

Proposed Sports Practice Wall at Sprague Fields
Community Forum – 11/05/19
Meeting Summary

Attendees:

- **Representatives from Playing Fields Task Force (PFTF), Dept. of Public Works (DPW) and School Committee (SC)** – Linda Chow (PFTF and SC); David Cohen (DPW); Dave Hickey (DPW); Jerry Nigro (PFTF and Youth Lacrosse); Jim Roberti (SC); and Beth Sullivan Woods (PFTF and Board of Selectmen), facilitator
- **Other Attendees** – we (regrettably) did not ask attendees to sign-in but estimate ~30 residents were in attendance, representing 10% of the 300 households that should have received the [letter announcing the forum](#). It is also believed that the majority of attendees do not currently have children in WPS. Per Todd Himstead, there were “residents from Oak St., School St., Stearns Rd., Francis Rd., Hill Top Rd., Highland Rd., Kingsbury St. and the Linden Square Townhomes, plus town staff who work in the maintenance building and at least 4 Town Meeting Members who represent Precinct H, where Sprague Field is located.”

Agenda and Meeting Materials:

- The agenda which was distributed in advance can be found at this [link](#)
 - The slide deck which was shared during the forum can be found at this [link](#)
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Primary Discussion Points and Key Takeaways:

- **Welcome and Background on Sports Practice Wall Proposal [Linda C., Jerry N.]**
As the background information about the proposed wall project (see **pp. 3 and 4** of the [slide deck](#)) was reviewed, attendees asked some questions:
 - Q:** *Has the wall already been decided?*
A: *Not yet – the School Committee has discussed being in favor of a wall but has yet to vote a specific location*
 - Q:** *Are there any standards for the dimensions of a wall?*
A: *Not really - they are manufactured in panels that are 6 feet wide, and multiple panels can be installed. The height can also be tailored to the needs of the users*
 - Q:** *Who has jurisdiction over where the wall can be installed?*
A: *Since the Sprague Field Complex is considered school property, the School Committee has jurisdiction. As noted by Jerry Nigro, the Playing Fields Task Force previously explored then ruled out installing the wall on Hunnewell fields, which would have been under the jurisdiction of the Natural Resources Commission (NRC)*
 - Q:** *Will there be restrictions once the wall is put into place?*
A: *The PFTF has responsibility for setting policies so would establish them for the wall*

- **2007-2008 Sprague Field Task Force (SFTF) and Master Plan [Todd H.]**

Todd Himstead was asked to talk about the Sprague Field Task Force - he explained how SC convened the SFTF back in 2007 *“in order to represent stakeholders as we redesigned the field layout and installed the town's first two synthetic turf fields.*

- *“We understood that 1 stakeholder group – the neighborhood – would feel some negative effects. The project would create much greater intensity of field use, more traffic, more noise, more trash, and more visual clutter in the form of goalposts, painted lines, netting, etc. So, the Task Force listened hard to that group about ways to mitigate the impact.*
- *“We learned that residents valued Sprague Field as an athletic facility for organized sports. But they also valued it as a park, a green space, a place of nature in a built-out town, a quiet place, and place for throwing a frisbee, flying a kite, strolling, dog-walking, sledding, bicycle-riding, stargazing, and the like. The Task Force deemed it very important to honor this parallel usage of Sprague Field. That is why the [Master] Plan retained some open space, and did not include scoreboards, bleachers, lighting, loudspeakers, or any other structures. That plan reflected our commitment to honor neighborhood input, and acknowledge the increased burden the project created.”*

It was interesting to note that the Master Plan (p. 12 of the [slide deck](#)) assumed structures by the FMD building back in 2008.

- **Overview of Location Options Under Consideration [Dave H.]**

Next, Dave Hickey walked the group through the 3 proposed options which were displayed on large foam boards (also found on pp. 5-8 of the [deck](#)). He circulated pictures of walls from other towns. The attendees asked some questions and made a few observations:

Q: *How much does the wall weigh?*

A: *Tonnage for a 39'W x 16'H wall would be approx. 12K pounds*

Q: *How is the wall anchored?*

A: *The base of the wall would get installed 18 inches in the ground, and the weight of the structure provides its own stability*

Observations about Option 3:

- *The area is a swampy mess when it rains; Option 3 can get very soggy*
- *Concerned about visibility if the wall was installed there*

- **Facilitated Discussion [Beth Sullivan Woods]**

Option 1 – Comments and Questions:

- *The wall would be tucked behind the building*
- *Would need to figure out where best to position containers – trade off*

Q: *What would go on either side of the wall?*

A: *Synthetic turf, which is what they have in Weston*

Q: *Do the staked-out areas at all 3 options indicate the actual size?*

A: *The stakes were intended to give a sense for general size*

Q: *Is there enough space to put a wall in without disrupting the butterfly garden?*

A: *Yes*

Q: *Could players end up chasing balls into the garden? What about foul balls from fields?*

A: *The proposal includes netting around the practice wall. Another idea would be to put up a chain link fence around the wall which would allow for the gate to be locked.*

- *A chain link fence with a lock is a horrible idea. Now, it is a beautiful, natural place – the only place that is private. Unique, quiet and exceptional place. ‘Green Belt’*
- *Hearing this feels like a “bait and switch” because now it’s not just a wall*

Beth: *How many think there should be a practice wall? (counted 3 or 4 hands, incl. father of a WHS lacrosse star player who went on to play Div. 1 lacrosse in college).*

General comments:

- *It’s a visual eyesore*
- *In the hierarchy – the wall is a “nice to have” rather than a “must have”*
- *I’m an abutter who hears field hockey practice noise; need to find a site with the least impact on the greatest # of people*
- *Best option might be lower baseball field - that field does not appear to get much use*

Q: *How was Sprague site selected? Why not Hunnewell?*

A: *Jerry explained again how Hunnewell had been explored earlier but a suitable site could not be identified. In addition, student-athletes who would benefit the most would be those who practice and play at the Sprague fields.*

Beth: *Let’s try and identify the pros and cons for each option*

○ **Option 1**

- + *Fewer abutters [clarification added after the session: fewer residents would have wall in their line of sight compared to Option 3, but there are quite a # of abutters]*
- + *Less of an eyesore since it would be tucked behind building*
- + *Would not take up green space*
- + *Building might absorb sound*
- + *Easiest access*
- + *Good drainage*
- + *Generally good for the kids – could also draw them away from using building*
- *Displaces other activities?*
- *Poor visibility – “stuff” goes on around building*
- *Intensive activity in close proximity to private, quiet, natural area of respite*
- *Stray ball dangers to those on trail around butterfly garden*
- *Foul ball dangers to players practicing*
- *If there is a chain link fence, then NO*

Possible mitigation steps:

- Netting
- Define hours of operation
- Would need to clean up area – containers
- Put up arborvitae?

○ **Option 2**

- + Fewer abutters than Option 3
- + Might get used as tennis wall (although tennis balls on turf may not be helpful to tennis players)
- Further from field
- Only open space, park land
- We all walk in that area; kids sled during winter
- Wall is obstruction and visual eyesore – monolithic concrete wall
- It should not displace current use
- Noise and visibility – that is what we would hear and see all the time
- Slope is an issue for installation; would require grading of site

Note: There is graffiti, trash and broken glass by the ropes course in the woods by Option 2; no one appears to patrol this area

○ **Option 3 – RULED OUT after hearing about swampy conditions and flooding**

- Swampy after rain / snow (would require raising up site for wall, adding drainage)
- Flooding of basements – Linden Townhomes began experiencing basement flooding after installation of synthetic field, “no way we could stay there”
- Tunnel of noise already, including after school music from baseball fields
- Danger of flying balls
- Visual eye sore

For a chart summarizing pros/cons based on input from the forum and afterwards, see next page or go to this [link](#).

● **Closing Thoughts and Next Steps**

- SFTF – recall that open green space was an objective; ‘where peace can reign’
- Consider example of Tolles Parsons [in reference to gift funding leading the project]
- Option 1 is “least offensive” or “least worst” option
- It appeared we accomplished what we set out to do – to conduct more community outreach and let community members be heard
- Next step is for School Committee to receive a summary of the forum, discuss and vote at its meeting on **November 26 at Town Hall @ 6:30 PM**. The School Committee meeting agenda will be posted to the [Town’s agenda center](#) at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

● Stakeholder Analysis (based on input gathered before Nov. 5)

Stakeholder	Option 1: By FMD building	Option 2: By tennis courts	Option 3: By fields
School Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proximity to Sprague + On other side of building - Impact on traffic / parking - Safety / seclusion 		
School Athletics & Youth Sports Playing Fields Task Force (PFTF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Will benefit large # of kids all ages, reduces injury by warming up + PFTF's preferred option - Not in coach's (or parents) view, medium walk fr. field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + PFTF's 2nd option - Not in coach's view, long walk for players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + PFTF's 2nd option + Directly adjacent to field - Interferes with XC
Facilities Management Dept. (FMD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Future expansion - Building damage & security - Disruption of operations 		
Wellesley Police Department	No preference between locations from a public safety and patrol standpoint		
	For improved visibility, consider making wall parallel to back of building, move bins	Both of these options work well from a Police Department perspective although he understands there may be neighbor concerns	
Neighbors	~26 neighbors (Francis / Stearns) voiced sim. concerns re: safety and seclusion, also for garden, future 40Bs	~8 neighbors raised concerns re: sledding, dog walking & other sports being impeded, and lack of open space	~14 abutters - safety, noise, obstruction of view & property value; some know it comes with territory; trees?

● Summary of Feedback from Community Forum on Nov. 5 and afterwards

Stakeholder	Option 1: By FMD building	Option 2: By tennis courts	X Option 3: By fields
School Athletics & Youth Sports Playing Fields Task Force (PFTF)	50+ residents emailed in support of wall that will benefit large # of kids of all ages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Improves muscle memory, hand-eye coordination, and skills overall + Helps reduce injury by enabling players to warm up + Encourages outdoor play and fitness - Also noted that other towns have walls, e.g., Ashland, Medfield, Sudbury, Weston, etc. 		
Community Forum Feedback (~30 residents from Oak St., School St., Stearns Rd., Hill Top Rd., Highland Rd., Kingsbury St. and Linden Sq. Townhomes, plus town staff who work in FMD bldg. and at least 4 Town Meeting Members from Precinct H, where Sprague Field is located) <i>*Clarification added post-forum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Fewer abutters [<i>who'd have wall in line of sight*</i>] than Option 3 + Less of eyesore if behind building + Would not take up open space + Building might absorb sound + Easiest access + Good drainage + Generally good for kids - could draw them away from building - Displaces other activities? - Poor visibility - "stuff" goes on by building - Intensive activity so close to private, quiet, natural area - Stray ball dangers to those on trail around butterfly garden - Foul ball danger to players - If chain link fence, then NO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Fewer abutters than Option 3 + Might get used as tennis wall (but tennis balls on turf may not be helpful) - Further from field - Only open space, park land - We all walk in that area; kids sled during winter - Wall is obstruction eyesore - monolithic concrete wall - Shouldn't displace current use - Noise, visibility - what we'd hear & see all the time - Slope is issue for install; would require grading <p><i>Note: Graffiti, trash & broken glass by ropes course in woods by Option 2; is this area patrolled at all?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swampy after rain / snow (would require raising up site for wall, drainage) - Flooding of basements - Tunnel of noise already - Danger of flying balls - Visual eye sore <p>X Ruled out due to flooding and swamp-like conditions near proposed site for installation</p>