquisition or development of additional lands. This is not a new problem – it has been documented since at least 1986 when it was examined by the Park and Recreation Commission. After consultation with the existing Parks & Recreation Department and the Scheduling work group of the Ad Hoc Athletic Field Advisory Committee, it was determined that one additional full-sized field (comparable to a girls’ lacrosse field, approximately 110 yards x 60 yards) would meet the Town’s needs, and an additional full-sized field would be necessary for resting purposes.”

Findings

2021 Ad Hoc Athletic Fields Advisory Committee Report:

- Artificial Turf Work Group: “The Subcommittee remained mindful of the events leading up to the formation of the larger Committee – the unavailability and deteriorating condition of youth league recreational fields due to high demand, insufficiency of space and inclement weather.”
- Finance and Fees Work Group Report: “New field acquisition or development should include a fundraising campaign with community and corporate sponsor recognition opportunities. This is possible on municipal or school property, and allows the burden of cost to be shared by volunteers engaging donors, and may avoid the need for issuing a bond.”
- Full Committee Recommendations:
 1. **Natural Fields:** Haines Park plan is a helpful piece of the overall field enhancement initiative, but is not a stand alone solution for our athletic field needs in Barrington
 2. **Artificial Fields:** Best location for an artificial playing surface would be on the Barrington High School fields running along County Road; questions still remain as to certain health and safety issues given the inconclusive nature of existing studies.
 3. **Tracking and Scheduling:** To ensure efficiency and to determine the appropriate distribution of costs.
 4. **Apply fees to reservations:** Using the field should be free of charge; however, because it is a public space, a league that wants to reserve exclusive use of a field should pay a fee to compensate taxpayers for the public loss of the field.
 5. **Establish a Capital Campaign Committee:** The opportunity to generate a meaningful portion of cost through fundraising should be taken.

Findings

2021 Ad Hoc Athletic Fields Advisory Committee Report

- Committee put in substantial work and did a great job, presented its report, and then nothing has happened.
- Committee was formed in spring of 2019 and neared completion of its work in February 2020 when COVID-19 pandemic delayed the Committee's final vote and recommendations.
- Certain information might be outdated and could be updated, especially addressing the environmental concerns on artificial turf.

Findings

Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC)

December 2022 “How Cities and Towns Spend Their Money” Report:

- RI municipalities underinvest in parks, recreation, and natural resources relative to local governments in other states – on a per capita basis, RI’s local government spending ranked fourth lowest nationally in FY 2020
- Barrington in particular is lacking in its investment in town recreation – ranked 24th out of 39 municipalities in investment on parks, recreation, and natural resources
- Municipalities should increase their investment in parks, recreation, and natural resources to make up for systemic underinvestment

Solutions

Three-part plan to holistically address the longstanding problems:

1. Athletic Field House
2. Synthetic turf field
3. Improved field maintenance

Athletic Field House

Addresses all of the problems that have existed since mid-1980s or earlier:

- Additional fields – potential for multiple fields
- Multi-purpose use
- Can be used all year round
- Can be used in any weather condition and provides additional field space for in-season outdoor sports during inclement outdoor weather
- Minimum maintenance and upkeep
- Longer hours – can play/practice after sun goes down

Athletic Field House

Sport Accommodations:

- Basketball
- Soccer
- Football (Flag, Pop Warner, Cheer)
- Lacrosse
- Field Hockey
- Baseball and Softball
- Tennis
- Pickleball
- Volleyball
- Futsal
- Track and Field
- And more . . . any other recreational activities

Athletic Field House

Conceptual Features:

- Two basketball courts that could also accommodate volleyball, futsal, cheer, or other floor sports
- One or two full-size indoor fields that could accommodate soccer, lacrosse, football (flag, Pop Warner, cheer), field hockey, baseball and softball, and anything else
- One or two tennis courts
- One or two pickleball courts
- Baseball and softball batting cage area
- Walking/running track

Athletic Field House

Conceptual Features:

- Simple layout
- Accommodate approximately 45-50,000 square feet of playing space (i.e., approx. 60,000+ square foot building)
- One or two levels (or “split-ranch”) to accommodate the afore-mentioned activities
- Basement option
- Adequate parking, traffic, and neighbor considerations
- Town owned to guarantee Town activities have first option to use

Athletic Field House

Potential Locations:

The Town has several potential locations for an athletic field house. Potential locations that the Town can publicly identify at this stage includes:

- Former Zion property – existing gymnasium and adjacent field to build out
- Chianese Park – would have the benefit of including additional space for parking to resolve ongoing parking issues at Chianese fields
- Land at corner of Middle Highway and College Lane (site of the former “Place”)
- Land between Primrose Hill School and East Bay Health Center
- 25 Watson property
- Other locations subject to negotiation and exploration

Athletic Field House

Potential Costs:

- Estimated in the range of \$3-6 million (subject to further information)
- Costs offset by:
 - Grants
 - Capital campaign/fundraising
 - Sponsorships/naming rights
 - Rental fees
 - Benefits of investment in community, youth, recreation, health and wellness
 - Other
- Issue bond for any remaining costs that are not offset

Synthetic Turf Fields

Addresses all of the problems that have existed since mid-1980s or earlier:

- Additional fields – potential for multiple activities at the same time
- Multi-purpose use
- Can be used all year round
- Can be used in inclement weather conditions
- Minimum maintenance and upkeep
- Longer hours – with lights, can play/practice after sun goes down

Synthetic Turf Fields

Benefits and Uses (from 2021 Ad Hoc Committee Report):

- “First, artificial turf playing surfaces can accommodate near constant use without significant degradation in quality.”
 - Available for approx. “58 hours of playing time per available field compared to the 20-25 hours of playing time that is a standard recommendation for natural grass fields in order to maintain quality.”
- “Second, provided that suitable drainage is engineered into an artificial field system, it is available for use in any weather conditions in which one can imagine youth athletes being willing to play.”
 - “[S]ports events in Barrington are cancelled for weather solely because of the damages that would result to the fields while they are wet. The use of an artificial turf field in inclement weather does not present any risk of damage to the playing surface, and. . . It will be available for use immediately after inclement weather has passed whereas drainage issues at many of Barrington’s natural grass fields can mean that they are unplayable for a day or more after wet weather has passed.”
- “Third, absent extraordinary investment of time and money and frequent field closures for resting of grass, artificial turf offers consistency of field quality throughout the year that is not possible to achieve through the use of natural turf in Barrington due to climate, soil conditions, Canada geese, and frequency of field use.”

Synthetic Turf Fields

Concerns (from 2021 Ad Hoc Committee Report):

- “**Health and Safety** – including considerations of injury risks, exposure risks, heat, abrasions, infections and concussions”
- “**Environmental** – including considerations of runoff, pollution and recyclability”
- “**Cost** – including considerations of installation/construction costs, periodic surface replacement and regular maintenance”

Synthetic Turf Fields

Research:

Town sent a letter to all Rhode Island municipalities, schools, and colleges that have installed artificial turf fields to receive feedback on key issues based on their actual experience to explore the benefits and costs of having a turf field.

Areas of inquiry:

- Use
- Maintenance
- Environment
- Injuries
- Overall experience
- Whether they would recommend installing artificial turf fields, based on their experience with turf fields

Synthetic Turf Fields

Rhode Island Municipalities, Schools, and Colleges with turf fields:

- Municipalities with turf fields: Central Falls, Cranston, Cumberland, East Greenwich, East Providence, Lincoln, Middletown, Narragansett, Newport, North Smithfield, Pawtucket, Providence, and Scituate. Also nearby Fall River, among others.
- Schools with turf fields: Bishop Hendricken Academy, Cranston Public Schools, LaSalle Academy, Moses Brown, North Kingstown Public Schools, Portsmouth High School, Providence Country Day School, Providence Public Schools, St. George's School, Wheeler School. Also nearby Seekonk High School, among others.
- All intercollegiate schools in Rhode Island that play sports have installed or are presently installing turf fields (Brown University, University of Rhode Island, Providence College, Bryant University, Roger Williams University, and Salve Regina University. Rhode Island College is under construction on a turf field)

Synthetic Turf Fields

Sample Feedback from Rhode Island Towns with turf fields:

- Cranston: “Love it!” Would “absolutely” recommend it.
- Cumberland: “[I]n my opinion it’s been the best acquisition in my 15 years working for the town.” . . . “Company does maintenance 4x per year. Costs about \$5,000-6,000 a year.”
- East Greenwich: Notes pros and cons, and concludes that “[i]f the community is prepared to make the investment in an artificial surface, proper equipment to maintain it, and staff to manage its use [I] would recommend it because synthetic turf can add many more usable hours of play with less of a risk of having a field that is unplayable from overuse and inclement weather.”

Synthetic Turf Fields

Sample Feedback from Rhode Island Colleges with turf fields:

- Bryant University: Overall experience has been “Excellent. You must have turf in New England.” No noticeable increase in injuries in eight years with turf.
- Providence College: “PC has 4 turf fields, and has done 5 turf installations since the first one in 2005. If our Sports Medicine staff had serious concerns about student-athlete welfare as it relates to turf fields it seems unlikely the college or our department would continue installing fields in this way.” . . . “In addition to varsity athletics the positive impact it can have with increased programming of recreational sports and also revenue opportunities via rentals makes it a no brainer.”
- Roger Williams University: “[W]hen you install a Turf you should think of it as having 3 fields. You will be able to use it triple the amount of time without damage as you could a grass field, as long as you have lights.” . . . “Turf’s drainage should be designed to handle a 100 year storm.” . . . “We have had Turf for over 10 years, no increase in injuries that I am aware of.”

Synthetic Turf Fields

Environmentally Friendly Infill:

Available options provide durability and performance and are low maintenance, safe, and environmentally friendly.

■ “Envirofill”

- Low maintenance, including no watering to cool surface
- Durable – can be used for multiple turf lifecycles with no decrease in performance. 16-year warranty.
- Non-rubber and includes antimicrobial protection to help prevent growth of bacteria and microbes that can cause stains, odors, and product deterioration.

Source: Motz, <https://themotzgroup.com/sport-projects/the-wheeler-school/> (last accessed January 5, 2022)

■ “Safeshell”

- Nontoxic, organic infill option made of 100% USA-grown walnut shells
- Low-maintenance, including no watering to cool surface
- Most durable natural infill available. 8-year warranty and limited top-off required

Source: Motz, <https://themotzgroup.com/sport-projects/the-wheeler-school/> (last accessed January 5, 2022)

■ Other safe and environmentally friendly options:

- Wood, coconut husk, cork

Synthetic Turf Fields



The Wheeler School Example:

- In 2018, installed 1.75 Dual Fiber turf with Safeshell infill and a 17mm shock pad
- Athletic campus is adjacent to upper watershed of Runnins River in Seekonk, MA. Important to the school that the infill selected not negatively affect the downstream water quality. It was also critical that the infill would not be difficult to maintain or create a burden that would take the focus away from maintaining the other 7 natural fields on the athletic campus.
- After reviewing 7 infill options, Wheeler selected Safeshell because it was a natural product that was ideal for the field location adjacent to a natural preserve and required much less maintenance than the other natural infills.

Source: Motz, <https://themotzgroup.com/sport-projects/the-wheeler-school/> (last accessed January 5, 2022)

Synthetic Turf Fields

Potential Locations:

- Victory Field at Barrington High School
 - Town's premier field for football, soccer, lacrosse, and track and field
 - Multi-use for high school and youth sports
 - Already has lights
- Barrington High School Fields along County Road
 - Two baseball fields and can host football, soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, rugby, and other activities
 - Multi-use for high school and use sports
 - Larger space, more fields
- Other locations at Barrington High School, Chianese Park, Barrington Middle School

Synthetic Turf Fields

Potential Costs:

- 2014 Gale Report: Estimated \$2.5 million to provide new synthetic turf stadium field at Victory Field within a reconstructed track (plus annual maintenance costs).
- 2021 Ad Hoc Athletic Field Advisory Committee Report: Estimated \$3.8 million for Barrington High School fields along County Road, at approximately \$10 per square foot for approximately 380,000 square feet, plus costs to install lights (plus annual maintenance costs)
- Costs offset by:
 - Grants
 - Capital campaign/fundraising
 - Sponsorships/naming rights
 - Rental fees
 - Benefits of investment in community, youth, recreation, health and wellness
 - Other
- Issue bond for any remaining costs that are not offset

Field Maintenance

Ad Hoc Athletic Field Advisory Committee – Field Maintenance & Acquisition Work Group Recommendations:

1. Continue to pursue accurate tracking of DPW manpower to support advocacy for additional personnel qualified to properly and sufficiently maintain municipal and school sports fields.
2. Develop and firmly impose a rotating schedule to allow fields to “rest.”
- 3 - 5. Haines State Park – completed.

Next Steps

The goal is to get as much public awareness and input as possible before deciding whether to move forward on the actionable solutions to the longstanding field problems.

- Public Workshops – several general and more pointed workshop sessions
- Board and Commission Feedback:
 - Parks and Recreation Committee
 - Planning Board
 - Zoning Board
 - Technical Review Committee
 - Open Space Committee
 - Economic Development Commission
 - Resilience and Energy Commission
 - School Committee
- DO NOT NEED ANOTHER AD HOC COMMITTEE

Next Steps

Continued:

- Finalize most feasible locations of athletic field house and synthetic turf field
- Engineering and other technical plans
- Traffic studies
- Updated and more detailed estimated cost information
- Determine whether to proceed

Timing

Ideal Timing:

■ January-November 2023

- Further review, engagement, and discussion by Public and Town (including Boards and Commissions)
- Complete additional studies
- April-May 2023 – Town Council vote on whether to proceed with solutions
- May 2023 – Public Vote at Financial Town Meeting (or Special Financial Town Meeting thereafter)
- November 2023 – Public Bond Referendum at General Election

Alternative Timing:

■ January 2023-November 2024

- Further review, engagement, and discussion by Public and Town (including Boards and Commissions)
- Complete additional studies
- Early 2024 – Town Council vote on whether to proceed with solutions
- May 2024 – Public Vote at Financial Town Meeting
- November 2024 – Public Bond Referendum at General Election (or Special Election before)

Anything in between?

Conclusion

It's past time that Barrington needs to invest in improving its fields and athletic facilities. Put simply, we need more fields and athletic facilities, more availability, and better maintained fields.

Addressed by:

1. Athletic field house in Barrington
2. Synthetic turf field in Barrington
3. Improved focus on overall maintenance of Barrington's fields

Appendix

Relevant Documents:

- 2001 Ad Hoc Committee Report
- 2014 Gale Report
- 2021 Ad Hoc Athletic Field Advisory Committee Report
- December 2022 Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council Report
- Summary of responses to questions on synthetic turf from towns, schools, colleges
- Individual responses to questions on synthetic turf provided by towns, schools, colleges