

MAYOR'S FIELD USAGE TASK FORCE REPORT
FOR THE CITY OF BRISTOL

On behalf of the members of the Field Study Committee, I present this report of the usage and conditions of the playing fields under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education and the Park Department. Other fields such as all Little League fields, Soccer Complex, and the Midget Football Field are not included on this report. They are private entities and control those fields.

The Task Force was formed to determine accurate field usage within our community and inquire and evaluate our current field conditions to determine if more field space was needed. After eight months of intense study and numerous discussions, we will provide our observations and recommendations.

Fields Studied

Park Department

Page Park
Wilson Park
Casey Field
Boulevard School
Jennings School
Mix Street Field
Ingraham Field
Rockwell Park
Muzzy Field
Riley Field

Board of Education

Bristol Central
Bristol Eastern
Northeast Middle School
Chippens Hill Middle School
West Bristol School
Green Hills School
Hubbell School
Stafford School
Mountain View School
Ivy Drive School
Southside School
Edgewood School

RECEIVED
2014 JUN 11 PM 3:59
TOWN AND CITY CLERK
BRISTOL, CT

FIELD USAGE & ACTIVITIES

A variety of teams and organizations request and require field use for either holding practice or playing games. In addition to Little League baseball, Girls softball, Club Lacrosse, American Legion baseball, all High Schools & Middle School sports teams, there are many AAU and Recreation teams that request playing space.

Currently, requests are sent to the Park Superintendent for Park fields, and the Athletic Director for the Board of Education fields. The number of requests is overwhelming as many organizations request multiple dates, fields and times. To further complicate the matter, often times groups seek usage from both entities; as they are seeking practice and game times. Another complicating factor is that many fields were constructed to host multiple activities, but not simultaneously. For example, a baseball field with the outfield designated as a space for soccer or lacrosse; or a baseball and softball field that overlap, allowing baseballs being hit into the softball space.

This spring, the Park Superintendent and the Athletic Director worked to jointly coordinate the scheduling process. However, both agreed that if the possibility of one entity being responsible for scheduling all facilities, it could ease the process. Currently both departments are researching computer programs that will assist in this process; which would allow input and generate an electronic spreadsheet that could eventually allow all organizations to check a website for schedules and availability.

Additional suggestions include: A standardized form outlining exact needs, level of play, if it is a practice or game, etc. This form will also outline the Policy and Procedures for usage as well as the responsibility for postponements, preparation of the field and reporting of conditions.

The timing for all this activity must be pre-determined to all of the parties seeking field usage time to finalize the schedule, as well as the administrative task of completing the schedule in a timely manner.

CONTROL OF FIELDS

Currently, each field is assigned to either the Parks or Education Department. They are responsible for scheduling, preparation of field, maintenance, repairs and determination of use. Problems occur when activities overlap and one is scheduled to start before another is finished. Example: High School or Middle School sport games or practice times are extended.

The Board of Education has another layer of control to deal with as the Principal as the Head of each school has ultimate control of their building and may decide another unscheduled activity. These activities take precedence thus causing a conflict. Any change in the current policy would need authorization from the Board of Education and Parks Department.

Additionally, outside groups are not allowed on school grounds during the school day. This causes a reduction of playing fields available by outside groups reducing the recreational choices for the community.

FIELD CONDITIONS AND MAINTENANCE

There is a major concern with the general condition and maintenance of all of the fields. Some fields require extensive work while others consist of mowing the sparse turf and putting lines on a field. However, many factors dictate the level of care of the fields, one of which is: Effective July 1, 2010, The State of Connecticut banned the use of EPA-registered lawn care pesticides on athletic fields at schools K-8. (see attachment). Obviously, this requirement limits the products that traditionally assist in weed control and turf growth. There is also pending legislation that seeks to include the High Schools and municipal fields under this ban; such legislation would seriously limit our ability to improve most of our fields (Attachment A).

Other concerns that affect the maintenance and care of the fields are lack of manpower, equipment, supplies, and weather; an especially rainy season prevents the preparation of the fields for play.

The Board of Education's policy is to move the outside custodian who normally does field work, inside to assist with summer cleaning. Other than mowing, the fields are not maintained by school staff, thus allowing the fields to deteriorate. This policy also inhibits the usage by many teams in the summer as their activities take place on fields that are not groomed or prepared for games. If we are trying to project an image to our community as well as those that visit, this practice needs to be revisited.

Other problems arise when the fields are not kept up. If a game is to be played, who is responsible for preparing it? What are teams allowed to do on the fields ie: water removal, grooming the surfaces, lining the fields, etc. These are all concerns that need to be addressed.

The Board of Education currently contracts an outside company to maintain their fields. They are responsible for mowing, fertilization, weed control, and over seeding. Most of the game fields are in good condition. However, drainage and leveling issues still exist and should be addressed. These conditions will be listed later in the field report.

A program entitled sustainable turf grass program is being proposed for the Board of Education fields. This program emphasizes a pesticide free environment by utilizing mowing, fertilization, cultivation, pest control, and irrigation. Additionally, over seeding and compost dressing will be considered.

All this will require funding for materials, equipment, supplies, and manpower.

Our playing fields are "Live Bill Boards" for our community. Every time a team from outside the community visits the facilities, the players, coaches, umpires and fans are left with an impression of Bristol. When the grass is not mowed and trimmed, weeds grow out of the infield, uneven playing surfaces exist, lines are not properly applied, rocks are noticeable on the surfaces, and the turf is sparse. This is sending a negative message about Bristol.

FACILITY DEFICIENCIES LISTED

1. Bathroom facilities
2. Fences in many areas for delineation and protection
3. Benches
4. Bleachers
5. Equipment box to secure supplies and equipment. Field lining, water control.
6. Irrigation ie: water control
7. General Maintenance ie: Field lining

LIST OF FIELDS

1. Bristol Central

2 baseball fields also used for soccer games and practice, 1 softball field, football practice field, small multi-purpose field, game fields for shared use between Football, Soccer & Lacrosse.

General conditions are fair, poor drainage continues to plague the baseball and game field. Uneven surface remains a problem. The football practice facility is in poor condition. It needs improvement to the overall condition.

2. Bristol Eastern

2 baseball fields, 1 softball field also used for soccer games and practices, Lacrosse game field, shared football, soccer, lacrosse game field with lights soon and a practice football field.

General conditions – some drainage issues especially on the front practice field. Football practice field is in poor condition and does not receive enough maintenance.

3. Northeast Middle School

1 baseball with outfield used for multi-purpose

1 softball field – should install a fence at 200 feet to allow for regulation games to be played

1 multipurpose field

Conditions – very poor – not attended to, needs substantial turf control program, irrigation, regrading, planting, and care. Fields are not maintained sufficiently.

4. Chippens Hill Middle School

1 softball field – should have skinned infield, 200 foot fence installed, 1 baseball – fair condition and need standard maintenance. 1 all-purpose field that is smaller and used for practice for soccer. Lacrosse field “swales” close to field. Initiate sustainable turf grass program.

5. Memorial Boulevard School (under Park jurisdiction)

1 softball field, 1 baseball field. Fields are used for soccer and lacrosse when they are not being used for baseball or softball. Condition is good, need grading adjustments. Can only be used for one activity at a time for games.

6. Stafford School

All fields are in poor condition. Feeble attempt to create a Little League field. All fields need grading, not regulation game fields. Area can be used by youth sports as a practice area – turf management program needed.

7. Ivy Drive School

Large open field with a softball field cut out with a backstop. Recommend to move the backstop and softball area closer to the school. Need grading, irrigation, and sustainable turf grass program, could accommodate two soccer / Lacrosse fields. Great potential – two games can be played simultaneously.

8. Hubble School

Open play area behind the school. Two backstops / one skimmed infield suitable for minor league softball field is smaller / approximately 180 feet to woods from home plate. Field surface is uneven, very little grass, basically unkempt. Needs substantial turf grass program and regrading. Poor condition for any organized use.

9. South Side School

1 skinned infield with backstop, outfield has multi-purpose use. Needs sustainable turf grass program. Presently unkept/ very poor condition/ not maintained.

10. Mountain View School

Large open area / good turf conditions / very uneven surface / lower surface needs regrading / practice facility/ upper field has backstop in poor condition, skinned infield. Needs sustainable turf grass program / practice facility

11. Greene-Hills School

New school / newly constructed fields, baseball, softball and multi-purpose in outfield. Can only schedule one game at a time because of overlap of fields. No fences. Already showing wear and tear

around goal areas. Need to use irrigations and sustainable turf grass program. Also need a commitment to continually work on field to maintain condition.

12. West Bristol School

Best designed area for game usage. Fenced baseball and softball fields with regulation dimensions. Soccer / Lacrosse field. Needs continuous work to maintain condition. Repairs around goal areas needed. Sustainable turf grass program needed. Additional four acres can be developed although it has grading and wet lands issues. If two houses adjacent to the property become available, they should be purchased and area used for fields.

13. Edgewood School

Open play areas including one small ball diamond space is suitable for physical education classes. Little League Eastern Region Center is next door and possibility of shared use could be explored.

14. Page Park

Currently has baseball and softball fields with outfield useable for multi-purpose when activities are not going on the ball diamonds. Softball infield should be skinned to allow for more level surface and save on maintenance costs. Multi-purpose area needs regrading and pot holes filled in. Screen or nets can be erected in left field to prevent balls flying into King Street.

15. Ingraham Field

Uneven playing surface / needs regrading if used for game field. Suitable for T-Ball, Youth Sport activities.

16. Muzzy Field

The field is currently undergoing refurbishment. It is one of the most pristine fields in the state. Field surface difficult to maintain because of multi-purpose usage. Fields does need grading issues addressed. Outfield turf area needs work & continued maintenance throughout all playing seasons.

17. Rockwell Field

Located between the lagoons at Rockwell Park. Large open areas with multi-purpose usage. No grass on field / very poor condition. Needs synthetic surface or turf management program. No maintenance done. Could be a terrific stadium area for football/lacrosse/soccer. Utilize the bath house as a meeting and bathroom area. This would complete the active play areas of the park, making the area a destination for the City. Presently underutilized and under developed.

18. Wilson Field

This is a permanent softball field with a skinned infield fenced. Condition is good. Outfield may be used for practice of other activities. Needs continuous maintenance, grooming and care to remain in good condition.

19. Casey Field

Primarily a softball field, but need for other activities that required bases. Newly refurbished with fence and skinned infield. Needs continuous maintenance to ensure condition will remain excellent. Does have lights which enables extended play.

20. Riley Field

Primarily a baseball facility with mixed use capabilities. Minimal maintenance being done. Not well kept or well groomed. Field needs more attention.

21. Mix Street

Newly acquired by Water Department and under care of Park Department. Lighted softball field with additional multi-purpose area. If allowed, field could be transformed into two conforming softball fields with 200' fences within the present fenced in footprint. Presently being used for multiple practices and games.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Improve the commitment of the City to improve the condition of the fields. This includes financial support to ensure enough man power, equipment, and supplies are provided to complete the job.

Does the City want to live up to its reputation for being a "Sports Town" by providing quality fields for all participants? Will it make the commitment to provide safe as well as well-groomed facilities?

2. Consideration of the creation of a "Grounds" Department responsible for all municipal outdoor grass surfaces and plantings. By combining employees from Parks, Board of Education, and Public Works, the "Grounds Department will provide enough skilled labor to adequately maintain every facility in the city.

Equipment can be consolidated and all materials and supplies will be ordered and controlled by this department. It will have at least one certified manager to oversee and plan the scheduled maintenance of the municipal grounds and playing fields.

This will eliminate the present duplication and create an entity that will be held responsible for its work. There will be no confusion about responsibilities.

Arrangements should be made to allow for all unions to be equal, so the best possible people are selected. The landscapes created by this department will be a wonderful promotional tool for the city. Every time someone passes or uses a facility that is well kept it will promote the image that Bristol cares.

3. Consideration of one department responsible to schedule all activities and utilization of playing fields. This allows everyone to go to the same source and dismisses the idea of one not knowing what the other is doing. Control and responsibility for individual buildings would need to be agreed on.

The computer layout will be available to the community outlining each field, when it is being used and by who. All promoting will be done by this entity and also policies at fields for any abuses. They will have total control of the use of the field space, thus making the process more equitable.

4. Address all amenities – bathroom facilities, tool box for light maintenance and supplies.
5. Publish a set of guidelines for usage and responsibilities for field use.
6. Charge a fee – refundable for damage control
7. Install new fences at Chippens Hill Middle School and Northeast Middle School – creating sanctioned softball facilities at both schools. Fence should be at 200 ft.

8. All softball fields used for sanctioned play in the City should have a skinned infield to allow for consistency of play. Note: Elementary schools not used for games are not included in this recommendation.
9. Every effort should be made to assign Girls Softball to 1 or 2 areas to remove confusion of schedules. These fields should provide if not exclusive use then preferred use.
10. Mix Street Field use should go to the Proper State Authority to determine if field can be altered. Moving of a fence and skinning two infields would allow for two softball fields inside the present footprint and provide a "softball complex to supplement the Little League Tournament across the street. This would provide another "Destination" for tournaments creating another reason for people to come to Bristol.
11. Reconfigure field at Ivy Drive School. Move backstop & softball field to corner near school. Regrade & seed entire game field. This reconfiguration would allow for two regulation soccer or lacrosse fields. Plus better practice facilities for many other activities.
12. Initiate sustainable turf grass program this must include providing irrigation equipment to be successful.
13. Supervision of someone for all fields. Person in charge should be evaluated on conditions of playing fields they are responsible for. Now there is *no accountability!*
14. Schools must create a more extensive plan of care for the summer season. If one entity is not created, the off-season should not be maintenance free or just mowed.
15. Determination must be made and expressed to all users as to what they are allowed to do to prepare the fields for games. Policies should be made to decide on what is allowable, especially at times official personnel is not available.
16. Build at least one synthetic field in the city. The initial field should be a stadium setting for football, soccer, & lacrosse games. The dimensions should allow for tournament play. Field should be permanently lined for these activities. It should have bleachers for a minimum of 1000 people. It should be lighted for extended use. Parking, bathroom facilities, scoreboard, enclosed by a fence, a press box and handicap parking and accessibility. Team meeting areas should be available. The usage of the field will be determined by the location and jurisdiction of course if the "Grounds" Department is created, it will be responsible for scheduling, maintenance and appearance.
17. Plan for the future- Bristol needs a sports complex in one area that has synthetic surfaces for baseball, softball, multi-purpose, football, soccer, lacrosse plus recreational activities. This one location will once again become a destination for Bristol residents as well as people from outside the city. It will become an active area for thousands of participants and not require the mowing, irrigation and continued maintenance of a conventional grass field complex.
18. A cost analysis should be conducted to determine the financial implications of each recommendation. Once determined, an implementation scheduled should be initialed to insure completion.

Report Submitted By:

David Mills- Chairperson

Committee Members:

Edward Swicklas

Chris Cassin

Peter Fusco

Susan Everett

Dave Greenleaf

Darrell Darby

Nicole Decker

Council Member Henri Martin