

Staff Notes
Amherst Center Recreation Working Group
Feb. 28, 2018
Town room

Attendance

Group: Rich Ferro, Chris Johnons, Barb Bilz, Dave Ziomek, Jim Brissette, Alan Snow, Doug Slaughter, John Kane, Meg Rosa

Weston & Sampson: Evan, Gene, Mike

Guests: See sign in sheets

Meeting Introduction

Dave Ziomek described the focus area as Wildwood Elementary School, the Hawthorne Property, Regional Middle and High Schools, and Community Field.

The meeting tonight is hosted by the Amherst Center Recreation Working Group, and study by Weston & Sampson is funded by CPA and the Regional Schools. This the first in a series of meetings for the study.

Weston and Sampson

Mike Noonan, Evan, and Gene—all landscape architects.

Kicking off a process, presenting preliminary findings then a listening session. Assessment of core fields-physical conditions, planning for future needs, looking at demand and use in the core and in context of town facilities. How are fields programmed? Identify needs. Then develop conceptual plans and cost estimates. Will generate a plan to implement preferred concept.

There are trends to be aware of—more female sports and a variety of activities. There are unique demands and use in each community. Would like to develop a plan to improve conditions and performance of facilities.

Tonight is part of a public process to help inform report. The demand analysis and usage information is important to collect. The process and dates can be adjusted as needed. Would like to finish before summer vacation. The current timeline is to identify concept plans and costs in March and April, priorities in April, and adopt strategic plan in May 2018.

Needs assessment looked town wide at all recreational facilities and schools in order to understand context of core fields. May make minor recommendations to town wide facilities.

The presentation focused on the current conditions and field layout/programming of the core facilities. Discussed parameters for study and key issues that have been observed and needs of existing conditions. Needs assessment for every field (in core and town wide), working with LSSE and the Schools. Found that very few fields are overused based on hours of usage but need reconfiguration to make best use fields.

Looking at gaps in services of facilities. Not just talking about active recreation. Also talking about passive activities and multi-generational facilities. Opportunities for improvements.

Amherst is “in the middle of the pack of communities” that Weston and Sampson have worked with in terms of existing conditions. It will be important to have improvements help facilities stay relevant to needs of community. For instance, the Town is planning a \$1 million project for Groff Park with a new playground, spray pad, pavilions and accessibility improvements.

Public Comments

Drainage is a problem on all fields, even on Potwine (Plum Brook). Potwine has never drained right, even after all the work. High school fields, there used to be a stream on site that is now buried. The JV field at high school is very wet. Track--a lot of public use. Orientation of track is wrong. All-weather surface would be great. Many benefits from a multi-weather surface. A lot of times Crocker Farm is wet and not playable.

Ultimate Frisbee, over 150 kids in spring. Reconfigure--keep all field uses in mind. Don't cut out a sport. Don't configure to limit use--i.e permanent fixture or location of trails. Fort River fields are used everyday by high school and middle school sports because not enough room at high school.

Plea for a multi-use field. Artificial surface is where games are today--different than playing on grass. Can use the field for many sports. Would allow the school to host other events. Look at costs and long term maintenance of artificial vs. grass.

Ultimate--sports where kids need two forms of transportation to and from fields. Can Hawthorne field and middle school support those sports so kids can have access to all sports at one central location?

Look at sport and gender equity with field use and programming.

Flaws of fields are acknowledged but nothing gets fixed. Many fields get dusty later in season due to over use and lack of watering/maintenance. Uneven surfaces everywhere. Not another place lacrosse is programmed but the fields north of the high school, which is in very bad shape—sloped surface, wet in spring, dry in summer.

Artificial turf surface. No place to play soccer in early spring--very wet. One turf field near high school.

Need a budget to keep fields well maintained.

Synthetic turf does have a budget and a lifespan. Could be health issues with synthetic turf. Would like to stay away from synthetic. Look into health impacts of artificial turf.

Walk around in the spring after a rain storm. Real challenge to maintain fields. Underscore first comments about drainage issues.

Can the track fit on Community Field? The hillside would lend itself to stadium seating.

Non-field areas at community field--pool and playground. Pool season is short. If new playground, look more broadly at sites for family playgrounds. Look at Kendrick Park because closer to the Town Center businesses and where families go now.

Synthetic--different options that may not be unhealthy. Amherst used to be a good field hockey school, but no longer a facility/program that carries a sport through the years.

Will weigh environmental impacts of maintenance

Size of fields--need regulation-sized field. Many teams complain of condition and size of the field.

Where will be football field be located. No place for town to get together for different events besides sports, such as a stadium or field for town-wide gatherings, parades, etc.. All sports would like a stadium.

Hawthorne property--good for passive. A hill there that would have to be taken down make it playable.

Another aspect of recreation. Recreation and agriculture—Hawthorne property lends itself perfectly to passive recreation and agriculture. Long range view--encourage schools to teach gardening and farming. Amherst is a town that had a lot of agricultural uses. Reasons to bring young people to introduce them to farming and the land. Instead of making a playing field.

Bring water with permanent facilities to all fields, for drinking facilities, for bathrooms and for field watering.

Track and field---discus, javelin and ultimate--safety issues with overlapping uses. Need adequate spaces. Often times a javelin flies into the field hockey area; very dangerous. When renovating track, look at field events. The condition of the track is an embarrassment when 6-7 kids went to nationals last year.

Amherst baseball--not proper fields. Community Field baseball field is very wet. Drainage at community field is an issue.

Facilities town wide are terrible. Don't up-sell conditions of fields. Need an honest assessment to win community support. Promote community aspect. Could use a stadium for events. Sports should have permanent seating. Concession, bathrooms. Amenities are necessary.

Get all land under one umbrella--because of regional schools. Many people will balk at costs. Need one ownership for fields to coordinate maintenance and scheduling.

Although fields look okay, they may not function well.

Amherst is only town in western mass to cancel games days after it rains because of poor drainage and standing water. Plum Brook is terrible with water, so is Fort River and Crocker Farm.

Community Field was donated to Stan Ziomek--keep part of conversation.

Middle School and Wildwood--great that many uses are congregated together--playground, tennis courts, etc. It is nice that uses are clustered and visible so families can use whole space and activities. May not be as good if all one type of field that doesn't allow other uses.

Nordic skiing--good program at the high school. Cherry Hill is groomed for this.

High School baseball field. Nice field with lights on. Great to watch a game there. Something about the hillside--makes it a really nice spots. It works there. A wonderful space.

At Middle and High Schools—the Tan Brook flows under fields in pipes; the water can no longer get into the brook and leave the site.

Beginning of a process to help make improvements--need community support. The Town has made it work with what we have, but need will need more in operating budgets as well as the capital improvements.

The Town was wet and did not have row crops--historic landscape is important to how fields function now.

Staff notes

Weston and Sampson Presentation May 8, 2018

Community Field Master Plan

Town Room, Town Hall

Public comments and questions

Need field usage data to support concepts and building new fields.

Data usage should also support what type (type A or B) of fields are installed.

How many fields will have lights? Will the track?

No softball now at Middle School, but is there space to bring it back if needed?

Need revenue generation from facility for tournaments and regional events.

Would like food service.

A nice facility will generate pride for the community.

How are tickets (for games) going to be collected? Will area be fenced with certain gates?

Do not like track on Community Field or in concept where it is close to the neighboring properties.

Need to celebrate and enhance War Memorial Pool.

Would like at least one synthetic turf field.

There is a problem scheduling sports because of lack of regulation-sized fields.

If a concept is implemented, will LSSE be able to use the fields more? Or will they be reserved for formal sports/programming.

For much of the community, a formal field is not as important as areas to play, playgrounds, picnic, etc.

Make a stronger connections across Triangle Street to bring the public into the space.

Need clarity on future management and programming between the Town and Regional Schools. Who will get priority?

Will fields need to move so areas won't get worn out (i.e. around goals or nets)? Do concepts consider these small movements?

The fields and conditions endanger kids now. Really need to move forward as soon as possible.

How will the concepts and plan balance long term interests and immediate needs?

The poor conditions of the field is an equity issue, because kids who have the ability leave to play at other schools.

Need to have fields and spaces that are for more than just high school sports.

Make area around War Memorial Pool for families; make it great again.

Add more public restrooms, and facilities that are accessible.

Install a synthetic field in the middle of the track.

Is there a budget for maintenance and repairs? Who will coordinate maintenance between the various stakeholders-Town , local schools and regional schools?

Like the community aspects—fitness trail and sitting areas—that is kid and family friendly.

If a spray pad, keep it free. There is a fee to use the pool.

The North-South orientation is best for fields.

Are circulation paths and pedestrian areas in places that will be used? For instance, kids often walk across the track to get to other fields.

A small informal field would be great for youth activities and community use.

Parking—is there adequate parking for the proposed concepts? Where is the HP parking? And bus drop off?

Connect walking system to downtown.

Need a public entrance for the community to encourage use of the facility.

**Preferred Concept Plan Presentation
October 3, 2018
Regional High School Library**

Staff Notes

Summary Notes from presentation

- Still in a planning process with 3 options and a preferred plan.
- The plan will likely have a 10-15 year implementation phase
- As part of their work, Weston & Sampson completed existing conditions assessment of all fields in town.
- There is an urgent need for better conditions on the track and field. Currently, the field inside the track is closed down for the rest of the season.
- There are a range of needs and improvements at the facilities, from accessibility issues to safer fields to storage and maintenance space.
- Consider various renovation strategies—full or phased approach.
- Multi-use fields for rectangular sports.
- 3 options for field improvements that were reviewed at previous meetings, which helped inform the preferred plan: keep Ziomek field in relative current location (pull away from hill for drainage) at Community Field with a type A and B field, reorient track, move softball field, unprogrammed space north of track for community use. Add a walking trail around the complex. New pool house and club house/locker rooms. Move war memorial, make it more visible and in a plaza. New splash pad, 2 basketball courts, fitness circuit.
- Preferred concept tries to make sense of arrival and intuitive how to get to fields
- The plan would be completed in phases. Makes Community field usable by the community for many activities.
- Regional assets and town assets, still continue to share those assets for the next 50-60 years. This preferred plan is a vision for the shared assets.
- Phase 1 costs--range from \$4-6 million.
- Potential phases, can be reordered. 5-6 phases.

Questions and Comments

- Like idea of community investment. This is one school of many schools in town.
- Great to have full accessibility.
- Pros and cons to synthetic turf and natural grass
- Recipe for better performing fields town-wide is to have 1 or 2 synthetic turf fields in the community.
- Field orientation very important for safety
- Dogs hurt the track. Will there signs? Clear rules and regulations?
- Need clear management rules
- Does preferred plans add fields? How many? What does it to do programming?
- If a synthetic turf field can have all spring sports on that field in the same day. Can start after school and play/practice into the evening because of lights.
- Can you really get 1500-2000 hours on a synthetic turf in a year?

- If a 12-14 year field, use it. Don't reduce use to try and extend its life. Plan for 12 years.
- Was there consideration for a full sized indoor pool (would require removing the existing pool)?
- Past few soccer seasons there have been 3-4 season ending injuries that range from concussion to torn knee to rolled ankle. Field conditions are a real and major safety concern.
- What will happen during phase 1 with existing fields? What are other fields to use?
- Need a playground area close to center of town. People won't walk to community field, need closer town playground. Playground investment should be where people will walk to --the Common or Kendrick Park.
- Water season is too short. Reinvest in indoor pool.
- 2 hurdles: cost and synthetic turf. But this is not an extravagance. Further east, some high schools have 3 turf fields.
- The current conditions are shameful. There needs to be more pride. Don't underestimate pride of athletics. Sports are important. An investment of community.
- These fields are a necessity. Nice facilities should be normal; it should not take serious injury or such poor conditions to maintain the fields.
- Four or 5 major capital projects in town. How is this going to be funded? Use plan to educate various boards, committees, towns, get general support. Would we ask local clubs?
- Lessons learned from greenfield. Don't follow them.
- Short term safety issues, Long term investments, but financial challenges of district.
- 1 year construction window, but overall timeframe is longer when including permitting and design.
- Some groups not represented here—i.e. input from recent alumni community. And from groups not here tonight--input from those groups. Would like to talk to parents whose kids are not athletes, or for citizens who don't use facilities now. Need to reach out to the other communities in town and the 4-town region.