



# **WILTON ATHLETIC & RECREATION FOUNDATION**

**Presentation Prepared for Board of Selectmen  
March 21, 2023**

# WARF Team and Partners

*Dedicated volunteers from across our community working collaboratively with town leadership*

**JR Sherman**

President

**Tom Viggiano**

Treasurer

**Scott Lawrence**

Development

**Jason Partenza**

Director

**Heather Salvatore**

Communications & Events

**Chandra Ring**

Secretary

**Nick Gemelli**

Fields & Facilities

**Justin Weigold**

Marketing & Technology

**Dave Cote**

Corporate Sponsorship

**Lindsay Sheehy**

Legal Advisor

**Bobby Rushton**

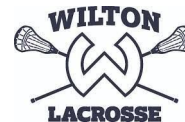
Advisor/WHS Athletic Director

**Lyons & Lyons**

Independent Accounting Firm



**WILTON YOUTH  
FIELD HOCKEY**



# Agenda

- Community Support and Fundraising Update
- Need-Case Summary
- Next Steps

# Community Support and Fundraising

- **WARF's first priority is building support and fundraising for the Allen's Meadows Community Turf Field with Lights and Seasonal Bubble project. In just the first two weeks:**
  - **WARF received \$200,000 in pledges from 15 donors and is committing to raising \$500,000.**
  - **WARF contributed \$60,000 from its corporate sponsorship program and expects to raise another \$40,000 this year and each year going forward, representing a \$100,000 funding source.**
  - **WARF's outreach has help generate dozens of Wilton resident support letters to town boards and an online petition with nearly 1,600 signatures.**
- **WARF will accelerate fundraising and support building through outreach, events, and targeted private and corporate fundraising, with a goal of maximizing funds and voter turnout for the Annual Town Meeting in May.**
- **WARF representation will continue expanding to meet this new opportunity and create future ones. It now spans all youth field sports and is expanding to benefit not just Wilton's ~2,600 households with children or ~5,700 residents under age 21<sup>(1)</sup>, but instead all of Wilton's recreation community.**

1) Source: 2021 ACS Data for Wilton, CT, data.census.gov (accessed March 10, 2023).

# Why Wilton Needs a Third Turf Field With Lights and Seasonal Bubble

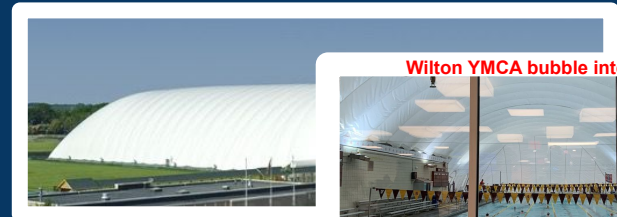
- Growing Demand for this Amenity:
  - User base and time demands are increasing, costs of using facilities outside Wilton are high and often prohibitive (time and money).
- Supply Constrained / Scarcity Value:
  - Existing turf and grass fields are insufficient relative to demand. No similar facilities within ~10-15 mile radius.
- Quality of Life Benefits:
  - Immediate and material improvements for children (users), families, town programs and organizations and the community at large.
- Growth Driver for Town:
  - Wilton amenities showcase positive investment in our town, attract and retain families, and create revenue opportunities and positive economic activity - no other asset like this in our town portfolio.

# Embrace the Possible

*WARF is working with the Town of Wilton to evaluate, assess and execute upon a shared vision for a state-of-the-art organic-fill turf facility with lights and seasonal bubble at Allen's Meadows*

## Organic-fill Turf Facility with Lights and Seasonal Bubble

- Up to 3 turf fields with lights possible
- Seasonal bubble just like YMCA across Rt 7
- 3x+ increase in capacity (1 field, before divisibility)
- Multi-sport configurations/flexibility
- Year-round, weather independent access
- High efficiency LED lighting, enhanced parking/access
- Ability to host tournaments, community events, new programming for children, adults, employers in area
- Self-sustaining and town revenue contributor







Images are provided to be representative, they are not actual designs.





Images are provided to be representative, they are not actual designs.

# Demand Growth: Sizing the Audience

*Community of families with children in sports & recreation programs is large and active*

## Families are backbone of Wilton and Fairfield County

- ~5k participants annually in Wilton youth and high school sports make up about ~125+ teams<sup>(1)</sup>
- ~28k children <18 years old in Wilton, New Canaan, Ridgefield, Weston, Westport combined

## Families = youth sports and recreation participants, fans, volunteers

- Every child can play, so much demand in core sports, untapped opportunities in recreation
- More & more children are playing more than one sport/year - year-round programming is becoming the norm
- More seeking activity between seasons - often leave town to do so - especially in Winter

	Youth	Wilton High School	Total
Field Sports	2,900 (8 sports, ~100 teams)	600 (8 sports, 20-25 teams)	3,500
Non Field Sports	900	600	1,500
Total	3,800	1,200	5,000

1) Source: Wilton Youth Sports organizations and WHS Athletics for 2022/2023. Youth "teams" estimated based on ~12-15 players per team. Numbers rounded for ease of viewing.

# Addressing Supply Challenges, Creating Opportunities

*Community turf with lights and bubble is a game changer for recreation and athletics*

## Addressing key challenges - fantastic for children, invaluable for parents and administrators/volunteers

- Quality and Safety - consistent play surface, shock absorbent, organic infill, weather resistant / sheltered in bubble
- Reliability - available year round, limited/far fewer cancellations
- Scheduling - better times (preferred/age appropriate windows for all), better for all constituents to a program
- Capacity - massive increase even before field divisibility, room for all, room for new

## Unique, convenient destination for sports and recreation, with added benefits and new opportunities

- Expanded youth programming in to four seasons
- Add leagues, tournaments, events and more for all ages and sports
- Free play opportunities, daytime (school) hours for <5 year olds and caretakers (especially in winter)
- New programming for adults, partner to corporates/businesses
- Venue for Town events of all kinds
- ***What we imagine, we can do!***

# Amazing for Users... and Their Families

*Improvements directly benefit children, adult users, families/parents and the Town*



- **Accessible and convenient for all**

- Ideal central location
- Walkable from schools, accessible by buses



- **Dramatically improved user experience, more growth from the experience**

- Quality of surface and facility gets users excited, makes them proud
- Fully lit fields improve quality of sessions relative to alternatives (dim, temp lights)



- **Appropriate practice times**

- Age appropriate times = more participation, more attentiveness, better energy
- Better timing + in-town = more family time, less stress, better mental + physical health



- **Save hard-earned money for families**

- Reduce or eliminate lengthy commutes to out of town facilities (gas, car maint, etc)
- Reduce halo spending around out of town youth sports and recreation participation

# Unlocking New Opportunities

*New facility will enable new programs and opportunities for all*

- This new facility creates a year-round opportunity for every Wilton child to establish physical literacy for life, become well-rounded people and gain invaluable leadership skills
- The “Play for Life” model recommends
  - Asking what kids want to play
  - Reintroducing Free Play
  - Investing in in-town leagues
  - Encouraging sport sampling
- Example untapped opportunities:
  - Free Play club
  - Multi-Sport club
  - Youth Fit Club/Boot Camp
  - Youth Activity Camps
  - Adult leagues
  - Parent/child open play/use

## SPORT FOR ALL, PLAY FOR LIFE MODEL BROAD ACCESS LEADS TO SUSTAINED PARTICIPATION



*Squaring the pyramid creates athletes for life, at all levels.*

*Up to age 12, focus on ability, confidence, and desire to be active.*

# Driving Growth for Wilton

*Investments in Town amenities drive positive economic growth*

- Recapture Wilton dollars leaving town:
  - Wilton programs and families spend considerable dollars patronizing non-Wilton facilities and surrounding businesses
- Indoor field space scarce / at a premium:
  - \$150-\$250 per hour for a  $\frac{1}{4}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$  field “pod” and up to \$800-\$900 per hour for a full field at needed/prime times. These costs are pushed directly onto families

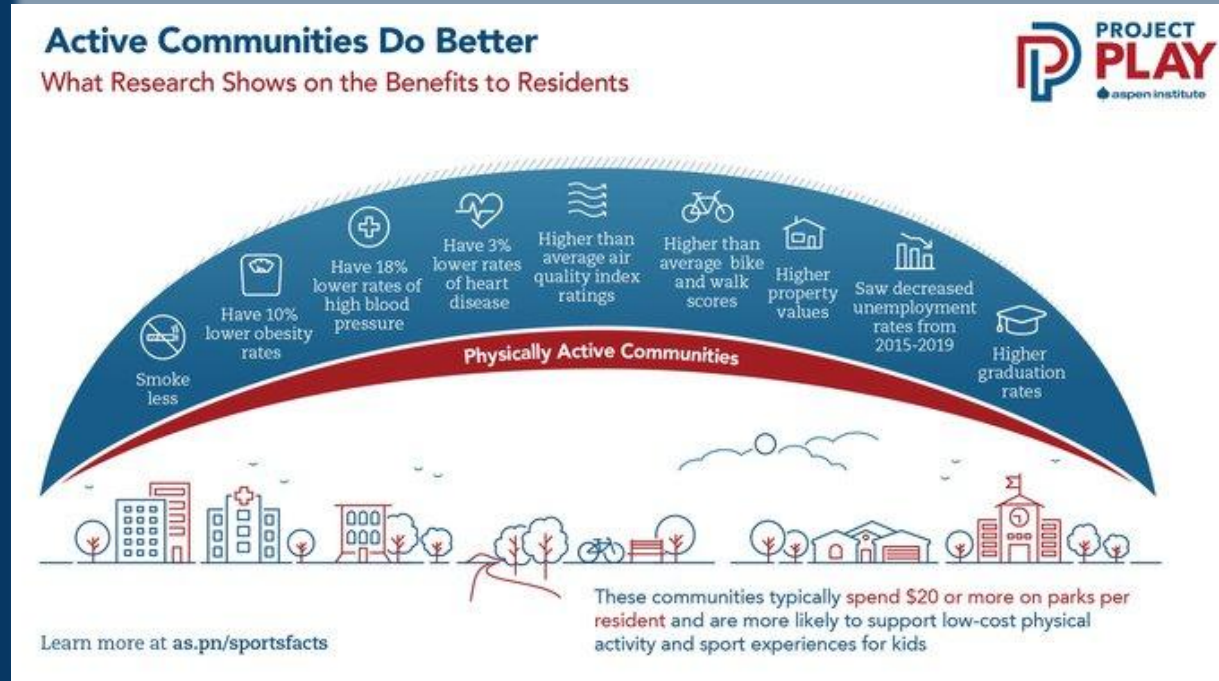
**New amenities drive new economic activity, create resilient local economies and encourage new investment. They signal the town’s willingness to make investments that improve lives, directly benefit existing and prospective families, our businesses and the town overall.**

# Finally...“Active Communities Do Better”

*Research supports positive benefits for those that invest in sports and recreation*

An “active community” proactively supports the health, social, and economic benefits of physical activity, sport, and recreation by promoting policies and infrastructure that encourage healthy behavior.

- Aspen Institute



# Next Steps

- This project is years in the making . . . the opportunity and timing are just right.
- WARF is very grateful for Town leadership's focus and support.
- WARF supports and will follow the Town's lead on environmental diligence.
- WARF will continue to offer design and operational guidance wherever helpful.
- WARF will continue to fundraise and build community support leading up to the Annual Town Meeting in May and beyond.
- For more information, visit our website: [warfwarriors.com](http://warfwarriors.com).

THANK YOU!

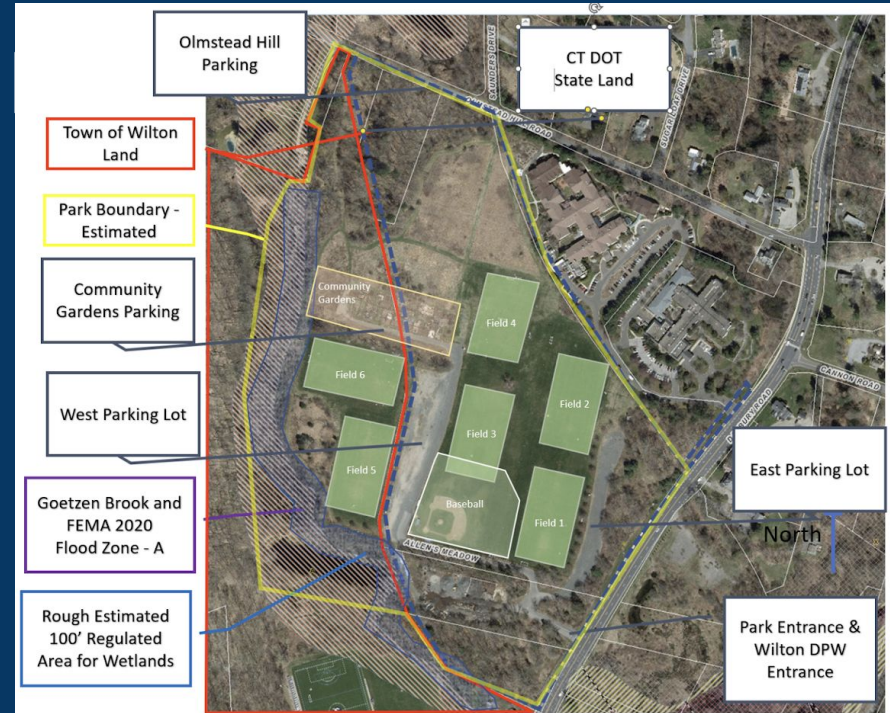


# Appendix

# Allen's Meadows - Existing Challenges

*Large and flat land dedicated to community use, but with numerous challenges*

- Grass fields
  - Overuse, inability to rest
  - Requires extensive maintenance
  - Uneven and inconsistent surface
  - Often closed due to rain/mud in season
  - Very dry in summer, recent droughts
  - Closed in winter and shoulder seasons
  - Inconsistent opening dates each season
- No lights (youth orgs must add temp lights)
- No field lines (youth orgs must pay for)
- Parking - no space markings, gravel/potholes, no lighting, no winter use
- No restroom facilities or other amenities



# Dramatic Capacity Expansion

*Turf + lights + seasonal bubble on just one field creates 3x more available hours before considering multiplier effect from divisibility of a turf field space*

One grass field w/ no lights			
Season	Weeks	Hrs/Wk	Total Hrs
Fall	10	30	300
Winter	12	0	0
Spring	10	36	360
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>		<b>660</b>

- Fall: 5 weekdays from 3 - 6PM plus Saturday 8AM - 5PM, Sunday 12 - 6PM
- Winter: Fields closed for Winter
- Spring: 5 weekdays from 3 - 7PM plus Saturday 8AM - 5PM, Sunday 12 - 7PM

Turf field w/ lights and seasonal bubble			
Season	Weeks	Hrs/Wk	Total Hrs
Fall	12	59	708
Winter	12	59	708
Spring	12	59	708
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>		<b>2,124</b>

- Fall: 5 weekdays from 3 - 10PM plus Saturday 8AM - 10PM, Sunday 12 - 10PM; two more weeks available relative to when grass fields would otherwise open/close
- Winter: 5 weekdays from 3 - 10PM plus Saturday 8AM - 10PM, Sunday 12 - 10PM
- Spring: 5 weekdays from 3 - 10PM plus Saturday 8AM - 10PM, Sunday 12 - 10PM, two more weeks available relative to when grass fields would otherwise open/close

# Safety & Sustainability

The new facility at Allen's Meadows will be a net positive for the Town, users & the environment.

## SAFETY

- Same organic infill as Wilton's existing turf fields
- Bottom up construction with cushion/shock absorbent sublayers
- Consistent, safe, low maintenance and near-always playable surface
- No reported increases in injuries, concussions or adverse health events on Wilton's existing turf fields vs. grass predecessors



## SUSTAINABILITY

- 8-10 year life (possibly longer with seasonal bubble)
- Organic-infill and bonded grass fibers maintain low temps
- Elimination of fertilizer/pesticide treatment, irrigation (water) for grass
- Reduction of carbon emissions from grass mowers and diesel gas generators for temp lights
- Further reduces Wilton carbon footprint by reducing miles driven by families to out of town facilities
- High efficiency LED lighting for safe, evening play



# Net Positive for Wilton

*Net positive when considering full impact*

## **Turf widely accepted as safe, more so when built to state of the art standards**

- State Department of Health considers turf fields safe
- State has approved turf field as a use case at Allen's Meadows on State's and Town's land
- Wilton has two eco-friendly turf fields with organic infill

## **For users, turf is safer than our grass fields**

- Wilton grass fields pose injury risk - not level, divots, rocks, sprinkler heads/holes, arid/hard in summer, soggy/wet in fall and spring
- Turf is engineered for safety: level, cushioned, consistent
- In Wilton alone, no observable or anecdotal data that indicates increase in injuries or concussion on our existing turf fields relative to the prior grass versions
- Modern turf field materials are safe – bonded grass fibers and organic infill material (**NOT crumb rubber**)

## **Turf fields are a reality, if not requirement, for today's youth sports**

- Youth and high-school sports programming has intensified with training, practice and game schedules - nearly all programs use turf fields to some extent, whether in Wilton or at peer towns or facilities

## **Replacing grass with turf results in elimination of:**

- Water for irrigation
- Fertilizer programs
- Carbon emissions from grass mowing

## **An Allen's facility will dramatically reduce many Wilton residents' costs and carbon footprint**

- Hundreds of families commute in gas-powered vehicles to like facilities 10-20+ miles away, 1-3x+ per week, aggregately representing thousands of miles, hours and dollars, and corresponding gallons of gas, spent on accessing other facilities
- Allen's Meadows location is safely accessible via easily walkable routes from schools and efficient bus routes from schools
- Thus, an Allen's facility would significantly reduce resident costs and thousands of miles of car trips and related emissions

# Net Positive for Wilton (cont'd)

## State-of-the-art organic infill turf fields mitigate environmental concerns

- WARF's core mission is improving community health through athletics and recreation, which requires being good environmental stewards and promoting safe and environmentally responsible projects. Accordingly, WARF believes that an objective, holistic review of the opportunity show that the fiscal, operational, safety and environmental benefits of an organic infill turf field clearly outweigh the costs, especially when compared against existing grass fields.
- Organic infill turf fields reduce or eliminate the risk runoff pollution or "heat islands" by eliminating crumb-rubber leachable pollutants, retaining moisture and absorbing less sunlight and ambient heat than fields with crumb-rubber infill.
- Recently raised PFAS concerns warrant review, and WARF welcomes and supports the town's efforts to study the health and groundwater effects, if any, posed by leachable PFAS in organic infill turf, if any, as part of its project diligence. However, CT DOT has already approved turf and seasonal bubble use as part of the town's new lease at Allen's Meadows. Also, the CT Department of Public Health FAQ on PFAS and turf fields currently considers organic-infill turf fields safe with respect to PFAS, noting that:
  - PFAS are used widely in "plastic, rubber, and resin, and as processing aids to improve plastic extrusion," including artificial turf field materials. However, the US EPA notes PFAS are also present in "water, soil, air, and food as well as in materials found in our homes or workplaces," including: chrome plating, electronics, and certain textile and paper products, food packaging (e.g. grease-resistant paper, fast food containers/wrappers, microwave popcorn bags, pizza boxes, and candy wrappers); household products and dust – for example in stain and water-repellent used on carpets, upholstery, clothing, and other fabrics; cleaning products; non-stick cookware; paints, varnishes, and sealants; personal care products – for example in certain shampoo, dental floss, and cosmetics; biosolids and fertilizer.
  - The most-cited peer review study showing PFAS in artificial turf shows that the PFAS is "bonded" to the product, does not "leach into the environment" and is not the type of PFAS that "transform in the environment into harmful PFAS," and thus: "For all these reasons, this peer-reviewed study shows that the presence of fluorinated substances in artificial turf fields does not pose an exposure concern to users of the fields."
  - Recent testing by nonprofits identifying PFAS in certain Massachusetts turf fields show concentrations "within the range of 'background' PFAS concentrations detected in soils (collected from pristine remote areas) and in surface waters (collected near urban areas) as a result of atmospheric deposition, [thus,] it is impossible to determine whether the PFAS originated from the turf or from other sources such as atmospheric deposition."
  - **Sources:** <https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Environmental-Health/Environmental-and-Occupational-Health-Assessment/Artificial-Turf-Fields> and <https://www.epa.gov/pfas/our-current-understanding-human-health-and-environmental-risks-pfas> (accessed: March 14, 2023).