

Athletic Fields in the Town of Ipswich, MA



Findings of the Athletic Fields Study Committee
Revised Report
February 2012
May 2013

Introduction

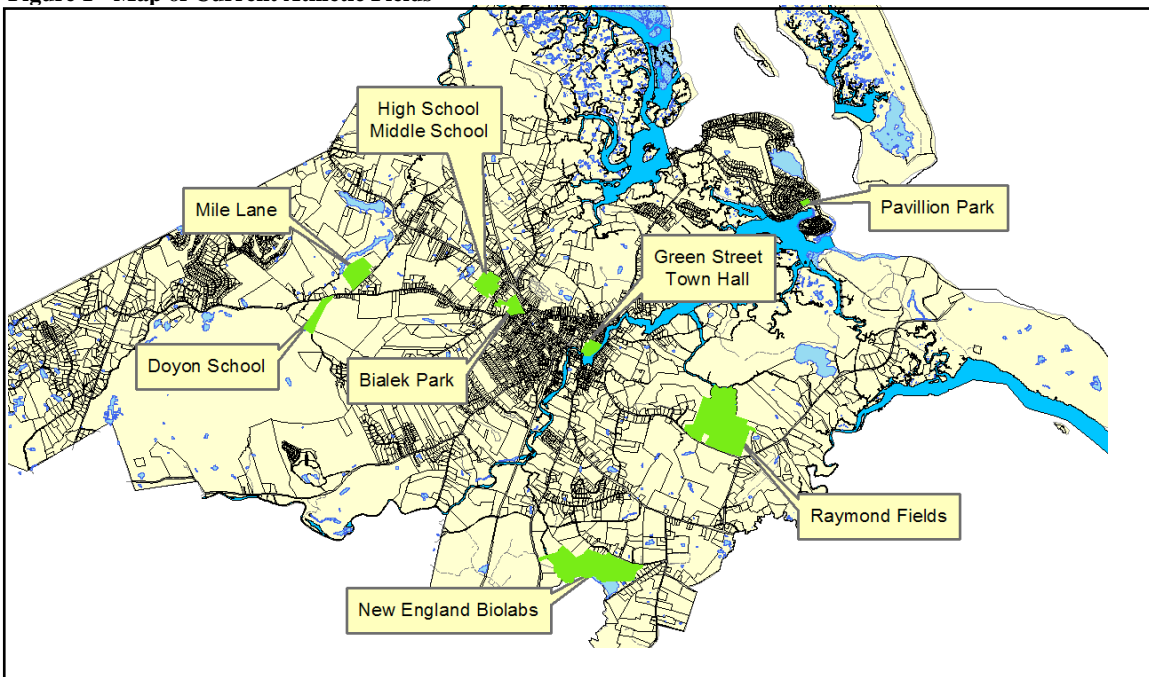
The Board of Selectman appointed an Athletic Fields Study Committee (AFSC) in November 2004 to review the current availability of athletic fields in Ipswich, determine the facility needs of the town's various active recreation programs, analyze the adequacy of the current inventory of facilities to meet current and future demands, and make recommendations on how to address any current and future unmet needs. The Town of Ipswich has identified opportunities for active recreation, including field-based sports, as an important goal for enhancing the quality of life in Ipswich. In particular, the Town of Ipswich Outstanding Quality of Life Vision Descriptors & Objectives document, and the Town Open Space and Recreation Plan, identify acquisition of open space for active recreation opportunities as key objectives. Over the course of two years, from 2005-2007, the AFSC surveyed the town's sports programs (both town and school based), inventoried the available athletic fields, inventoried the use of those fields by the sports programs, developed an assessment of the current availability of athletic fields, developed an estimate of the number of athletic fields required to meet current needs, and evaluated the suitability for playing fields of currently owned but undeveloped Town property. A summary report was written which outlined the methodology, findings and recommendations of the Committee and this report was submitted to the Board of Selectman in 2007.

Since the submission of the report, the AFSC has worked to implement the recommendations including land acquisition efforts, field development and improvement projects, field maintenance policies and programs and other related activities. Due to the length of time that has passed since the initial report, the AFSC has developed the following revised report to update the Town on the progress that has been made and the outstanding issues that remain.

History and Current Availability of Fields

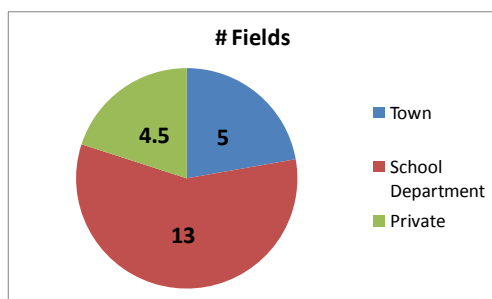
Currently all sports leagues (town, school and community-based) have access to fields at seven properties in town. These properties are Green Street (Town Hall), Bialek Park, Pavilion Park, Mile Lane, Doyon School, Middle School and High School.

Figure 1 - Map of Current Athletic Fields



Each of these properties have one or more playing fields of various types including baseball, softball, soccer, multi-purpose (i.e. used for multiple sports) and/or practice (i.e. not regulation fields). The total number of available fields at these seven properties is seventeen. Two of these properties are Municipal owned while the other five are owned by the School Department. In addition to the town and school-owned properties, athletic teams are allowed use of private fields at two properties; Raymond Fields on Essex Road/ RT 133 and New England Biolabs fields on County Road /RT 1A. These two properties provide an additional four fields used for soccer only. Figure 2 summarizes the quantity and distribution of fields by ownership.

Figure 2 – Number of Fields by Property Owner



It should be noted that while the landowners at Raymond Fields and New England Biolabs have been extremely generous in allowing the town use of the fields, they are privately owned and there is no long term guarantee of continued use but the Town.

Figure 3 - Detailed Inventory of Current Athletic Fields

Property	Owner	# and Type of Field(s)	Seasonal Sport Uses		
			Fall	Spring	Summer
Bialek Park	Cemetery & Parks Department	4 baseball fields	Youth Football Intown Youth Soccer Youth Baseball HS Varsity Field Hockey HS JV Field Hockey HS Freshman Field Hockey Adult Soccer	Intown Youth Soccer Youth Softball Chiefs Baseball Youth Baseball HS Freshman Baseball HS Varsity Softball HS JV Softball HS Freshman Softball	Girls Youth Softball Adult Soccer EBSCO Soccer Ultimate Frisbee
Pavillion Park	Cemetery & Parks Department	1 small sized practice field	Intown Youth Soccer	Intown Youth Soccer	
Green Street Fields	School Department	1 multipurpose field 2 baseball fields	Youth Football	Intown Youth Soccer Youth Baseball	
Mile Lane	School Department	2 multipurpose fields 1 baseball field 1 small sized practice field	Youth Baseball HS Varsity Cross Country HS Varsity Soccer (boys) HS Varsity Soccer (girls)	Travel Youth Soccer Youth Lacrosse HS Varsity Baseball HS Varsity Lacrosse (boys) HS Varsity Lacrosse (girls) HS JV Lacrosse (girls)	
Doyon School	School Department	3 baseball fields	Intown & Travel Youth Soccer HS JV Soccer (boys) HS JV Soccer (girls)	Intown & Travel Youth Soccer Youth Lacrosse Adult Baseball Youth Baseball HS JV Baseball HS JV Lacrosse (boys)	Adult Baseball
Middle School	School Department	1 softball field	Intown & Travel Youth Soccer MS Field Hockey MS Coed Soccer	Intown & Travel Youth Soccer MS Track MS Softball HS Varsity Track (boys & girls) HS JV Track (boys & girls)	
High School	School Department	1 multipurpose field 1 small sized practice field	HS Varsity Football HS Freshman Football	HS Varsity Track (boys & girls) HS JV Track (boys & girls) HS MS Track ASA Softball	
Raymond Fields	Private	2 soccer fields	Travel Youth Soccer	Travel Youth Soccer	
New England Biolabs	Private	2.5 soccer fields	Intown Youth Soccer	Intown Youth Soccer	

Field construction in Ipswich has been sporadic over the years. The last new field to be developed in Ipswich was the one new multi-purpose field constructed at the School Department's Mile Lane property in 2008. Prior to that in 1999, the School Department had constructed the rest of the Mile Lane complex as part of the Middle/High School construction. However these new fields did not increase the overall playing fields inventory since the new fields were developed to replace fields that were eliminated by the construction of the new school buildings. The last development of additional fields in Ipswich prior to 1999 occurred in the 1960s as a result of the building of the Doyon School on Linebrook Road. Prior to 1960, it is unclear when the town last added to its athletic field inventory.

Current Field Use

The AFSC analyzed both town and school sports leagues since these leagues work cooperatively in coordinating the use and scheduling of available field space in town. School and town-owned fields are generally shared across the sports leagues. Currently there are five major sports that make up the predominant activities on fields. These sports are soccer, football, baseball, softball and lacrosse. Within the town sports programs there are 10 leagues, with approximately 1500 players, ranging from ages 5 to over 50 spread across these five sports. School programs include 5 multi-season sports and approximately 450 of participants annually. Overall the town, school and privately owned fields are shared by a total of eight different sports, over three seasons, with youth and adult participants totaling nearly 2,000 people annually (see Figures 4 & 5).

Figure 4 – Field-based Sports Participation – 2009-2012

Field-based Sports Participation - 2009-2012			
Participants by Sport			
Sport	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Youth Soccer (in-town & travel, K-12, fall & spring)	690	608	554
Youth Football (grade 3-8, fall)	142	155	141
Youth Lacrosse (grade 1-8, spring)	220	230	262
Youth Baseball (K-8, spring)	370	333	308
Youth Softball (grade 3-8, spring)	129	147	120
High School Field Sports	326	342	341
Middle School Field Sports	144	159	148
Adult Soccer (spring)	45	45	0
Adult Baseball/Softball (spring)	76	76	76
Total	2142	2095	1950

Fields uses on town and school-owned properties are limited chiefly by the type and size of field required for a particular sport and the amount of use that the field can support. On the two privately owned field properties additional restrictions further limit use including limitations on hours of use, types of leagues, etc. For example, the New England Biolabs property forbids non-town teams from using the fields which limits the numbers of fields available to the Ipswich Youth Soccer Travel League.

Maintenance of fields is managed by both town departments and private contractors. Maintenance includes grass cutting, irrigation, trash collection, and capital repairs. Town fields are maintained predominantly by the Cemetery and Parks Department for grass cutting and repairs. The School Department properties are maintained

through a private contractor paid for by the schools. Maintenance on the privately owned fields is performed by either the land owner or the contractors hired by the sports leagues using the fields. Capital improvements to field properties is currently managed by a number of departments and organizations including Cemetery and Parks, Parks and Recreation, Ipswich Little League, and private donors. There is currently no short or long range capitol plan for town or school owned athletic fields. Capital improvements are managed opportunistically as needs and financing dictate.

Scheduling the use of the fields occurs each fall and spring when the Town Recreation Director calls a scheduling meeting. All organized youth and adult sports programs that plan to use town and/or school fields during the spring, summer or fall seasons are invited to attend. Master schedules are worked out dividing the available athletic fields among the various town-based organizations and the School Department. These plans are then revised as necessary to accommodate unforeseen changes in needs as the year passes. The school teams always have priority for school and town facilities. In the summer season, when most youth and school sports are not in operation, individual or independent athletic groups schedule directly with the Recreation Department for daily or weekly sessions.

Due to the current level of sports participation and the limited number of available fields, particularly for the town soccer and lacrosse programs, tremendous stress has been put on the existing fields from overuse. This overuse of the limited number of fields also means fields are unable to be “rested” periodically to assure that fields do not degrade and to maintain the safety of the athletes that use them. Specific issues arise include fields designed for baseball or softball not being available because soccer or lacrosse teams are using them for practices or games. Sports such as baseball and softball (as well as lacrosse) cannot be condensed into a smaller or shared space due to the liability of stray hard balls “sailing” through the area/perimeter of these fields. Neighborhood concerns have often been magnified by overuse. For example, neighbors of the Mile Lane complex had been under the impression that use would be restricted to weekdays for school athletics. However, now that town soccer and lacrosse programs have grown significantly, Mile Lane fields are being used on weekends as well, which has increased complaints from neighborhood residents.

Needs

Over the years the number of sports activities and participants has grown significantly in Ipswich while the number of athletic fields available to support activities has not. In particular participation in three of the five major sports in town, including soccer, lacrosse and softball, has grown significantly over the past few years. For example, softball has grown from four teams when it was in the Ipswich Little League, to seven teams. In lacrosse, the youth program has fielded three boys and two girls teams since 2005, but in 2012 fielded 11 teams with 262 participants in the program in 2006, which was almost four times the 75 participants in 2004 program.

Based on the number of current sports, leagues, participants, and playing seasons in town, the AFSC has calculated that a minimum of eight additional full size, multipurpose fields are needed to alleviate the existing shortage. These eight additional fields would meet the immediate demand and reduce the scheduling conflicts and field overuse, as well as reduce the dependency on the use of private fields. The programs that would likely use these eight fields would be the youth travel soccer, adult soccer, youth lacrosse, youth football, and school field hockey.

In the longer term, to serve anticipated future demand, ten more full size, multi-purpose fields should be added bringing the total number of available multipurpose fields to 21. These additional fields would be utilized by both town and school sports programs. A total of 18 new multipurpose fields would allow the town to completely eliminate the need for use of private fields, while at the same time eliminating the currently overcrowded, overused field facilities.

Figure 5 – Detailed Description of Field-based Sports Participation – 2011/2012

SPORT/AGE/GROUP	FIELD SIZE	# OF CURRENT FIELDS	# OF PARTICIPANTS
Ipswich Youth Soccer intown			
4-5 yrs olds/clinic	40x60	1	50-60
5-6 yrs/bugs (co-ed)	15x20	3	60
7-8 yrs/birds (girls)	20x25	2 shared w/boys	60
7-8 yrs/mysticals (boys)	20x25	2 shared w/girls	80
9-10 yrs/predators (girls)	40x60	1 shared w/boys	40
9-10 yrs/airborne (boys)	40x60	1 shared w/girls	60
Subtotal			355
Ipswich Youth Soccer travel			
U10 girls & boys	40x60	1 shared for both genders	0
U12 girls & boys	50x65	1 shared for both genders	90
U14 girls & boys	50x100	2 shared for both genders	100
U16-U18/19 girls & boys	50x100	1 shared for both genders	60
Subtotal			Avg - 310
Ipswich Youth Soccer OVERALL TOTALS			615 Total Fall 2011/Spring 2012
Youth Lacrosse- IYL travel			
U9 girls	45 x 60		18
U11 girls	45 x 60	games: 3 shared for all	31
U13 girls	60 x 110	practices: 3 shared for all	20
U15 girls	60 x 110	currently at Mile Lane	36
U9 boys	45 x 60		25
U11 boys	45 x 60		42
U13 boys	60 x 110		44
U15 boys	60 x 110		46
IYL Overall Totals			262 Total Spring 2012
Adult Soccer			
Adult over 30 Soccer	65 x 110	games/practice: 1 shared	
Adult over 40 Soccer	65 x 110	for all	
Adult over 40 Soccer	65 x 110	(baseball outfield at Bailek)	
Adult over 50 Soccer	65 x 110		
Adult Soccer Overall Totals			48 Total Fall 2011
Youth Football- ITYF			
A team (8th grade)	60 x 120	games: 1 shared	22
JVA team (7th & 8th grade)	60 x 120		30
B team (6th grade)	60 x 120	practices: 1 1/2 shared	21
JVB (5th & 6th)	60 x 120		22
C team (4th grade)	60 x 120	currently on Green St.	23
D (3rd grade)	60 x 120		23
ITYF Overall Totals			141 Total Fall 2011
Baseball/Softball			
Ipswich Little League		Five 60' fields shared at Bialek Park & Green St	264 for spring 2012
Ipswich Travel Softball		one 60' at Bialek Park	120 for spring 2012
Babe Ruth Baseball		two 90' field shared at Doyon & Bialek Park	44 for spring 2012
Chief's		one 90' field shared at Bialek Park	12 for spring/summer 2012
			440 Total

Multipurpose athletic fields require the playing fields as well as sideline space and buffer space between fields. Adequate parking is required for players and spectators and zoning guidelines call for two spaces per acre or one space per three participants. In addition fields should be oriented to allow rotation of fields to reduce overuse. Larger field complexes may require bathrooms and/or storage facilities and a concession stand should be considered.

In addition to the multi-purpose fields there is a need for baseball and softball fields. There is a current need among the baseball programs for 90' baseball diamonds. Between the adult league, school teams and youth leagues, there are only three 90' diamonds available. Currently, non-baseball sports use these baseball diamonds, or some portion of them as multipurpose fields. A fourth 90' baseball field would take tremendous pressure off of the existing facilities. If softball participation continues to expand, there may be a need for two additional softball fields. These would be 60' diamonds and have to be built on acquired land.

Given the number of fields, the field dimensions and support structures required, a total of 90 to 100 acres of space is needed to serve the Town's long-term athletic field needs. In the short-term a minimum of approximately 45 acres is need to address immediate needs. One or more large field complexes would be preferred to meet these needs due to efficiencies that could be gained through consolidated parking and other services.

Figure 6 – Summary of Additional Field Needs

SPORT/AGE/GROUP	FIELD SIZE	Full Sized Fields	
		Allocated in "New Complex"	
Ipswich Youth Soccer intown			
4-5 yrs olds/clinic	40x60	0	
5-6 yrs/bugs (co-ed)	15x20	1	
7-8 yrs/birds (girls)	20x25	1	
7-8 yrs/mysticals (boys)	20x25	0	
9-10 yrs/predators (girls)	40x60	1	
9-10 yrs/airborne (boys)	40x60	0	
Subtotal		3	
Ipswich Youth Soccer travel			
U10 girls & boys	40x60	1	
U12 girls & boys	50x65	2	
U14 girls & boys	50x100	2	
U16-U18/19 girls & boys	50x100	1	
Subtotal		6	
Ipswich Youth Soccer TOTAL			
		9	
Ipswich Youth Lacrosse travel			
U11 girls	60 x 110		
U13 girls	60 x 110		
U15 girls	60 x 110		
U11 boys	60 x 110		
U15 boys	60 x 110		
IYL Overall Totals		4	
Adult over 40 Soccer	65 x 110		
Adult over 50 Soccer	65 x 110		
Adult Soccer Overall Totals		1	
Youth Football- ITYF			
A team (8th grade)	60 x 120		
JVA team (7th & 8th grade)	60 x 120		
B team (5th & 6th grade)	60 x 120		
C team (4th grade)	60 x 120		
D Team (3rd grade)	60 x 120		
ITYF Overall Totals		4	
TOTAL # FULL SIZED MULTIPURPOSE FIELDS			
60 x 110yds each with 60 yds between each		18	
Baseball/Softball			
Ipswich Travel Softball		will need 2 additional 60' fields (will need land acquisition- 4 acres total including 2 fields & parking)	
Babe Ruth Baseball		need one additional 90' field (will need land acquisition- 5 acres total including parking)	
TOTAL # NEW BASEBALL/SOFTBALL DIAMONDS			
		3	

Accomplishments

Since the submittal of the AFSC report in 2007 the AFSC, working in conjunction with other groups, boards and committees in town, was able to address a number of the report recommendations and goals. Those accomplishments with brief details are listed below:

- Development of one, additional full-sized soccer field at Mile Lane
 - Due to the generous donations of the Institute for Savings one additional full- sized field was constructed at Mile Lane in 2008. Additional improvements to the property associated with the project included repair and construction of fencing along Mile Lane and expansion of the existing parking lot to accommodate additional field use.
- Field improvements at Bialek Park
 - Numerous improvements to the recreational facilities at Bialek Park were completed in 2010. These improvements included the installation of a new backstop and construction of a new infield at the baseball field nearest the restroom facilities (the so-called Chief's Field). While not under the specific purview of the AFSC the improvements at Bialek Park also included the construction of a new playground and play structures along Linebrook Road, and repair of drainage issues associated with the Bialek recreation projects.
- Outreach to landowners
 - In consultation with the Ipswich Planning Office and the Open Space Committee the AFSC conducted outreach to numerous property owners to determine their interest in selling or making charitable donations of their properties for the construction of athletic fields.

Recommendations

Consistent with the details contained in this report, the AFSC makes the following recommendations for the expansion and ongoing maintenance of athletic fields:

- The Town should pursue opportunities to increase the number of athletic field facilities on town-owned land consistent with the needs for the type and number of fields identified in this report. Responsible Parties: AFSC, OSC, Planning Office
- The Town should pursue opportunities to acquire land and develop additional athletic fields on privately owned land in Ipswich. Responsible Parties: AFSC, OSC, Planning Office
- A long range plan for the financing of periodic and necessary capital improvements to athletic fields in Ipswich should be developed and funding should be secured to implement the plan. Responsible Parties:
- A review of current operational maintenance procedures for athletic fields should be undertaken and recommendations developed to assure all athletic fields are adequately and cost-effectively maintained. Responsible Parties:
- A review should be undertaken of current athletic field scheduling procedures to assure that optimum use of available fields is achieved. In addition, the potential implementation of an automated scheduling system should be considered and investigated.
- A review of current signage policies, the posting of signs, and the enforcement of posted regulations should be undertaken and recommendations made to address any identified issues.

Conclusion

The Athletic Field Study Committee urges the Board of Selectman, the Open Space Committee, the Recreation Department, The Finance Committee, as well as other relevant Town Boards and Committees, and the community

at large, to support the acquisition and construction of additional athletic playing fields. The AFSC feels strongly that a long-term solution to address the current and future demand is the correct course of action for the Town to take and has devoted an extensive effort to evaluating the Town owned inventory of land to determine if suitable property already existed which could support additional playing fields. The Committee has learned that there are few options for additional fields on currently owned town land but has identified 1 property which could support a limited number of additional fields and is developing plans for them. The AFSC recognizes that significant costs for acquisition, construction and maintenance would be incurred to provide the necessary number of additional fields but believes it is an obligation of the Town, working in collaboration with willing public and private partners, to address the athletic field needs. The Town has a documented its commitment to providing adequate facilities for field-based recreation in the current town Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Report submitted by the Athletic Fields Study Committee

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