

Wilton Youth Football and Cheer
Wilton Youth Field Hockey
Wilton Lacrosse Association
Wilton Soccer Association
Wilton Baseball and Softball Association

April 10, 2023

To: Town of Wilton Board of Selectmen
Copy to: Town of Wilton Board of Finance

Dear Board of Selectmen,

We, the current volunteer leaders of Wilton's nonprofit youth sports organizations, are grateful for your efforts on behalf of our respective members and the Town of Wilton.

We fully support the advancement of the Allen's Meadows project.

Wilton's commitment to youth sports and recreation is a major part of our Town's heritage and of vital importance to the well being of every child and family. The quality, resilience and safety of our sports and recreation infrastructure is an essential investment.

Cooperation and communication among Wilton's volunteer youth sports leaders, Wilton High School Athletics and Wilton's Parks & Recreation department has never been higher or more constructive. Despite this cooperation and camaraderie, the challenge of capacity, reliability and durability of our fields to accommodate our growing programs is insurmountable and one that only additional turf field(s) with lights can meaningfully improve.

You may review the Wilton Athletic and Recreation Foundation ("WARF") point of view which was submitted to the Board of Selectmen on April 3, 2023 [here](#) for more detail on the full picture. The purpose of this communication is to highlight detail with respect to challenges faced and opportunities ahead from the perspective of each Wilton-based youth sports organization.

Please also refer to images [here](#) which provide representative visuals of the current grass field conditions.

A third turf field with lights in Wilton dedicated to and prioritized for youth sports and recreation programming, purpose built for multi-sport utilization and divisible into subfields for all hours for practice and game play, will enable more thoughtful and effective distribution of youth programs across Wilton's turf and grass field portfolio, resulting in:

- Enhanced quality of life for children and their families (more appropriate, more reliable and more local practice and game schedules)
- Dramatically improved quality of play and safety of play, and
- Reallocated and more effective field maintenance dollars.

Below are a few key points from each youth sports organization with respect to their respective challenges and opportunities.

Wilton Youth Football and Cheer (“WYFC”) (750+ total youth participants)

- For its growing tackle football program WYFC currently has only two grass fields (Guy Whitten and JV Baseball Outfield), and little to no turf access for practices.
- The Flag Football program (largest WYFC program) uses one primary field (Middlebrook Lower), and remnant available space for capacity overflow in the fall and spring.
- Tackle fall season requires practice to occur between 5:30 - 7:30 PM, causing the rental of expensive and unsafe temporary lighting for evening use as daylight is very short in fall and Fujitani Stadium turf field has no consistently available capacity.
- Game schedules for tackle are limited to windows of time after and between WHS Football and WHS Field Hockey on weekends, resulting in difficult scheduling dynamics which lead to inappropriate game times for youth and more away games than our peers.
- A third turf and lit field would greatly enhance practice capacity, improve scheduling of practices and games and enhance quality and safety of play for flag and tackle.

Wilton Youth Field Hockey (“WYFH”) (275+ total youth participants)

- Field hockey as a sport is now played exclusively on turf fields.
- WYFH is limited to use of Fujitani Stadium (Lilly Field is consumed by WHS Soccer and WHS Girls Lacrosse and isn't lined for field hockey) and only after WHS Football, WHS Field Hockey and WHS Band practice which consumes ~80% of the total available time on Fujitani Stadium. WYFH must also manage limited available turf time with WYFC in season.
- The impact of limited turf time for play causes young players to have to practice too late on weekday evenings (between 8:00 - 10:00 PM), too inconsistently due to changing WHS schedules and restricts ability to offer programming in town in all seasons due to similar challenges causing many WYFH participants to seek programs out of town.

Wilton Lacrosse Association (“WLA”) (600+ youth participants)

- The current lack of lighted, weather proof fields for our K-8 lacrosse athletes results in condensed seasons, limited practice time and over crowded fields.
- The need to schedule around our 120 WHS Boys and Girls Lacrosse athletes results in practices for 5th-8th graders that end after 9 PM on school nights, and also forces more 'away' games for families on weekends relative to our peers.
- WLA also currently spends ~\$50k/year for off season indoor space rentals. This expense is passed directly to our members. Travel for families to and from these facilities is costly from both a time and dollars perspective, and not optimal for the environment. The additional lit, turf field, and the potential of a seasonal bubble would allow WLA to redirect funds from out-of-town facilities back to support our Wilton facilities and enhance and grow the WLA program.

Wilton Soccer Association (“WSA”) (1,000+ youth participants)

- Despite being the largest program in town, 90%+ of WSA's youth soccer practices/clinics and games are held on only two grass fields each season (Allen's 4 and Hurlbutt/Ambler) resulting in limited scheduling flexibility and reduced quality of play due to overused fields that are difficult to maintain. The remaining 10% of participants use a combination of other

grass fields (Comstock, Middlebrook Madaras, Landmark) and remnant Lilly Field time (late Sunday afternoons only).

- WSA requires fields that are of 1) appropriate size for regulation soccer field formats of which there are three sizes depending on age, 2) durability to absorb and recover from typical weather to provide for reliable scheduling, 3) field lines and equipment (three different goal sizes to match three different field sizes) which are expensive and immobile, and 4) availability at consistent and appropriate times for youth and their families. There are few fields in town that meet most of these criteria and no fields that WSA uses that meet all of these criteria.
- Lilly Field turf and lights are unavailable to WSA youth soccer due to their consumption by WHS Soccer in fall season and by WHS and WLA Lacrosse in spring season. Shrinking daylight in the fall season compresses practice time dramatically and causes significant scheduling challenges. With no permanent lights available and temporary lights over grass fields deemed unsafe and too expensive, the options for our teams and players are very limited. The result is shorter or no practice.
- A third lit, turf field would greatly add to flexibility of scheduling, enhance quality and safety of play and the quality of life for families, while also reducing costs to WSA and therefore to our member families.
- Finally, soccer, like field hockey, is a sport that requires the ball to roll on the ground (vs. others that seek to keep the ball in the air). Bumpy, dry or wet, rocky, potholed and uneven grass fields impact the ability to develop skills of players, reduce the safety of players who are often moving at high speeds, and diminish the ability to play games at a level which encourages proper playing style, growth and improvement.

Wilton Softball and Wilton Baseball and Softball Association (“WBSA”) (500+ youth participants including Wilton Little League)

- Wilton Little League (youth baseball for <12 year olds) fortunately has two dedicated grass fields at the Wilton YMCA maintained by a third party.
- WBSA utilizes a portfolio of grass fields maintained by the Town which are of varying quality and sizes.
- WBSA have no access to turf in any season and limited access to the lit fields that are consumed by the WHS Baseball and Softball programs.
- Baseball and softball fields by definition are difficult to maintain due to their mixed surfaces (grass and dirt) and tendency to hold moisture after rain.
- The quality and safety of grass/dirt fields are challenged by weather and inadequate drainage which causes uneven and rutty surfaces especially in primary seasons - the wet months of spring and the dry months of summer.
- A third multi-sport turf and lit field dedicated to youth would reduce reliance on grass/dirt fields, enable potential improvement of grass fields through less utilization in poor conditions and provide reliable space and time to practice in all conditions.
- WBSA spends meaningfully on the rental of third party indoor space for the winter season.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our views on the financing side of the equation. A third turf field with lights and a seasonal bubble is a fantastic investment for the town. It would be a first class amenity for every resident, a direct investment in the health and well being of our youth and their families and a value enhancing asset for homeowners and our town overall. Each \$1 million bonded for 10 years

at an assumed 3.5% interest rate would cost each resident just \$0.57 per month (assumes 18,500 residents).

Thank you again for your dedication, cooperation and all efforts in support of our programs and specifically, the Allen's Meadows turf, lights and potential seasonal bubble project.

Sincerely,



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