

Wilton Indoor Field Concept

P&R First Look

January 2021

What is this?

- **These slides explore why Wilton should consider building an indoor field space in time to allow for Winter 2021 use.**
 - This is the third or fourth effort to evaluate building new turf or indoor fields space in the last 25 years. For reasons discussed below, we believe the time is right to restart discussions.
 - We are providing this information for your consideration to assess interest and inspire further investigation and action.
 - All information, assumptions and estimates are our own and subject to further development. Questions are very welcome.
- **Who we are:** a small, but expanding group of Wilton parents and experienced town volunteers with a keen interest in Wilton's future.
 - JR Sherman
 - Parent (2020 Grad, 2028s), Board & VP Wilton Youth Lacrosse Association, 15+ year youth lax coach, Wilton HS Lacrosse player, President/Founder of Wilton Athletic & Recreation Foundation
 - Scott Lawrence
 - Parent (2025 and 2027), Former Planning and Zoning Commission Chair and Member, Former Zoning Board of Appeals Chair and Member

Why Wilton Needs Indoor Field Space

- **Broad community interest in indoor activity space is increasing:**
 - New facilities demonstrate community interest, commitment and investment to prospective homeowners, businesses and developers.
 - Wilton would benefit from expanding upon the Comstock model of providing community activity space that accommodates multiple uses and users. For example, an indoor facility with track, pickleball, basketball and open activity spaces alongside regulation field space could accommodate a wide range of Wilton users (from youth to senior, singles to families) and activity levels (from casual walkers to high school and adult athletes).
 - Wilton prides itself on its youth athletic programs, facilities and heritage. Youth sports attract new families to town, help integrate new kids and parents into the community and foster strong personal friendships and community bonds. New lighted and turfed indoor field space would significantly benefit Wilton sport programs at all age levels.
 - Peer towns have more and/or new lighted and turfed field facilities (Darien, New Canaan, etc.).
- **Need for full-year, full day/night and turfed field use is increasing:**
 - Wilton has high current field use: many town teams and private/club teams use Wilton's 31 fields each year. Private club (rental) use both inside and outside of Wilton has been increasing.
 - Competitive sport needs are increasing: Field sports (Football, Soccer, Lacrosse, Field Hockey, Baseball/Softball, etc.) increasingly train/compete on a full-year and regional/national basis, rather than a seasonal/local one. This is especially true for collegiate recruiting sports, but the effect is trickling down to youth sports who have increasingly full and competitive schedules.
 - Community needs are increasing: Convenient access to semi-conditioned indoor activity space (track, basketball, pickleball, general workout area, etc.) is at a premium, especially during Winter. Wilton also lacks a full-sized (100y x 80y (400'x250', ~100,000 SF)) indoor facility for community events like graduation, town meetings or art/crafts shows, and the like. Wilton's current largest indoor structure is WHS Field House (~230'x140', ~32,200 SF), which requires accessing school grounds for use.

Why Wilton Needs Indoor Field Space (continued)

- **Weather challenges are increasing (source: BestPlaces.net):**
 - Wilton has ~123 precipitation days per year, with highest frequency from March-June (10-12 days/month) during spring sports seasons.
 - Wilton has 3 months (December-February) with average HIGH temperatures below minimal comfortable outdoor activity temps (40 degrees).
 - Weather variability and intensity appear to be increasing, causing more last-minute schedule changes and lost outdoor activity/practice/game time.
 - Wilton players are increasingly competing with regional/national teams who have climates allowing for year-round outdoor use or who have better access to indoor facilities.
- **Real costs and opportunity costs are increasing:**
 - Wet fields are expensive: using fields during/after rain degrades the fields and increases maintenance and restoration costs.
 - Private indoor field/facility use is expensive: Wilton teams spend ~\$160,000/year renting indoor field space (source: Wilton Lacrosse Association & Wilton Soccer Association).
 - Commuting is expensive: nearest full-size indoor field facilities are 20-40 minutes each way, without traffic (SONO / Chelsea Piers). Multiply that times 15-20 kids per team, per practice = many “lost” hours.
 - Inactivity is expensive: Conveniently accessible indoor sport facilities promote a healthy, active lifestyle with real quality of life benefits for all users, especially in combatting Winter doldrums.
- **Alternatives do not currently meet contemplated needs:**
 - Current town indoor field options (Wilton Sports & Fitness and SportsPerformanceU) are beloved, but still require commuting and cannot accommodate full-field or multi-team scrimmaging.
 - “Bubbling” an existing turf field (Fujitani or Lilly) has been explored in the past. However, doing so does not add new turf and lighted field area or increase overall use capacity, especially in the highest-use spring and fall seasons. Also, both sites have access and parking challenges due to regular school use.

Why Do This Now?

- **Recognizing increasing needs for activity space, Wilton groups have evaluated building new indoor and/or turf fields multiple times in the last 25 years.**
 - Locations included Comstock, Middlebrook, Kristine Lilly (North Field), Guy Whitten, Allen's Meadow (Town land only), among others.
 - Financial viability remains a key consideration, including using rental income to cover expenses and debt service, if any. As shown by private indoor facilities (SONO, Chelsea Piers, CT Sportsplex), indoor field facilities can be profitable under the right circumstances.
 - Prior efforts have stalled for various reasons, including litigation/neighbor issues, location/site constraints, financial or other constraints, demographic need, and, most recently, the pandemic.
- **Now is the time to restart and rethink for 2021 and beyond.**
 - The pandemic continues to cause untold health and economic pain for many Wilton residents. Planning and building a potentially financially self-sustaining project that promotes community health can be a positive, unifying goal in response to uniquely challenging times.
 - At the same time, the pandemic is causing an unexpected demographic shift of NYC families relocating to Fairfield County. A town-run indoor field facility provides a differentiating amenity that can attract new families, homeowners, businesses and development to Wilton over peer towns.
 - Demand for indoor field use is expected to increase. Demand for related indoor space that serves the broader community – track, sport courts, workout areas – will also increase.
 - An indoor facility can accommodate new community uses, users and events that bring new customers to Wilton's core area businesses, especially restaurants.
 - Cost of capital is presently low.
 - **Wilton should capitalize on these trends within the next 12 months.**