Athletic Fields Needs Analysis

Town of Wellesley, MA

Findings of the Playing Fields Task Force

July 2014

DRAFT

Section 1. Introduction

Section 2. Background

Section 3. Field Usage Analysis

Section 4. Recommendation

DRAFT

Section 1. Introduction

The North 40 Steering Committee requested that the Playing Fields Task Force (PFTF) provide its perspective on the current status and availability of athletic fields in Wellesley and to make recommendations on current and future needs.

The PFTF surveyed the Wellesley youth sports groups that utilize playing fields (soccer, lacrosse, football, baseball, softball) to develop data on the changes in the number of teams using recreational fields from 2008 to 2014. In addition, we received input from the Wellesley Athletic Director on the number of high school and middle school teams using recreational fields from 2008 to 2014.

Section 2 includes some background on demographic trends, field inventory, scheduling and maintenance. Section 3 provides a high level analysis of field usage trends and our recommendations for future needs are presented in Section 4.

DRAFT

Section 2. Background

Demographic Trends

The population of Wellesley since 1960 has ranged from a low of 26,071 in 1960 to a high of 28,051 in 1970. While there have been fluctuations in the distribution of the age groups over the years the total population has not fluctuated by more than 7.6% over the last 50 years (see table below). However, the number of children participating in certain youth sports that utilize rectangular fields has grown significantly in the last 10 years. For example the youth lacrosse program had 10 teams in 2000, 24 teams in 2008 and 34 teams in 2014, a 240% increase in the number of teams since 2000. In addition, many more children are participating in athletic activities at early ages and several sports have become multi-seasonal in the last decade or so.

Wellesley	**1990**	**2000**	**% chg**	**2010**	**% chg**
All Persons	26,615	26,642	0.10%	27,982	5.03%
Under 5 yrs	1,570	1,957	24.65%	1,570	-19.78%
5 - 17 yrs	3,833	4,727	23.32%	5,962	26.13%
18-64 yrs	17,486	16,247	-7.09%	16,585	2.08%
65 yrs and over	3,726	3,711	-0.40%	3,865	4.15%
Source: Bureau of the Census					

Field Development History and Use Characteristics

The last new field to be developed in Wellesley was Tom Lee field in the mid 1990's. While the population has remained relatively stable since that time the number of children in town has grown dramatically (see table above). In addition to, or perhaps as a result of that growth there has been a increase in the number of youth sports teams since then.

Field use is governed chiefly by the type and size of field required for a particular sport and the amount of use that the field can support. For those fields without lights field use is also governed by the amount of daylight and for those with artificial lights, by town imposed limitations on the hours the lights can be operated. Field availability is also governed by the condition of the fields. Periodically weather related issues or intensity of use issues (soil compaction that results in the thinning of the grass) limits the availability of grass fields.

DRAFT

Current Inventory of Athletic Fields and Primary Users

Currently all sports teams (adult, youth and school based) requiring a playing field have access to the following fields in town:

		Wellesley Playing Field Inventory		
Name	**Owner**	**Surface**	**Lights (Y/N)**	**Primary Users**
Fiske School Field	School	Grass	N	Youth Soccer, Youth Baseball
Hardy Field 1	School	Grass	N	Youth Baseball, Youth Soccer
Hardy Field 2	School	Grass	N	Youth Baseball, Youth Soccer
Schofield School Fields	NRC/School	Grass	N	Youth Soccer, Youth Baseball
Sprague School Field 1	School	Grass	N	MS Football, MS Soccer, HS Lacrosse, HS Softball, Youth Soccer, Youth Lacrosse, MS Softball, Youth Softball
Sprague School Field 2	School	Turf	N	HS Lacrosse, HS Soccer, Youth Lacrosse, Youth Soccer, HS Football, MS Football
Sprague School Field 3	School	Turf	N	Youth Soccer, HS Lacrosse, HS Soccer, HS Field Hockey, Youth Lacrosse
Sprague School Field 4	School	Grass	N	Youth Soccer, HS Soccer, HS Lacrosse, Youth Lacrosse, MS Baseball
Sprague School Field 5	School	Grass	N	HS Baseball, MS Field Hockey, MS Soccer, Freshmen Soccer, MS Baseball
Upham School Lower Field	School	Grass	N	Youth Soccer
Upham School Upper Field	School	Grass	N	Youth Baseball
Brown Field	NRC	Grass	N	Youth Baseball
High School Stadium Field and Track	NRC	Grass	N	HS Football, Youth Lacrosse, HS Track, Youth Track
Hunnewell Multipurpose Field	NRC	Grass	Y	Youth Football, Youth Softball, Adult Softball
Hunnewell Park Fields	NRC	Grass	N	HS Field Hockey, HS Soccer, HS Football, HS Baseball, HS Softball, HS Lacrosse, HS Track & Field, HS Cross Country, MS Field Hockey, MS Soccer, MS Track & Field, MS Cross Country, Youth Lacrosse, Youth Soccer
Kelly Field 1 (Bates School)	NRC	Grass	N	Youth Soccer, Youth Baseball
Kelly Field 2 (Bates School)	NRC	Grass	N	Youth Soccer, Youth Baseball
Kelly Field 3 (Bates School)	NRC	Grass	N	Youth Soccer, Youth Baseball
Kelly Field 4 (Bates School)	NRC	Grass	N	Youth Soccer, Youth Baseball
Lee Field	NRC	Grass	N	Youth Softball
Ouellet Field	NRC	Grass	N	Youth Baseball
Perrin Park	NRC	Grass	N	Youth Soccer, Youth Lacrosse
Reidy Field	NRC	Grass	Y	Youth Baseball

DRAFT

These properties have one or more playing fields of varying types including soccer, lacrosse, baseball, softball, field hockey, track & field and/or practice fields (not regulation size fields for competition). Many of the fields, while not necessarily designed to be so, are multi-purpose fields that are used to accommodate multiple sports at different times (or sometimes shared at the same time during peak demand) of the day and year. It should also be noted that several of the fields (Schofield, some of the Hunnewell Park fields and the High School Stadium field) are not ADA compliant.

In addition, due to the existing shortage of adequate rectangular athletic field space in town, Wellesley United Soccer Club (WUSC – youth soccer) leases two fields at Elm Bank Reservation in order to accommodate all of their teams. It should be noted that while WUSC has been able to lease the land at Elm Bank for a number of years, the land is owned by the state and there is no long term guarantee that Elm Bank will continue to be available for use in the future.

Regulation Rectangular Field Size Requirements

High School Soccer Field – 60-80 yds wide by 110-120 yds long
High School Lacrosse Field – 65 yds wide by 120 yds long
High School Field Hockey Field – 60 yds wide by 100 yds long
High School Football Field – 53½ yds wide by 120 yds long

Scheduling

Scheduling and permitting for the fields is handled by the Recreation Department or the School Athletic Department, depending on the field.

In the spring and fall, the largest field users (the Athletic Department, Youth Soccer, Youth Lacrosse and Youth Baseball/Softball) meet to develop a master use schedule for the needs of their respective programs. These schedules are revised as necessary to accommodate unforeseen changes in needs as the season progresses. The school teams always have priority for the playing fields. The high school and middle school sports programs have exclusive use of the Sprague Fields prior to 6:00 pm weekdays, during the school year. This makes it difficult for all the youth sports to get their practices in during the spring and fall due to shorter daylight hours in those seasons. The limited daylight hours and lack of lighted fields means that practices must finish by dusk, thereby necessitating that more fields be available for practices during the relatively short window of daylight after 6:00 pm.

Opportunities to share fields with other sports are consistently evaluated as scheduling takes place. However, such opportunities are limited. For example, it is difficult for youth sports such as soccer and lacrosse to share fields with baseball or softball as the potential for injury due to stray hardballs flying through the fields is too great.

DRAFT

Maintenance

Maintenance of the grass and turf fields is performed by the Department of Public Works Park and Tree Division. Grass field maintenance typically includes include mowing, fertilization, irrigation, cultivation, weed control, over seeding, controlling field use, and controlling pests like insects or diseases when necessary. Turf field maintenance primarily involves infill maintenance.

Due to the current level of sports participation and the shortage of available fields, particularly for the youth soccer program, tremendous stress has been put on many of the existing fields from overuse (e.g. high school stadium field, Hunnewell multipurpose field, Sprague Field 1, Sprague Field 4). The high demand for use of these fields makes it difficult to “rest” the fields during ideal growing seasons (fall and spring). This can result in degradation of the surface quality with the development of unstable, loose or uneven areas leading to divots and pot-holes resulting in twisting or trip hazards that could cause injury to the participants.

DRAFT

Section 3. Field Usage Analysis

Over the years the number of sports activities and participants has grown in Wellesley while the number of athletic fields available to support activities has not. In particular, participation in two of the four major sports that require rectangular fields has grown meaningfully over the past six years.

Wellesley Playing Field Usage				
Rectangular Fields				
		# Teams	# Teams	
	Season	2008	2014	Variance
Youth Lacrosse	Spring	24	34	10
Youth Soccer	Spring	160	160	0
	Fall	130	160	30
Youth Football	Fall	5	5	0
School Lacrosse	Spring	6	6	0
School Field Hockey	Fall	5	5	0
School Football	Fall	4	4	0
School Soccer	Fall	9	9	0
	Total	**343**	**383**	**40**
Diamond Fields				
Youth Baseball	Summer	18	18	0
Youth Baseball/Softball	Spring	108	85	(23)
Youth Baseball	Fall	28	24	(4)
School Baseball	Spring	4	4	0
School Softball	Spring	4	4	0
Adult Coed Softball	Spring/Summer	4	0	(4)
Mens Slo Pitch Softball	Spring/Summer	8	7	(1)
	Total	**174**	**142**	**(32)**
Other Fields				
Youth Track and Field	Summer	0	1	1
School Track and Field	Spring	4	4	0
School Cross Country	Fall	4	4	0
	Total	**8**	**9**	**1**

NOTE: The baseball/softball team numbers are estimates based on user fees paid in the respective years.

DRAFT

What is not captured by the number of teams is the frequency of practices and games. Youth sports (except for football) tend to have a 2 or 3 day per week event schedule on average (1 or 2 practices and 1 game). The school sports have a 5 day per week schedule. As a result the number of teams does not correlate equally with the amount of field time needed by the respective school and youth sports.

In addition to the regularly scheduled practices and games of the youth and school sports there are a number of groups who pay user fees, including recreation, youth sports and other third parties that host a variety of camps, clinics and games on the playing fields throughout the year on a space available basis. The lack of available field time does have a dampening effect on adding addition programs that require rectangular fields. As an example, recreation would like to create after school programs (e.g. flag football) that are in proximity to the middle school, that require the use of rectangular fields but is unable to do so due to the lack of field availability.

DRAFT

Section 4. Recommendation

In 2007, the town completed a two year project to develop a Town of Wellesley Ten Year Comprehensive Plan. As described in the Open Space and Recreation section of the plan:

"Open space used for active recreational programs totals approximately 225 acres of Town-owned land. Some of this land is attached to schools and includes school playgrounds and playing fields. As is the case in many communities, demand for athletic fields is growing as sports programs increase resulting in the need for expanded fields year-round. The Town has a limited number of fields and good turf management requires that they be "rested" to keep them from being overused."

The shortage of playing fields and overuse of fields is not new to Wellesley and continues to be an issue today. With the possible purchase of the North 40 the town has an opportunity to address some of the playing field needs.

Based on the number of current sports, leagues, participants and playing seasons for field based sports in Wellesley, the existing shortage of rectangular fields, the limited ability to fully utilize the High School Stadium field due to its condition and the inability to properly "rest" a number of fields which could lead to future harm to those fields, the PFTF has estimated that three additional full size rectangular multipurpose, synthetic turf fields are needed to alleviate the existing shortage. We estimate that lighting the fields would reduce the need from three to two fields. The additional fields would meet the immediate demand, reduce scheduling conflicts, reduce grass field overuse and eliminate the dependency on the Elm Bank Reservation fields. Adding a "bubble" to one or more of the fields would create additional capacity to utilize the fields for indoor sports during the winter.

It should also be noted that the high school track is near the end of its useful life and will need to be replaced within the next few years.

There are several additional considerations that could modify the need for the number of new additional fields:

1. High School Stadium Field – This field is underutilized due to the chronically poor condition of the field. Converting this field to a synthetic turf field would increase the opportunity to optimize the utilization of this field. The addition of lights to this field would increase the number of available field hours, thus reducing the number of new fields needed.
2. Hunnewell Multipurpose Field – This is the only rectangular field with lights in Wellesley. However use of this field is not maximized due to soil compaction issues associated with current levels of use. Converting this field to a synthetic turf field would increase the number of available field hours for this field, thus reducing the number of new fields needed.
3. Sprague Fields Usage – Increasing the number of available field hours for the two synthetic turf fields at Sprague could be achieved with the addition of lights, thus reducing the number of new fields needed.

DRAFT