

**Town of Harvard  
Parks & Recreation Commission  
Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee  
Interim Report  
September 17, 2019**



*Ann Lees ballfield - September, 2019*

## **Interim Report**

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### **I. Preface**

The Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee (AFPS) is charged by the Parks & Recreation Commission (P&R) with exploring a series of issues relevant to the Town's interest in improving the management of its athletic fields<sup>1</sup>. Established by vote of P&R, the subcommittee is an ad hoc, not standing, body which will be dissolved upon submission of a Final Report.

Given the quantity and nature of the AFPS's findings in its first few months of operation, and in consideration of the annual timetable of municipal budgeting, the subcommittee voted to issue this *Interim Report* as a means to inform discussion, consideration and action by the relevant boards and committees of the initial recommendations contained herein.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A: Harvard Parks & Recreation Commission, Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee, Approved Charges – May 20, 2019

## II. Summary of Key Findings, Recommendations & Actions

The subcommittee's initial findings, recommendations, and actions are as follows.

KEY FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTIONS
1.) No maintenance plans --- whether overall or by field --- exist for the athletic fields	Develop annual maintenance plan for each athletic field and overall Town athletic assets	AFPS/P&R to coordinate w/ DPW; compile options for consultant to develop realistic plans
2.) DPW lacks staff & equipment to fulfill maintenance expectations	Delineate what can be executed by DPW and what requires outside contractor for each field via P&R	AFPS/P&R to coordinate w/ DPW
3.) Operating budget does not provide sufficient funding for maintenance	Propose operating budget increases in next fiscal year	P&R/TA to define additional costs
4.) P&R lacks revenue stream to fund supplementary contract maintenance	Implement OSRP objective ("Allocate funds for additional vendors to be used for field maintenance." <sup>2</sup> )	P&R implement field usage charges for all uses; socialize w/ HAA, HPS, etc.
5.) Fields are over-used (defined by frequency, hours, # users v capacity)	Reduce weekly/monthly/seasonal usage; define maximum usage; mandate 1-day per week field rest closure on over-used fields	AFPS/P&R identify to AD/TBS/Supt. & HAA which activities are over-using; identify at-risk fields
6.) Insufficient athletic field capacity exists to rest/rotate fields and to prevent damage	Schools, HAA and other users must plan, budget & schedule use of non-ToH athletic fields if acceptable playing conditions are to be sustained	AD, HAA to negotiate regularly-scheduled usage of Devens or other non-ToH options; this revises MP recommendation <sup>3</sup>
7.) No viable enforcement of P&R field closures or policies	Establish permitting process; set enforcement policies	P&R, SB, TA, and HPD coordinate implementation
8.) "Chain of command" for maintenance requests to DPW lacking	Proactively communicate P&R single-contact policy for DPW field maintenance requests	P&R to establish lines of communication from TBS coaches/AD & HAA; DPW to direct requests to P&R
9.) Ann Lees ballfield renovation project remains incomplete despite Title IX "legal mandate" <sup>4</sup>	CPIC/STM warrant article Requestors to update & inform HPS of actions taken to address Title IX inequity	HPS act in coordination with TA & DPW to ensure any inequity is successfully addressed
10.) Records mgt. challenges preclude effective data-/information-gathering & analysis across boards, TBS	TA to work with AFPS and all boards to improve effectiveness per Charter <sup>5</sup> ; TBS move AD to full-time position	P&R issue outstanding minutes, provide public release of referenced docs; AFPS to meet TC, AD (for data)
11.) Workload causes persistent P&R backlogs & shortcomings on various functions & initiatives	Hire a 2-year part-time P&R Director, towards implementing a prospective full-time position	P&R, SB coordinate position req for FY2021 or sooner if possible
12.) No consistent or prioritized capital improvement or facility planning for athletic field projects	P&R create ongoing, updated long-term prioritization asset management process for needed improvements to fields under its management	AFPS / P&R seek PB, CPC, DCED input on prioritization process; work with SB to define needs via OSC

AFPS = Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee  
AD = Athletic Director  
CPIC = Capital Planning & Investment Committee  
CPC = Community Preservation Committee  
DCED = Dir. of Community & Econ Dev  
DPW = Department of Public Works

HAA = Harvard Athletic Association  
HPD = Harvard Police Department  
HPS = Harvard Public Schools  
OSC = Open Space Committee  
OSRP = Open Space & Recreation Plan, 2016  
P&R = Parks & Recreation Commission

SB = Select Board  
STM = Special Town Meeting  
TA = Town Administrator  
TC = Town Clerk  
TBS = The Bromfield School

<sup>2</sup> Open Space & Recreation Report, 2016; Section 9: 7 Year Action Plan; Goal 7; p. 128

<sup>3</sup> Town of Harvard Master Plan 2016; Community Services and Facilities Recommendations; p. 168

<sup>4</sup> CPIC application for Ann Lees ballfield renovation project, October 2018

<sup>5</sup> Town of Harvard, Charter, Article 4

### III. Ongoing Areas for Research, Analysis & Next Steps in the Final Report

A spate of other issues affects the condition, availability, and management of athletic fields. The AFPS continues to refine its approach and framework for presenting the issues, its findings and recommendations. The following reflects the subcommittee's current structure on categorizing the issues and some of the matters under review.

#### A. Inventory

A comprehensive inventory of athletic field assets including features, attributes, and activities that can be accommodated is underway. For inventories and descriptions of athletic fields, see:

- Town of Harvard, *Open Space & Recreation Plan 2016*; Section 5: Inventory of Land; A. Protected Land pp. 92-93. This inventory does not include the Pond Road Field and Hildreth Elementary School Fields. (<https://www.harvard.ma.us/conservation-commission/files/2016-open-space-recreation-plan>)
- *Town of Harvard Master Plan 2016*; Chapter 7: Community Services & Facilities, Section 4. Parks and Playing Fields; pp. 104-106. (<https://www.harvard.ma.us/master-plan>)
- Parks & Recreation Commission website; Parks, Fields and Playgrounds (<https://www.harvard.ma.us/parks-recreation-commission/pages/parks-fields-and-playgrounds>)

#### B. Assessments

Athletic field conditions are being documented by AFPS and will be issued in its final report. Among the attributes being assessed are<sup>6</sup>:

- Qualitative / quantitative assessments
  - o Drainage
  - o Irrigation
  - o Grading/crown height
  - o Soil structure
  - o Grass/organic growth
  - o Pests
  - o Bare spots/holes
- Review of maintenance conducted & impacts on above

#### C. Users/Participants

Specific demographics segments show a decline in the numbers of Harvard residents under 18, and school enrollment for some middle school grades are as much as 25% below the size of the graduating class of 2019. Early analysis indicates that the percentage of children and students participating in youth sports and athletic activities is at or above 63%. A more thorough and complete analysis cannot be conducted until statistics are made available to the subcommittee by the Harvard Public Schools.

#### D. Usage

Despite a single-digit decrease in school enrollment over several years, overall usage of athletic fields remains consistent over a three-year period, and for some sports or activities usage has grown, according to an early, incomplete analysis. Usage consists of the total number of hours an athletic field is deployed for practices, scrimmages, games, and/or similar activities.

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<sup>6</sup> University of Massachusetts; UMass Extension School Turf Management (<https://ag.umass.edu/turf/publications-resources/best-management-practices>)

#### E. Management

A plethora of field management matters effects the condition of athletic fields. Initial findings and recommendations summarized in this report will be comprehensively set forth in the following and other areas for the final report.

- Maintenance
  - o Field-specific maintenance planning
  - o Overall turf management planning
  - o Implementation of best practices
- Long range planning
  - o Scheduling renovations
  - o Capital improvements
  - o Asset lifecycle discipline
  - o New fields
- Access policies
  - o Permitting / fees
  - o Enforcement
  - o Safety / risk

#### F. Governance & Jurisdiction

The following governance areas will be further developed and solutions offered in the final report.

- Roles & responsibilities
- Town of Harvard
  - o Select Board
  - o Town Administrator
  - o Department of Public Works
  - o Parks & Recreation Commission
  - o Planning Board
- Harvard Public Schools
  - o The Bromfield School
  - o HES / Spectrum
- Other
  - o Harvard Athletic Association
  - o Booster clubs

#### G. Finances

Financial priorities underpin many of the challenges facing the management of athletic fields; the final report will revisit these and other key areas of finance that impact the process:

- Benchmarking expenditures vis-à-vis comparable municipalities
- Asset management & lifecycle costs
- Municipal funding status / alternatives
  - o Operating / maintenance budget
  - o Capital improvements
- Private funding status / alternatives
  - o Boosters clubs
  - o Corporate / private donations
  - o Other fundraising

#### **IV. Appendix**

##### **Harvard Parks & Recreation Commission Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee Approved Charges – May 20, 2019**

In October, 2018 the Parks & Recreation Commission voted unanimously to create a subcommittee to explore the usage patterns, capacity, scheduling and maintenance of the Town's athletic fields in order to identify potential improvements in management, availability and planning.

The 2016 Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP) identified and set forth the need to maintain, expand and improve playing fields, and further specified objectives to a.) Improve field maintenance; and to b) Develop more fields to allow rotation and prevent overuse. Nevertheless the 2016 OSRP identified no existing public lands for their "recreational potential" as future playing fields.

Given the Parks and Recreation Commission's responsibility to manage and regulate the use of the Town's playing fields, the Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee is charged to:

- Document the current condition of all athletic fields under its jurisdiction
- Establish a comprehensive capacity analysis and plan
- Assess the usage frequency, duration, # of episodes and amount of traffic on fields (i.e. scheduling vis-à-vis all leagues, sports, users, and schools)
- Inventory status quo features of athletic fields, including accessibility, parking, drainage, lighting, etc.
- Set out roles and responsibilities with regard to the jurisdiction, governance, maintenance, and use/scheduling of athletic fields
- Identify potential source funding for the maintenance of fields
- Identify parcels of land suitable for an additional playing field as well as sources of funding for same
- Investigate the prospective use of Devens playing fields
- Conduct open meetings and pursue public input on its activities and findings
- Document other findings as may be deemed relevant and important
- Keep the Select Board, Parks & Recreation Commission, School Committee, Athletic Director and Harvard Athletic Association informed as work progresses.
- Issue a final, public report to the Select Board and Parks & Recreation Commission with options and recommendations with regard to the above, ideally in calendar year 2019

The Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee will be appointed by the Parks & Recreation Commission and shall consist of the various interested parties who use the Athletic Fields and represented by 7 voting members from the following groups:

- One member of the Parks & Recreation Commission
- One member of the Select Board
- One member of the School Committee, Harvard Public Schools' Administration, or Representative from the Superintendent's Athletic Advisory Committee
- Two Harvard Athletic Association Board Members
- Two Members-At-Large who are residents of the Town of Harvard

It is recommended that the Subcommittee be provided funds to cover costs associated with community outreach and preparing documents such as the final report.