

Fall 2019 Town Meeting Article 3 Information Relating to the Route 1A Field Complex



NEED

This year approximately 2,700 athletes will use the public athletic fields in Walpole. The Town's current field inventory includes 20 fields and diamonds distributed across approximately 35.3 acres of fields, however the field conditions have been well-documented to be overcrowded and overstressed.

In 2008, the Town commissioned an athletic field Master Plan to assess current field properties and provide critical outlets for athletic competition and enjoyment for all residents of the community. The Master Plan concluded that there are insufficient playing venues to meet the increasing demands of the Walpole community, turf conditions are stressed at many locations due to heavy and often excessive use during all seasons, and poor playing conditions can demoralize users and increase the risk of injury. The field Master Plan also concluded that

Walpole must look for opportunities to create new playing venues at existing properties. Without new venues, “improved playing conditions will never be attained” and that it was critical that opportunities for new playing venues be explored “now.”

One of the recommendations from the Field Master plan was to “look to other, undeveloped public and private lands in order to develop playing venues, all in an effort to reduce the burden on existing facilities.”

Many of the existing fields, such as the Johnson Middle School fields and Jarvis Farm fields, are restricted by the DEP from expansion or treatment due to their proximity to Walpole’s wells. 10 of the 12 playing venues are also located at schoolyards, so are restricted by the size of the parcel. Additionally, and in comparison to other communities in the region, Walpole lacks a concentrated field complex that could host tournaments and accommodate large-scale athletic events. For example:

- Pond Street Fields (Norfolk)
- Coakley Middle School (Norwood)
- Westwood High School
- Poncin Hewitt Field (Attleboro)
- Medway High School

Attached is a copy of the town’s current field inventory. A number of fields in town aren’t on this list such as Restaino Field (Walpole Little League), the Mylod Fields (Walpole Youth Soccer League), and fields at Norfolk Agricultural High School because they are owned, operated, or maintained by private leagues, organizations, or other entities.

PROCESS

ACTIONS TAKEN BY TOWN MEETING

Town Meeting has taken a number of actions over the course of the last decade relating to the development of recreational fields along the Norfolk Town Border. These actions include the following:

- The first vote occurred in the Spring of 2007 when the Town voted to conduct a comprehensive Field Master Plan. The plan was completed in November 2008 and included a recommendation to, “look to other, undeveloped public and private lands in order to develop playing venues, all in an effort to reduce the burden on existing facilities.”
- The second vote of Town Meeting occurred in the Spring of 2013, where Town Meeting set aside funds to purchase 63.72 acres of land from the State for the purposes of creating fields for Recreational Purposes. The Town took ownership of the property in December 2015, with a restriction to limit the use of the land to active and passive recreation use.
- The third vote of Town Meeting occurred in Fall 2017, when Town Meeting voted to appropriate \$500,000 to design multiple fields on the Route 1A site. In April 2018, the Selectmen voted 4-0 to award the design contract for this project to Weston & Sampson.
- The fourth vote of Town Meeting occurred in Fall 2018, when Town Meeting was asked to set aside a portion of the Town’s Free Cash funds to offset the anticipated funds while the

Town continued through Design Development. At the time, the Board of Selectmen (3-2-0), the Finance Committee (12-0-1), the Capital Budget Committee (5-1-0), and the Recreation Committee (5-0-0) all voted to support this article.

- In Spring 2019, Town Meeting was asked to consider a proposal to construct a previous athletic field proposal. In addition to the baseline components of synthetic and natural turf fields, the proposal also included basketball courts, a children’s playground, and lights for evening games. Although the final vote for the article was 89-48, the article ultimately failed to achieve the necessary 2/3rds threshold required to pass a borrowing article.

FIELD DESIGN

In 2016 the Town contracted with engineering firm Weston & Sampson to provide a site analysis of the property, conceptual plans for a proposed field project, and a cost estimate to construct the project. Over the course of a series of discussions, the firm presented a few different options to town officials detailing different build-outs and phases, established a project baseline, and collected preliminary feedback on renderings. Later that year, W&S came back to the town with updated concepts based on the feedback they received.

After the 2017 Fall Annual Town Meeting authorized design costs, Weston & Sampson was formally contracted to work with Town officials through schematic and development design to develop the field complex proposal building out approximately 18-20 acres of the parcel, with room for expansion.

Many areas that were not critical to the previous proposal that was considered during Spring 2019 have either been reclassified as an alternate, reduced in scope, or eliminated entirely. Specifically, the landscaping and parking lot budgets have been reduced considerably, the field lighting has been categorized as alternates, and the basketball courts and playground have been eliminated entirely.

PUBLIC MEETINGS / OUTREACH

There have been a series of public outreach sessions and meetings which have occurred during the design development and permitting processes over the course of the past year. These meetings include:

1	December 11, 2018 - Public Outreach Meeting	11	April 23, 2019 - Capital Budget Committee
2	December 12, 2018 - Conservation Commission	12	April 29, 2019 - Finance Committee Meeting
3	January 23, 2019 - Conservation Commission	13	June 25, 2019 - Board of Selectmen Meeting
4	February 11, 2019 - Board of Sewer and Water Commissioners	14	July 16, 2019 - Board of Selectmen Meeting
5	February 19, 2019 - Board of Selectmen Meeting	15	August 6, 2019 - Board of Selectmen Meeting
6	February 21, 2019 - Planning Board	16	August 27, 2019 – Capital Budget Committee
7	February 25, 2019 - Finance Committee	17	September 4, 2019 – Board of Selectmen
8	March 7, 2019 - Planning Board	18	September 16, 2019 - Capital Budget Committee
9	March 19, 2019 - Board of Selectmen	19	September 16, 2019 – Finance Committee
10	April 4, 2019 - Planning Board	20	October 1, 2019 – Board of Selectmen

ADDITIONAL INVESTMENTS IN RECREATIONAL SPACE

In addition to working toward developing fields at other sites, the Town has invested in the following field and recreation space improvements at existing facilities since the Field Master Plan was finalized:

1. **Fisher School** – The Fisher School field was increased in size by 30% in 2012. An underground automatic irrigation system was installed and drainage improvements have all been completed. This field receives the highest quality of plant and soil amendments that the green industry can provide for an athletic field and the quality and safety of this field are above average.
2. **Elm St. School** - The Elm Street School playground was renovated with an underground irrigation system and new drainage in 2016. The field was also expanded by 2,500 sq. ft. and a complete re-grading and seeding of the area has drastically improved the conditions that were post construction of the school.
3. **Boyden School** - Boyden School baseball diamond received improvements in 2012. This included the installation of a new backstop and player protection fencing at the bench areas. The infield was stripped of the native clay, then the batter's box and mound were re-built and the entire area re-graded with an engineered clay sand mixture.
4. **Upper Turco Field (WHS)** – The Upper Turco Field also received improvements in recent years. It was stripped of loam, regraded, new loam was added and sub-drains and a new irrigation system were installed.
5. **South St. Rail Trail** - The Parks Department in 2018 cleared the existing railroad bed from the White Bridge parking lot to the back of the new Community Center. A stable walking surface of stone dust was installed and concrete barriers put in place behind the industrial buildings on South St. to complete the connection between the new Community Center complex and the Town Forest.
6. **Adams Farm Volleyball Courts** - This project was completed in 2011 as a way to replicate the volley ball courts that existed on the site where the new library was being constructed. A coordinated effort was undertaken with several volunteers to design, excavate and build (2) new sand courts at Adams Farm.
7. **Center Pool, Splash Pad, and South Pool** – Center and South Pools have seen several improvements these past few years including the addition of skimmers, improved filtration systems and grounds improvements. When the wading pool needed extensive repairs in 2014, it was decided to include a splash pad into the design. These features seem very well appreciated by the users.
8. **Sports Courts** – Fall 2018 Town Meeting authorized an investment of approximately \$200,000 into the resurfacing of the Tennis Courts at Walpole High School and Basketball Courts at Johnson Middle School and Bird Middle School. These three projects were completed in Summer 2019.
9. **Turco Field Replacement** – After years of financial planning, the Town replaced the John B. Turco Memorial Field at Walpole High School in Summer 2019.

SITE DEVELOPMENT

WATER SERVICE OUTSIDE WALPOLE

The current proposal includes the construction of sewer and water infrastructure connected to the main in Winter Street. A question had come up previously about the Town being forced to provide water and sewer infrastructure to locations outside of the boundaries of Walpole. Town Counsel has advised that, *“Water and Sewer service provided beyond the Town’s boundary would be subject to an intermunicipal agreement. Such an agreement, executed by the chief executive body of each municipality, would authorize the provision of services outside the Town. Thus, the Town of Walpole could provide water and sewer services to properties outside its boundary through an intermunicipal agreement with the town within which that property was located. The Town would not be obligated to enter into such an agreement.”*

There have been instances where Sewer and Water connections have been provided to residents or businesses outside of the boundaries of Walpole however in all cases this has been done after careful consideration by the Sewer and Water Commissioners. Most recently the Commissioners have been mindful of the expected changes that will likely be handed down by the Department of Environmental Protection. The Commissioners expect that the DEP will likely reduce Walpole’s daily water withdrawal limit which may impact major expansion projects in Walpole. On the sewer side the Town’s sewer system is connected to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority which takes the waste in the sewer system and treats it at a facility in Boston. At this time the Town does not foresee any limitations imposed by the MWRA on the sewer waste attributed to the Town of Walpole.

PUBLIC SAFETY / MCI-CEDAR JUNCTION

A question has also come up previously about the proximity of the proposed field complex to MCI Cedar Junction and Police Department’s protocol in the event of a prison riot.

Town Meeting took up the initial requests to purchase this property in 2013 for the purpose of active and passive recreation uses. It is located off of a major thorough fare in Walpole (Route 1A) that is used multiple times per day by not only members of the Walpole Police and Fire Departments, but also by other major ambulance carriers in the area.

While response times may vary by the Police Department depending on many factors, its response times, especially for emergencies, are typically swift. Walpole is 20 square miles and response times apply on every call in every section of town. Sector cars are assigned to geographical boundaries and Norfolk PD could also be utilized if mutual aid was necessary.

The Fire Department protects these 20 square miles from one centrally-located fire station with a majority of responses initiating from the station. Over the past 5 years, the Fire Department has averaged approximately 30 emergency responses per year to the facility across the street from the proposed project. According to the Fire Department’s recent records, response times average approximately 6 minutes.

At no time has any public safety personnel raised any concern about response time to and from this site. In the event someone breached the wall or escaped via another avenue, an emergency action plan would be activated and the notification list would be utilized. The Walpole Police Department is on the top of that list. The DOC activates designated posts outside the wall that would be filled in the event of such a major emergency and they regularly conduct drills on this protocol.

BUDGET & FINANCE

DEBT BUDGET

The Finance Department is responsible for managing and maintaining the town's overall debt service. Debt is an important component of the Town's overall capital financing plan, which aims to meet infrastructure needs through a planned program of future financing. As part of this, the "debt schedule" is a tool used to map out and project debt that has been incurred and the respective annual repayment costs over the course of the borrowing years. This annual repayment cost is based on the principal and interest on any particular bond item. In order for the Town to incur debt, formal approval is required by a two-thirds vote of Town Meeting.

Specifically this debt schedule is broken down into three types of borrowing:

1. Excluded debt authorized via a Proposition 2 ½ override, such as the 1998 High School expansion project or the 2009 library construction project;
2. Non-excluded debt within the budget, which includes boilers, windows, roofs, and the construction of the Police Station, Fire Station and Senior Center; and
3. Other short-term borrowing commitments called BANs.

If this article passes, it will be financed within the existing tax levy so the tax base will not need to increase more than the traditional increase each year. The current field project that is being considered by Town Meeting includes funding without the need for a debt exclusion override.

By maintaining a consistent debt budget from year-to-year, the Town can continue to invest in its infrastructure and capital needs in a way that is the least impactful to the taxpayer.

DEBT CAPACITY

The debt capacity is the maximum amount of normal debt that a municipality may authorize for qualified purposes under state law. MGL c. 44 §10 limits debt to 5% of the valuation of taxable property as last equalized by the state Department of Revenue. In Walpole our debt capacity is \$219,331,340. Our Double Debt Limit is \$438,662,680 with authorization from the State Municipal Oversight Board.

The Town has been planning for this project for more than 4 years. Once the Town finalized the purchase of this property in 2015, the Finance Team began to program this project within the Town's debt schedule. The Town has programed a borrowing figure of 3,950,000 over 15 years.

CAPITAL PLANNING

Through the Town's long-term Capital Improvement Program, the Town is able to invest in its infrastructure and capital needs at a constant rate that is consistent for the taxpayer. With 120+ miles of roadways, an expansive sewer and water system, approximately 30 public buildings, 170 municipal vehicles and equipment, and two dozen public athletic fields, the Capital Improvement Program establishes a commitment to meet infrastructure needs through this planned program, so repairs and replacements don't spike from year-to-year or all at once. In addition the Capital Plan helped the Town maintain it AA+ Bond rating which gave us great rates with this last borrowing and a 5 Year Capital Plan is recommended by Bond Counsel.

This project costs so much because the Town had put off investing in a large-scale field project for 30+ years. As was the case with the municipal building projects, the Town is catching up after

decades of not investing in its infrastructure. This project has been scaled back, including the elimination of the water feature and the building, to meet budgetary targets.

SCHOOL PROJECTS

If the MSBA invites the School Committee to advance to the next phase and construct a new middle school, it is expected that it will be financed by a debt exclusion override. If a middle school project is passed, it will be outside of the levy limit and stand on its own. The Route 1A Field project is being funded within the levy limit so the **construction of a new middle school will not be impacted by the field project.**

If Town Meeting authorizes this borrowing, the Town has developed a borrowing plan that would still allow smaller-scale projects at the elementary schools and a mid-range project at the High School if necessary in the upcoming years. As of September 2019, the Town is projecting that significant funds will become available through the debt budget beginning in Fiscal Year 2023 that could be allocated toward projects such as these. The amounts that are being projected are outlined below:

- **Fiscal Year 2023:** **\$ 244,846**
- **Fiscal Year 2024:** **\$ 238,237**
- **Fiscal Year 2025:** **\$ 713,784**
- **Fiscal Year 2026:** **\$ 1,622,240**
- **Fiscal Year 2027:** **\$ 2,006,645**

The Town is able to undertake the field project and other infrastructure improvement projects because the Town has been planning for multiple projects over the last five years. It is understood that older debt would fall off and the Town will continue to add \$50,000-\$100,000 each year to the debt budget because there was need to reinvest that money into the Town/School infrastructure.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Some have inquired as to why the Town has not considered other alternative sites such as the Town Forest and expanding the fields at the High School. The Walpole Town Forest was dedicated in 1916 with a deed restriction that the area can only be used as a Town Forest and it is a protected area under state law. The forest includes a lot of Walpole's water fields and wells and provides much needed aquifer protection for the Town. If the Town were to develop field space in the Town Forest the DEP would enforce similar restrictions to what is in place with the Johnson Middle School Fields and Jarvis Farm because it is in an Area 1 of the aquifer protection district. If the Town were to take a portion of the Town Forest and dedicate it to fields space it would need to be replaced with a similar adjacent parcel. The use of the Town Forest for field space would require Town Meeting action and an act of the state legislature.

It should be noted that the Town did in fact pursue the development of approximately 12 acres of land that directly abuts the fields at the High School in 2001/2002 with an estimated cost of \$1,700,000. The plan was not pursued because it was determined at the time it would have required the removal of 436,000 cubic yards of sand from the High School. At the time the Zoning Board voted to deny the application because, "it would be dangerous and harmful to the amenities of the Town" and furthermore the removal of 436,000 cubic yards of fill would ensure undue congestion on Walpole's roadways. According to reports issued in 2001 the proposed project would have required 278 truck trips each day for 6 months to remove all of the fill. Ultimately the Board of Selectmen decided not to pursue the expansion of the high school playing fields for a variety of reasons including, the concerns raised by the Sewer and Water Commissioners surrounding water

protection, the abutters concerns raised during the ZBA hearing process, and the truck traffic that was expected to be generated as a result of the project. The Police and School Departments also raised safety concerns with having a large scale mining operation so close to a school and the Conservation Commission also expressed concerns which included the use of conservation land as part of the expansion project and some of the proposed access routes would negatively impact wetlands in the area.

As for the current fields at the Walpole High School the Town asked Weston and Sampson to look into further developing upper and lower Turco Fields. It was quickly determined that the development of lower Turco field was prohibitive since it was built on a wetland. Many of the necessary improvements that would need to be made to the area to make it a viable site include but are not limited to; walkway areas to, from and around lower Turco Field and the necessary drainage improvements to ensure that the issues associated with having a field in a wetland could be properly addressed.

The area around upper Turco field could be developed to allow for one single multi-use field. (rendering below) The estimate the Town received in August 2019 to develop upper Turco Field was approximately \$2,000,000.



FIELD PROGRAM INFORMATION

ESTIMATED OPERATIONAL COST

At this time the projected yearly maintenance and operation cost once the facility is up and running is between \$80,000-\$90,000. Currently we do not have a projected energy buildout. The meter at Turco Field house at Walpole High School powers the building, the football field lights, and the tennis court lights. The yearly average for this is \$11,000. It is anticipated that the lighting bills for this site will be in the same ballpark as Turco Field. Please keep in mind that these are projected estimates. The Town will need some time to have the facility up and running just as we have with the Senior Center so that the true costs can be determined.

USER FEES

Currently a user fee is charged on a per-athlete basis that assists with the cost of regular field maintenance, such as core aeration, fertilization, top dressing, pest scouting, infill replacement, irrigation, soil amendments, and over seeding of all athletic fields. It is expected that with 20 additional acres of field, an additional fee will be required to help offset the field maintenance. After the project is approved, the Recreation Committee will likely meet with the youth leagues to deliberate and determine the field permitting process, field fees, etc.

FIELD SCHEDULING

Currently the scheduling and permitting of all public athletic fields in Town is overseen by the Recreation Department. Like with the user fees, the Recreation Committee will likely meet with the youth leagues to determine the fairest method for allocating field time after the project is approved.

PROPOSED HOURS OF OPERATION

As one may expect with a project that has yet to receive a funding appropriation the situation is fluid. The anticipated hours of operation at this time will likely be 8AM-9PM. It is expected that this facility may operate up to 12 months per year however it will ultimately dependent upon the weather. The final hours of operation will need to be vetted further and the Board of Selectmen, Police Department, Fire Department, Recreation Department and/or the Recreation Committee will likely provide input on this as the field project nears completion.

RESTROOMS

After the previous fields proposal was defeated at the Spring Annual Town Meeting, Town Administration was directed to go back to meet with the engineering firm and identify areas of cost savings and value engineering from the previous proposal. Ultimately the proposal submitted to Town Meeting this fall includes the bare minimum in terms of amenities, with many areas either having been reclassified as an alternate, reduced in scope, or eliminated entirely.

Regretfully neither restrooms nor the full-service building are not included as part of this proposal. As such portable toilets are being discussed as a substitution for families. In the meantime, the current plan proposes the construction of both sewer and water infrastructure connecting to Winter Street. Should funding become available or fundraising efforts are realized, it is likely that restrooms may be reconsidered at a later date.

PLAYGROUND

The previous proposal contained a playground play structure containing ADA compliant transfer stations. Once onto the structures, users would have had a series of panels and a slide to play with. Additionally, there were many ground based features that were accessible and included play panels. All surfacing of the playground was designed with poured-in place rubber, providing full access throughout the footprint of the playground.

While a playground certainly would have brought an additional recreational element to the fields complex, at a cost of \$540,000 during the previous proposal, regrettably this was one of the components that was ultimately eliminated from this scaled-down proposal. Providing for a fully ADA compliant playground however has been identified as a priority for any fundraising efforts.

EXISTING FIELD MAINTENANCE

While the Parks Department does an exceptional job on many of the fields in Town, there are two spaces that come to mind that appear as though they are not kept up to the level Walpole residents have come to expect from the Town's playing fields. Those fields are Jarvis Farm and Johnson Middle School. Both of these areas are restricted by the DEP due to their proximity to Walpole's wells. Additionally, the two little league diamonds at both OPR and Boyden are subject to limited availability, due to the need for daily school use and they are not equipped with automatic irrigation systems. Bird Middle School fields and Stone Field are excellent examples of the level of quality, care, and excellence that the Parks Department commits to our playing fields, with the right conditions. Also, the Fisher School playing fields have had tremendous improvements in both the quality of the facility and the size of that location and have experienced usage increases.

FIELD REVENUE PROJECTIONS

Revenue projections would be premature at this time. If the project is approved, the Recreation Committee will likely convene with the youth leagues to deliberate the field permitting process, field fees, and the use of the amenities.

ENERGY USE

At this time we do not have a projected energy buildout. The meter at Turco Field house at Walpole High School however powers the building, the football field lights, as well as the tennis court lights. The yearly average for this is \$11,000. It is anticipated that the lighting bills for this site will be in the same ballpark as Turco Field.







DEMAND FROM YOUTH SPORTS

2018	BOYS & GIRLS LACROSSE	WALPOLE YOUTH FOOTBALL	WALPOLE YOUTH SOCCER (SPRING)	WALPOLE YOUTH SOCCER (FALL)
YOUTH LEAGUE INFORMATION				
<i>- Total number of players using town fields (2018 roster)</i>	392	150	84	284
<i>- Total number of teams (2018 roster)</i>	26	5	8	37
<i>- Number of levels</i>	7	5	9	7
<i>- Current number of Walpole public fields used</i>	3	4	1	4
<i>- Current Number of Walpole private fields used</i>	0	0	6	6
<i>- Regulation field size</i>	110 x 60 yds	120 x 55 yds	Varies by Age	Varies by Age
CURRENT USE **TOWN OF WALPOLE FIELDS ONLY**				
<i>- Total Number of Game & Practice Slots per Week</i>	23	18	3	12
<i>- Duration per game or practice (hours)</i>	1.5	2	1.5	1.5
<i>- Total Number of Hours per Week (current)</i>	34.5	36	4.5	18
DESIRED USAGE PER WEEK				
<i>- Total number of game & practice slots per week</i>	78	18*	46	35
<i>- Duration per game or practice (hours)</i>	1.5	2	1.5	1.5
<i>- Total number of hours per weeks (desired)</i>	117	36	69	52.5

CURRENT FIELD INVENTORY

Field / Diamond	Acres	Type	Groups / Leagues
Turco (main)	4.0	Multi-Purpose Synthetic Field	HS Sports, WYF, Lacrosse, Youth Soccer
Turco (upper)	2.0	Field Hockey / Modified Lacrosse	HS Sports, Field Hockey, Lacrosse
Turco (lower)	5.0	Multi-Purpose / Javilin / Discus / 90' Diamond	HS Sports, Babe Ruth, WYF
Jarvis Farm		Multi-Purpose Field / Baseball Diamonds	Little League, Recreation Dept.
Plimpton Field	0.8	60' Diamond (not regulation)	
Bird Field (V)	7.6	Multi-purpose / soccer	HS Sports, Walpole Youth Soccer
Bird Field (JV)	Incl.	Multi-purpose / soccer	HS Sports, Walpole Youth Soccer
Bird Field (Fr)	Incl.	Multi-purpose / soccer	HS Sports, Walpole Youth Soccer
Eldracher Field	Incl.	90' Diamond	HS Baseball, Babe Ruth, American Legion
Carty Field	Incl.	90' Diamond	HS Baseball, Babe Ruth
Smith Field	Incl.	60' Softball - skinned infield	HS Softball, Walpole Girls Softball
Johnson Middle	5.5	Multipurpose	Walpole Youth Football, Lacrosse
90' Diamond	Incl.	90' Baseball	HS Baseball, Babe Ruth
60' Diamond 1	Incl.	60' Softball - skinned infield	HS Softball, Walpole Girls Softball
60' Diamond 2	Incl.	60' Softball - skinned infield	Walpole Girls Softball
Stone Field	2.1	Multipurpose	Walpole Youth Football, Recreation Dept.
Stone Diamond	Incl.	60' Softball - skinned infield	Walpole Girls Softball, Recreation Dept.
Morgan Field	0.8	60' Little League Field	Walpole Little League, Recreation Dept.
Boyden School	1.0	60' Little League Field (skinned infield)	HS Softball, Little League
Fisher School	2.0	Multi-purpose / Modified Soccer & Lacrosse	Walpole Youth Soccer, Walpole Lacrosse
OPR School	1.8	60' Little League Field (skinned infield)	Little League