

Article 22

This article, brought by the School Committee, would authorize the borrowing of \$1,205,000 for the purpose of remediation and reconstruction of playing fields 1 and 2 at the Sprague Athletic Field. This sum, in combination with \$645,000 of Community Preservation Committee (CPC) funds (Article 17), would fund the excavation of contaminated soil, installation of a permeable barrier, drainage channels, and the creation of a barrier composed of 12 inches of stone covered with a synthetic surface playing field. Funding of this project will address the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP) requirements for remediation, and help to address the increased demand for and the deterioration of existing playing fields.

Executive Summary

The Sprague Athletic Field is the largest and most heavily used of the Town-owned playing field resources for youth league sports. The complex is utilized by the School Department for both physical education and after school athletic programs (Sprague Elementary School, Middle School, and High School). Wellesley Youth League (baseball, soccer and lacrosse) teams use the fields for practice and games and the Recreation Department uses the site for several programs and camps. The identification of hazardous waste at this site necessitates meeting MADEP requirements for a remediation plan to be presented to Town Meeting. The School Committee and the Playing Field Task Force (PFTF), a committee formed in 1997 at the request of NRC and Recreation, have been working with the Town's consultant, Gale Associates, to develop a remediation plan. The School Committee and the PFTF recommend the installation of a synthetic playing field option, as presented by Gale, to address the remediation and recreational needs of the town. In order to meet MADEP requirements, any and all remediation of this site must be completed by June, 2009. A shared payment plan has been developed using funds from the Town, the CPC and the users of the town playing fields. Any private funds raised for this purpose would reduce payments for the Town, CPC and the users on a pro-rata basis.

Background

The Sprague Field Complex is seasonally configured to meet youth sports requirements. It was given to the School Committee for its use, and since that time it has been designated as athletic fields by that Committee. The 25 acre site is located between the Sprague and Middle Schools and is accessed by School Street through the Sprague parking lot, or by Calvin Rd or Donizetti Street, through the Middle School parking lot. Fields 1 and 2 are located directly behind the Sprague School, adjacent to three Oak Street homes.

From the 1940s to the early 50s, this site served as a municipal dump. During the Sprague School construction process, testing of the school site found traces of mercury, naphthalene, lead and hydrocarbons. These contaminants were reported to the MADEP and removed as part of a remediation plan under the direction of PBC. Following this testing, an abutter to the playing fields urged the Town, PBC and the Schools to test the playing fields adjacent to the Sprague School site. At a Special Town Meeting in

November of 2002, School Committee and the Board of Health successfully sought \$22,000 to conduct a site assessment of the Sprague Field.

Additional testing and reporting indicated the potential for large buried objects and the discovery of dangerous materials (glass and metal shards) had migrated to within 6" of the ground surface. At this time, the site became eligible for closure by the DEP by implementing an Activity and USE Limitation (AUL) restricting future uses involving construction/excavation, residential use and child related activities (no use by children under age 6). In September 2006, Gale Associates, the Town's environmental consultants, delivered their testing results. They found no hazardous material present that would force continuation of the AUL, but the safety hazard from metal and glass migrating to the surface was found to require remediation.

In order to comply with MADEP requirements, the School Committee as owner must present a remediation plan to Town Meeting for the fields. This plan must be executed and any and all remediation finished with associated paperwork submitted by June, 2009. The PFTF reviewed and discussed two options of natural turf vs. synthetic turf as presented by Gale Associates. The PFTF voted unanimously in favor of the synthetic turf solution.

On February 6, 2007, the School Committee held a public hearing on the Sprague Project. Comments were heard from proponents and opponents. The School Committee voted 4-0 in favor of the synthetic turf option.

On February 15, 2007, CPC voted to fund remediation for the Sprague project in the amount of \$645,000.

In response to comments from the opposition, the PFTF held a meeting February 16, and invited Oak Street abutters and members of the Sprague PTO to meet with the PFTF and a representative from Gale Associates.

Problem Statement

For the past several years, the Town has experienced an increase in the younger population of school aged children. This growth in the school aged population has had a significant impact on participation in multiple sports, most notably soccer, which has resulted in an increased demand for playing fields. In 2006 there were 3,886 participants in youth league baseball, soccer, and lacrosse in Wellesley vs. 3,184 participants in 2001, a 22% increase. There are presently ten Town-owned playing field sites, and one Department of Conservation and Recreation owned site in Town (Elm Bank) available to meet the demands of school athletic programs, recreational programs and camps and youth league programs. All fields in Town are presently natural turf. In order to keep these fields playable and safe, the fields should periodically be rested.

Over the past year, fields at Schofield were unavailable for use due to the construction of modular classrooms. As new construction projects are anticipated, there is the potential that more fields could be lost or at least temporarily unavailable. The decrease in supply

and the over use of remaining fields in combination with weather-related issues has resulted in the deterioration of all playing fields in Town. Due to its location, size, and proximity to the Middle and Sprague Schools, the Sprague Fields are the most heavily used fields for youth sports in Town. The identification of dangerous waste on fields 1 and 2 has limited the use of these fields.

Development of Remediation and Construction Plan

In conjunction with the remediation request from the Special Town Meeting, The Playing Field Task Force, comprised of members from School Committee, Selectmen, Recreation, Natural Resource Commission, Department of Public Works, Board of Health and representatives of Town Youth Leagues, was organized to oversee the development of a remediation and restoration plan for the Sprague Fields 1 and 2. It is the unanimous recommendation of the Task Force that the Town's needs would best be met with a premium synthetic field for the following reasons:

- Migration of glass and metal would be less susceptible to climate changes of contraction and expansion of natural turf.
- The synthetic turf would decrease the risk of injuries to athletes, especially young girls.
- These fields could be used year round, in the rain and day's immediately following rain. No resting is required and fields could conceivably be used day in, day out without deterioration.
- If construction begins in May 2007, these fields could be available for use as early as September, 2007
- Practices now held in early spring in parking lots could be moved to these fields.
- Fewer games would be lost to cancellations.
- Games are played on a level surface, not subject to climate shifts and teams would be better prepared for away and championship games that are increasingly played on synthetic turf.
- Annual maintenance costs could be decreased as there would be no need for cutting, fertilizing, weeding, line painting, etc.

Costs and Funding of the Plan

The total cost of remediation and construction of a synthetic field is estimated by Gale Associates to be \$1,850,000. If Article 17 is approved, CPC would fund \$645,000, and the town would borrow \$1,205,000. The Playing Field Task Force has agreed to a 10 year payment plan through user fees for \$602,500 of principal and an estimated \$146,806 in interest payments, as well as the additional payment for the replacement cost of the

synthetic field in 15 years (estimated life of 15 years, warranted for 8 years). User fees would be deposited in a Town-owned restricted fund. It is the intention of the PFTF to raise private funds. Any funds raised will offset the obligations of the Town, the CPC and the users on a pro rata basis.

Proponents of the plan feel this plan would best address the needs of the Town. Some opponents of the plan have raised concerns about the possible health implications of a synthetic field in close proximity to an elementary school, the heat given off from the field and environmental concerns about the materials which make up the carpet and underlying pellets. The Board of Health, based upon currently available data and reports, including information provided by Gale Associates, believes there are no immediate risks or public health hazards involved with synthetic turf. Some would prefer to have any synthetic field at a site other than an elementary school. Some neighbors are concerned that a fenced-in field would change the park like setting, and that traffic may increase. The upfront cost for installation is a concern along with care of the proposed investment. There are questions of who would monitor usage and protect the fields from damage by debris, especially gum.

The majority of Advisory regards the Sprague Field proposal as a good example of collaboration between Town boards to develop a workable solution for the remediation and reconstruction of these fields. At the same time, the solution offers an opportunity that begins to address the problem of insufficient and overused fields town wide. It is understood by many that the number of fields available for the increased needs will continue to decrease as school construction projects continue. The funding solution being provided is attractive as it leverages both CPC and Town funds with user fees and potential private funds in the future. The fields at Sprague are heavily utilized and the installation of synthetic turf on these two fields should allow for more usage following inclement weather, further into the fall and earlier in the spring due to the superior drainage of these fields. Additionally, the synthetic turf will add an additional layer of protection from the migrating debris buried at the site.

The minority members of Advisory also recognize the PFTF as representing a notable example of collaboration of multiple boards and that its members have worked extraordinarily hard to consider multiple views. The minority members also recognize that the Town does not have sufficient playing fields to accommodate the demand of school and recreational activities. However, the minority also notes that synthetic turf on these fields will not solve this problem.

The minority members of Advisory oppose passage of this motion for several reasons. All of the minority members believe that the added initial cost of synthetic turf is not a top capital priority for the School Department or the Town, in light of other projects that respond to more pressing or more significant needs. There is skepticism about estimates of the relative operating costs associated with synthetic and natural turf and a recognition that reduced maintenance costs would not be reflected in commensurately lower budgetary cost (i.e. less use of DPW staff and equipment at Sprague Fields will facilitate more work on other DPW projects, but will not reduce DPW costs). Some members of

the minority note that the process that led to the PFTF recommendation did not reflect an overall plan to address the demand for playing fields and was not considered in the context of the Town's long-term capital needs. Additionally, although there was significant collaboration among boards, some members of the minority believe that there was also a serious process flaw in that the neighbors and Sprague School community were not part of the planning process and were only brought into the process after the decision to recommend synthetic turf was made. Some members of the minority were also concerned that the environmental risks are not adequately understood and/or that Sprague Fields is not the optimal location for synthetic fields.

Advisory recommends favorable action, 7 to 4