

**November 1, 2021**

**TO: Lynn Vanderslice & Steve Pierce**  
**FROM: Tom Viggiano, President of Wilton Softball**  
**RE: Wilton Softball Field Improvement Needs**

Dear Lynn and Steve,

As you know, the volunteer leadership of Wilton's community-based 501c(3) youth sports organizations have collectively begun engaging you for your support in efforts to address needed improvements and investments by the Town of Wilton into the quality, availability and reliability of athletic fields and facilities for the benefit of Wilton children in sports and the Town at large. The cross-sport coalition will be submitting a collective list we have been working on for your consideration shortly.

However, apart from those collective efforts, you also recently received a communication from a Wilton Softball parent. In the short time this family has been part of our program, they have identified some obvious differences between the quality of our town fields/facilities and that of the many other Fairfield County towns that we visit for away games and tournaments. Further, the Wilton Softball Board's capital committee has been working on a plan of improvement for some time. For this reason, I also wanted to send you this communication.

I think we all collectively understand that we need to take actions and make some much-needed improvements. Below is a list of required improvements that the Capital Committee of the Board of Wilton Softball has been tracking. We understand that certain improvements will be easier to address in the near term, while others will require a mid to longer term view. Our Softball board is open to hearing feedback from you regarding your point of view on the items below, and how we might stand up a project plan to begin addressing them.

Thank you in advance for time and energy on this, and all that you do for our town. I look forward to the iterative journey of improvement we will begin together.

Best,

Tom Viggiano  
President of Wilton Softball

## Wilton Softball Facility Improvements

- **Batting Cages and Practice Facilities** – Softball has only one outdoor batting cage that we privately funded. Comstock has a makeshift cage that is indoors. There are NO other usable indoor workout facilities for us to use in the Winter months. Having more dedicated batting cages is needed (indoor ones in particular). This contrasts with other towns that have dedicated facilities specifically for these purposes. Improving our indoor and outdoor practice facilities including pitching bullpens and other practice areas is critical. This is where the conversation about expanding turf facilities in our town becomes really important to softball programming. A bubble would provide the indoor workout space needed in the winter months. We are currently forced to rent winter practice space from other towns at a significant expense to the softball organization. However, the need goes beyond just indoor facilities. We are regularly at the mercy of weather closures on the grass fields, and often lack playable outdoor space needed to run our routine clinics and practices for our program. Expanded turf facilities (indoor and outdoor) will help exponentially, and ANY addition of a turf field, whether it be in a bubble or in an outdoor space, should be lined for softball and baseball.
- **Infield fill** – The infields at each of the softball fields (Varsity, JV, Middlebrook Fields 1 and 2, Comstock and Lions Field) need to be backfilled with clay on a regularly scheduled basis. There are rocks, pebbles, weeds, wasp nests and broken pieces of glass in the dirt. The hard, rocky surface is particularly problematic. The girls are often injured when they slide on the rocks, which also cause frequent and unpredictable bad hops. Mitigating with appropriate fill would be helpful. However, the next three bullets are important to retaining any improvements we make in this regard.
- **Skin and redo the Middlebrook and JV fields (at a minimum)** – The Middlebrook, JV, Lions and Comstock fields have not been redone in many, many years (since the early 90's). WBSA did help fund the redoing of the Varsity field in the past few years, but the others are in dire need. There are significant drainage issues (discussed further below). Some of the bases and pitcher's mounds are not properly aligned. The batter's boxes are beaten (and easily crater) and need to be replaced. Basically, they are beyond their useful life.
- **Irrigation** – The lack of irrigation at the Middlebrook and JV fields is problematic, creating multiple issues with respect to safety, playability and the long-term health of the fields. When we re-skin those fields we need to install irrigation systems. The outfields seem to hold up pretty well during the summer, but the infields and the lip of infield/outfield are our problem areas and are dangerous. The infields become a dust bowl, hard as a rock with unsafe gullies cut in them from the rain. Adding regular irrigation will help with these issues. We have already done the research and priced out this improvement. I can provide details as we move forward.
- **Drainage** – I know we discussed this at length on our recent call. It is a known issue for the Varsity field. It is worth mentioning the fact that WBSA just spent a significant amount of money (\$10,450) to redo the Varsity field in recent years only to have a substantial amount of the infield fill be washed into the parking lot. I was not aware that there are long-known drainage problems at the Varsity campus to the extent that we discussed on the call together. We also suffer from similar drainage issues at the JV and MB fields. They puddle and there are gullies that get cut into the middle of the infields. At MB, the infield dirt is pushed into the woods behind the field. For these reasons, I think it is critical that the town engineers (or private ones) be engaged at such

time that any major investment is made in the reskinning and implementation of irrigation at ANY field we attack. If not, then we are just putting good money after bad, as evidenced by what is happening at the Varsity field.

- **Lights** – We have one lighted field for softball in our town (Varsity), and we share that with the HS and other town activities (including men’s league, and other youth sports). In contrast, Wilton Baseball has two dedicated youth lighted fields at the YMCA (which we understand is private property), and our neighboring towns often have multiple lighted softball fields. The addition of lights at the JV and Middlebrook fields would exponentially improve our ability to host more events and expand our program capabilities. I know there has been some resistance to lightning from the neighborhood below Middlebrook. However, technological improvements have made high wattage movable LED light panels available with “cut off” ability to reduce light pollution and keep the lights on the fields. We have a 100amp panel in the shed that has the capacity to run the lights.
- **Ongoing Field Prep and Maintenance** – The ongoing maintenance required at the fields warrants a loud call out. We are grateful for the efforts of our town’s workers who help to prep fields (mow, drag the infield and line the foul lines). However, as residents and parents of players in the program, we spend an inordinate amount of time working the fields. On game days the volunteer coaches and parent helpers arrive at the field hours early to rake the fields (or drag the field, if needed), line the batter’s boxes, line the pitcher’s circles, and apply dryout to cure puddles or muddy areas. It is a lot of extra work that our town residents (who are taxpayers) need to invest to ensure our fields are in a proper playing condition. This is a very visible and real difference between how our town approaches the preparation of the fields versus our neighboring towns, and a comment that we frequently receive from opposing coaches. We are appreciative of the help we get from town, but it is an indication that our town may be woefully understaffed or unaware of the efforts our families are required to put forth.
- **Bleachers** – The bleachers at the Middlebrook and JV fields are deteriorated. The wood benches are rotten and splintered. The aluminum ones are broken. Parents, grandparents and other spectators regularly resort to bringing their own chairs. New, larger bleachers would be important for providing a suitable seating option for our parents, grandparents and other spectators, particularly as we enhance our ability to host more events.
- **Dugouts** – The Middlebrook field dugouts need improvements, including fresh paint, and repair of loose benches, broken bat hangers and storage bins. We suggest surveying the facilities at other towns (Ridgefield, Fairfield, Westport, Darien and New Canaan) to draw a comparison and generate ideas for improvement. We also note that the JV field lacks dugouts altogether and should have them installed.
- **Fences** – We only have one fenced in field suitable for tournament play. Fencing another field to official playing dimensions would be very beneficial to our program and town by enabling us to host more revenue-generating tournaments, such as the little league district tournaments our town had been so successful in over the years. We might suggest that Varsity would be a good field to consider for a movable high-quality fence that goes up during the season and comes down afterwards - similar to the one that is used at the Ridgefield varsity field. We should also analyze the fence at MB 1 and make repairs, as needed.

- **Bathrooms** – We have no working bathroom facilities at ANY of our softball fields (of note, the bathrooms at the Varsity stadium field are usually locked and inaccessible). We privately pay for and place portable bathrooms and hand washing stations at the Middlebrook fields. As one would imagine, this is not a good or sanitary situation for anyone, especially in the Summer and particularly young women. This situation is also in stark contrast to our neighboring towns who have proper bathroom facilities.
- **Storage for Equipment and Field Prep Materials** – We are nearing the end of the life of the storage sheds that we use at the Middlebrook fields. We will eventually need to replace the existing permanent buildings. We also have a several months-long outstanding request to relocate the metal storage bin that is in the woods near the MB1 field to another location at Middlebrook, between the two permanent sheds so that we may use it for the chalk field liner and the dry-out that we are currently required to keep stored with our equipment.
- **Bases and pitcher's mounds on MB and JV fields, and possibly Comstock and Lions** - Movable pitcher's mounds would be beneficial as different ages pitch from different distances. Our present situation requires us to dig up the pitcher's mounds and re-install them each time we have a different age playing. All the bases need to be replaced with proper working break away bases. The current bases do not properly sit in their respective holes, causing a tripping risk.
- **Tree Trimming** – The trees along the side of MB1 overhang into the field and need to be cut back behind the fence line. This has been called out during district play as a hinderance and a safety concern.
- **Garbage Cans** - A final issue is our town's carry out policy. While I applaud the effort on behalf of our town to reduce expense and hold people accountable for themselves, I think there is real evidence that it is not working. Our parents and the visitors to our town regularly see trash strewn about the Varsity field complex. Water bottles litter our track and our fields. The Port-O-John's and the Lost and Found box at Varsity serve as garbage repositories (please just take a look inside the lost and found box to see what is in there). I don't know what the impetus was for implementing the carry out policy, but I do think it warrants reconsideration. At the MB fields, we thankfully have garbage cans, but that is a service we pay for privately (on taxpayer funded public fields).

Again, thank you in advance for working together with our youth organizations on these much-needed improvements.