

## Neighbor Comments on Proposed Changes to the High School Football Field

Compiled by Cliff Canaday, Neighbor Representative to the Playing Fields Task Force

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February 13, 2012

School Committee  
Playing Fields Task Force  
Wellesley, MA

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Playing Fields Task Force has asked for a list of comments and concerns regarding the proposed changes to the High School Football Field from the neighbors of the field. Many neighbors provided feedback with a variety of comments which is supplied below. These comments and concerns were compiled and summarized by Cliff Canaday who is a neighbor representative to the Task Force.

The strongest sentiment among neighbors was the opposition to night time use and it is this concern that is highlighted. Additionally, through informal methods, many neighbors were polled on their opinion specifically related to night time use of the field. This letter attempts to characterize the responses received through this polling and identifies neighbors who expressed an opinion in this regard.

### Night Time Use of the High School Football Field

Currently, the High School football field is not able to be used at night (the one game exception noted). The High School itself is only used on a limited basis at night and other night time activity in the area does not extend back into the neighborhood. As a result, what may be an environment with a certain level of activity during the day becomes a dark, quiet and tranquil environment at night. Making the High School football field ready for night time use would exchange this dark, quiet and tranquil environment for a loud, bright and intrusive environment lacking the privacy and serenity afforded today. Some neighbors may appreciate or tolerate the bustle of the environment during the day but many also appreciate the dark, still and quiet environment at night. It is this negative consequence of the change to the current environment that is at the root of the opposition to making the field ready for night time use.

With the new high school and Whole Foods, this neighborhood has seen significant change over the last several years. Due to these changes, the neighborhood has seen increased traffic, parking issues, litter, and noise levels. The additional light, noise and activity that night time use would bring places an undue burden on a neighborhood that has already taken significant negative effects through other development.

Some of the more significant concerns expressed on night time use:

- **Light, Noise and Activity:** Night time use would bring in light, noise and activity where there is none today.
- **Security and Safety:** Without the complete visibility that daytime affords, accidents, theft and deviant activity happen more often.

- **Traffic and Parking:** Currently, traffic and parking issues are at a minimum at night which may change with this proposal.
- **Wear and Tear, Privacy:** With the additional activity and reduced visibility comes wear and tear on the neighborhood, trespassing, and privacy concerns.
- **Litter and Garbage:** The amount of litter per attendee is greater at night.
- **History of Night Time Events:** At the last night time event at the field, the Town reported underage drinking, accidents and fights.
- **Effects on Our Home Environment:** Night time use brings these and other negative effects to a neighborhood at a time where this does not happen today. The neighborhood becomes more urbanized and results in significant degradation of both home environment and property values.

Specifically on the issue of night time use of the field, many neighbors were contacted through email or through meetings as a part of everyday activity where the question "Are you opposed to night time use of the High School Football Field?" was posed. The responses are listed below. The information was gathered by Cliff Canaday, neighbor representative to the Task Force. Neighbors were defined as residents who were believed to be abutters and abutters to the abutters of the Hunnewell field complex. Responses from residents not within this definition were not included. This is an informal poll and the time or the means were not available to contact everyone or broaden the scope. There are neighbors who were contacted but who expressed no opinion, did not respond or they did not want to be included in this letter and they are not listed below.

Neighbors Opposed to Night Time Use of the High School Football Field:

Marlene Allen  
Rice Street

Chris Heymanns and Abigail McCabe  
61 Smith Street

Melissa Arronte  
Clifford Street

Wayne Marasco and Jeny Brown  
43 Rice Street

Marcos and Ines Bergamo  
39 Rice Street

Jeremy and Lisa Sewall  
71 Smith Street

Cliff and Mary Canaday  
55 Smith Street

Marc Shechtman and Kathleen Coolidge  
41 Rice Street

Harry and Maria Cannelos  
65 Smith Street

John Sizing  
Rice Street

Bob and Martha Collins  
17 Rice Street

Nancy Stakun  
32 Rice Street

Lara Crawford  
15 Rice Street

Berk and Basak Veral  
Rice Street

Nesbit and Meredith Hagood  
73 Smith Street

Kip and Melissa Wilson  
59 Smith Street

Neighbors For Night Time Use of the High School Football Field:

Nicole and Ed Burke  
State Street

Heidi and Wade Harper  
16 Rice Street

*Other Neighbor Feedback*

Many neighbors gave feedback related to this proposal in addition to the concerns with night time use. This feedback is provided for the use of the Task Force and School Committee in determining whether or not to proceed with the proposal. These comments and concerns were compiled and summarized below by Cliff Canaday and while an attempt was made to be comprehensive, it may not represent all the comments and concerns of every neighbor. Additionally, there has been no formal ratification of the items listed below and contributors have not been listed since their approval to do so in this letter has not been granted.

Noise and Sound Systems

Currently, organizations using the field may bring in a temporary, portable public address system which generally consists of two speakers facing out from the home side of the field and into the neighborhood. This configuration proves to be particularly annoying in that the volume is directed toward the neighbors and often the testing and set-up is performed in the early morning hours. What has mitigated this annoyance to an extent is that the use of these systems is generally limited to the weekends in the Fall since the High School and Youth Football programs are the only organizations that currently have access to a public address system. There are also some private organizations with public address systems that occasionally hold events in the Spring. This limited use has raised awareness of the noise and stoked concern over further development of this capability.

While the technology of a new, properly configured, permanent public address system may serve to reduce some volume spill into the neighborhood, it would also provide access to all organizations using the field which would result in extended use and extended exposure to noise pollution for the neighborhood. Without controls, the use of the sound system could extend to weekdays, mornings and evenings and for more periods during the year causing further disruption.

Town ordinances currently limit high noise levels (construction, landscaping, music, etc.) to certain hours during certain days of the week. Neighbors have experienced that many times these limits go unenforced. Furthermore, some neighbors would like to press the Town to impose stricter requirements to limit high noise levels. Additionally, it should be pointed out that use of the field outside of these hours, a variance or a change to the ordinances may be required.

Public address systems are not the only source of noise pollution in the realm of neighbor concern. Crowds, vehicles, game activity (game horns, referee whistles, etc.), area visitors and public safety devices (police or street crossing devices) can be a source. This is all noise related to the proposed changes that does not exist today.

Traffic and Parking

Even without the proposed additional use of the High School football field, traffic in the area is a significant concern. During busy hours with the number of vehicles, pedestrians and street crossing

points, there is a significant risk of accidents and personal and property damage. Also, at certain times during the day, neighbors have reported lengthy times to travel short distances or even lengthy times to get out of their driveway. Any additional use of the surrounding facilities only makes the problem worse.

Fundamentally, there are no good methods for traffic to arrive and withdraw for large events or for simultaneous events at the area facilities. The High School has re-routed traffic, staggered start times, provided special event bus service and distributed information in an effort to control congestion. With the recent construction of Whole Foods, the State/Kingsbury/Washington Street intersection area has been redesigned with new signaling, signage, parking lot design and other traffic control mechanisms. Even with these measures, the area continues to experience congestion. Several nearby intersections received poor grades in the traffic study conducted prior to construction of the new High School. That traffic study also preceded the building of the new Whole Foods Market, which has increased activity at these intersections throughout the day and evening. This congestion is not just an inconvenience for neighbors and visitors but it increases health and safety risks especially with the potential for this congestion to impede public safety and emergency vehicles.

Attempts to control the additional traffic due to the proposed changes will change the character of the neighborhood and do not have the promise of being completely effective. Traffic lights, signage, pavement markings and street and curb changes may have some effect on controlling the congestion, but it significantly contributes to the increased urbanization of the environment. Also, speed limits and other signs are both intentionally and inadvertently violated, contributing to the limited effectiveness of establishing them.

Considerations of this proposal carry with it a large unknown in the form of the new High School. As the school is completed, parking will transition from the five distributed lots to the central High School lot. This transition carries with it an unknown effect on the area traffic and the parking practices of students, faculty and visitors. There is significant potential the situation will become worse with this transition as vehicles come and go from a central point rather than distributed points as is happening today.

The availability of parking spots for all facilities is a concern. It is expected that the capacity of any new stadium carry with it the parking facilities to accommodate it under current regulations. With the potential for concurrent events at the field and high school, it is also expected that the capacity for parking be set to accommodate for both or have controls in place to limit the number of visitors to the area.

Heavy traffic congestion can result in more neighborhood parking and neighborhood parking can cause traffic congestion. Expecting high congestion at an event, visitors to the area may opt to park in the neighborhood and take a short walk. Neighborhood parking can cause traffic congestion as streets are narrowed to one lane and visibility becomes limited. It is this compounding effect which raises the safety and security concerns of neighbors.

#### Landscaping, Fencing and Aesthetics

The Task Force has suggested that any changes to the field can be accompanied by changes to the landscaping. Many neighbors welcome this feature of the proposal. The large dead or nearly dead pine trees that currently border Smith Street pose a danger to the residents and visitors, to the homes across Smith Street, to the adjacent power lines and the field facilities (stands, fencing, track, field, etc.). Much of the current vegetation and the rusted barbed-wire chain link fence are ugly and ineffective. The

sidewalk on the field side of Smith Street is not maintained and it is in disrepair. There is little to provide an effective privacy barrier against the neighborhood and the visibility of portable restroom facilities from the street leads to an unkempt appearance.

### Artificial Turf

A part of the changes suggested at the High School field is the installation of artificial turf. There is not complete opposition to this among neighbors but some concerns have been raised. These concerns relate to drainage and the effect on ground water, the potential negative effects to people and the environment, the proximity to wetlands, the materials used and player injury rates and injury severity as it relates to the turf.

It is expected that should artificial turf be installed at the High School field, it would be similar in materials, construction and design to the artificial turf fields at Sprague. It is also assumed care would be taken for proper drainage and that ground water flows would not be interrupted. Additionally it is assumed care would be taken to minimize the impact on the environment and abutting wetlands and to minimize player injury. Finally, it is assumed that the High School and the Task Force would adhere to all state and Town laws, procedures and regulations when designing and installing this turf. If these expectations and assumptions do not hold true, many neighbors become significantly concerned.

### Private Use of the Facilities

While not a stated objective of the Task Force, it is recognized that the proposed changes enable a broader use of the facility for events other than Town youth sports. Just as the Town leases the current High School field and Sprague fields to private interests (private sports leagues and clinics, large gatherings such as the terminating point for walks/runs, summer camps, track and field competitions, etc.), proposed changes will enable further leasing of the facilities to non-Town interests at the expense of the neighborhood. Many neighbors are significantly concerned that the neighborhood will have to bear the negative effects of this additional non-Town activity.

### Control, Regulation and Maintenance of the Facilities

Bringing change to the field may also bring further rules and regulations in an attempt to mitigate some negative impact on various interests. These rules and regulations, such as restrictions on the time of day the facilities can be used, restrictions on the type of use as well as who is allowed to hold events at the facility, may come along with controls to ensure their enforcement. There are concerns that these controls become ineffective or that they do not endure over time or that they require a significant cost to implement such that they are eliminated.

A concern has been raised that there does not appear to be a single authority governing the fields – a single authority to ensure controls are in place, a single authority to coordinate scheduling of events and a single authority to notify when rules and regulations are being violated. Without this single authority, it is believed that conflicts will arise and controls will lapse but no organization will take responsibility to address the issues and take corrective action.

Landscaping and other features of the design have to be maintained to be effective. Some neighbors have expressed concern that costs and convenience issues may get in the way of maintaining the facility at an appropriate level to provide the effectiveness for which it was designed.

### Character and Value of the Neighborhood

The changes to the field, the additional area activity (people and vehicles), traffic control and parking modifications, the additional noise level, the additional night time lighting and the additional litter and garbage that would result from this proposal, drive to the increased urbanization of a neighborhood that is currently a quiet, residential haven in the evening. Some neighbors may appreciate or tolerate the activity attributable to the High School during the day but many neighbors believe that the neighborhood has reached its limit. These proposed changes generate increased activity for the entire neighborhood and the urbanization that these changes bring would exceed tolerable limits. These are not changes that existed or were evident when the neighbors chose to live here and they would result in significant degradation of both the home environment and property values.

### Costs

Some neighbors have expressed concerns over the costs of the proposal. While the Task Force has indicated their expectation that the funds will most likely be provided from private organizations and individuals, some neighbors continue to be gravely skeptical that the Town will not incur a large portion of the capital costs such that it may result in higher taxes for a project where it is believed the need has not been proven.

Additionally, many neighbors have expressed concerns over the potential for increased operational costs borne by the town especially as they relate to night time use. Specifically, these concerns relate to the cost to power lights and to provide liability insurance for night time events.

### Other Comments

Tom Harrington, chairman of the Task Force, has made clear that this initiative is in the early stages. There are many details that have not been determined and, in fact, the task of the group is to gauge the value of proceeding with the initiative and to determine future steps given the generalities of what is now being proposed. Should that decision be to go forward, many neighbors believe gathering complete detailed information regarding objectives, facility design, traffic patterns and impact assessments, parking alternatives, environmental impact assessments, neighborhood impact assessments, project funding mechanisms and operating costs is warranted in this case.

Tom Harrington has also made it clear that the scope of the Task Force is limited to the High School field area. While the attempt to focus discussion to make the Task Force more productive is appreciated, some neighbors believe that this scope limitation constrains the options available to the Task Force to address issues. The problems that this proposal is attempting to address are Town-wide and it may be best that broader strategic civil planning and design questions be answered before proceeding with the proposal at the High School field.