

**Town of Needham
Joint Meeting
Select Board, Park & Recreation Commission,
Board of Health, School Committee, Finance Committee,
Community Preservation Committee
Claxton Field Update
Minutes for February 15, 2023
Powers Hall
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88278879105>**

5:30 p.m.

Call to Order:

A special joint meeting of the Select Board was convened by Chair Marianne Cooley. Those present were Kevin Keane, Heidi Frail, Matthew Borrelli, and Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager. Marcus Nelson did not attend the meeting. Also in attendance were Katie King, ATM/Operations, members of the School Committee, Parks and Recreation Committee, Board of Health, Finance Committee, and the Community Preservation Committee. Lee Koska, Prasanta Bhunia, and Marie Rudeman from Weston and Sampson were also in attendance.

Ms. Cooley said the meeting tonight is to discuss Claxton Field and to understand the situation with the soil at the field.

Ms. King told the Select Board and other board and committee members that soil testing is upcoming at Claxton Field, noting many questions will not have answers until testing is complete. She said the goal of tonight's meeting is so everyone has the same foundational information, how the Town got to this point, and potential outcomes. Ms. King gave a brief history of Claxton Field, noting it was a former town burn dump prior to the Recycling and Transfer Station being built. She commented that about 60 years ago landfill was brought to the site and leveled, creating the fields as we know today. Ms. King said Claxton Field has been on the list for renovation to bring additional amenities to the user groups and residents. She said Town Meeting, in October 2020, approved funding for a new design, and Weston and Sampson was hired for its design, engineering, and environmental services. Ms. King said in December 2021 Weston and Sampson conducted initial soil borings at the site to visually inspect the composition of the soil. Discussion ensued on the layers of grass, topsoil, fill mixed with ash, waste material, and debris. She noted a second sample test round was completed and the design was modified so that no digging would take place below the initial layer of topsoil and included mitigation strategies. Ms. King said in spring 2022 Weston and Sampson presented the results of the second set of soil samples. It was noted that shards of debris were found under the playground at depths of 4 to 7 inches, at which time the playground structure was entirely removed. Ms. King also commented the second set of results showed 10 - 12" of consistent topsoil free of debris, and the field remained open. Ms. King said the next steps include chemical testing, which was recommended not take place based on 4 key items: (1) 10-12" depth across the field before hitting any waste, (2) a sense that materials at a former burn dump

likely would not produce gasses, (3) the unlikely occurrence that waste would migrate up to the top, and (4) the initial field design had changed and mitigation efforts were built into the construction plans. Ms. King said in the summer of 2022 an unrelated water main project on Central Avenue required use of space at Claxton Field for “lay down space,” when the contractor piled soil on a side area, prompting a complaint and a concern from a resident to the Board of Health. She said at that time the Board of Health, Health and Human Services, and the Department of Public Works re-engaged Weston and Sampson to identify mitigation strategies for the contractor to take. Ms. King said the contractor complied with all of the immediate mitigation strategies, with a few remaining items to be completed once the contractor leaves the site. Ms. King stated the focus for Claxton Field was to move forward with the funding request for construction submitted in the FY2024 budget process. She said in December 2022, Needham was contacted by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection saying they received a complaint from a resident about what was happening with the soil on Claxton Field. Ms. King said members of the Board of Health, DPW and Health and Human Services met with the DEP to get a better understanding of the concern and the DEP expectations of the Town moving forward. Discussion ensued on the Massachusetts Contingency Plan (regulatory framework, environmental response requirements for landlords). She said the DEP has asked for additional testing to be done to get a sense of the chemical makeup of the soil, solely because of the history of the land being a burn dump. Ms. King concluded the town has done its due diligence and has a good plan in place, including mitigation built into the design. She said however, the DEP asked for further testing, which she said the Town is planning to do, noting additional design plans will be made if necessary.

Carys Lustig, Director of DPW said DPW’s boring test will be conducted on the site by Weston and Sampson. She said the sampling plan was approved by the DEP and sampling will begin tomorrow, February 16, 2023. Discussion ensued on testing of materials and four possible scenarios based on the outcome of testing.

Stacey Mulroy, Director of Park and Recreation said alternate locations for the high school softball teams are being sought, noting Broadmeadow and Avery Schools have been identified as possible options if Claxton is unavailable.

Timothy McDonald, Director of Health and Human Services acknowledged the many health questions that will come from the test results. He said it is incredibly unlikely that any materials would “off gas” through soil or migrate up through soil, saying typical uses at the field (running, jumping) likely has not exposed anyone to any type of chemicals, but until more information is gathered it is best not to speculate.

Ms. Cooley invited questions from board members.

Mr. Borrelli commented on the action plan. He asked about the timeline for receiving test results and having the DEP give clearance to use the fields. He asked if the fields could be prepped, should the best test results come back?

Ms. Lustig said preliminary test results are anticipated to be received by the end of February. She said a formal communication on all test results (except dioxins) and recommendations from Weston and Sampson is anticipated at the end of March. She noted the Licensed Site Professional (LSP) working for Weston and Sampson will evaluate information and give the Town final clearance for use of Claxton Field. She noted the spring playing season is near. Ms. Lustig said while the fields are currently not closed to the public, alternative locations are being provided should the Claxton fields become unavailable.

Joshua Levy, Finance Committee asked what money is being used to fund testing and will additional funds be necessary?

Ms. Lustig said the contractor who disturbed the site will be responsible for all testing of the soil they disturbed.

Mr. McDonald said a couple of years ago, Town Meeting approved a financial warrant article (\$50,000) requested by the Board of Health for outside scientific expertise. He said based on the quote received, all of the money will be used for the first round of testing.

Peter Pingitore, Community Preservation Committee asked whether there is enough time to get test results and come to a scenario (#2), which would allow the full presentation of the article before the CPC based on the described design in the application?

Ms. Lustig said it is unlikely to have test results to be able to move forward with the presentation to the CPC. She said it is hopeful to try and keep the project on its initial timeline, perhaps entertaining an application in the fall or bid the project before Town Meeting and not be able to award it until after Town Meeting the following year.

Ms. Cooley invited public comment.

Stephanie Magni, Varsity Softball Coach asked if Memorial Field was an option for use? She commented on the size of Avery Field, which could be a public danger.

Ms. Mulroy offered to set up a time speak with Ms. Magni about field possibilities.

Holly Clarke, 1652 Central Avenue asked who is responsible for keeping the piles of soil created by the contractor covered? She asked about the playground area and what could be done?

Ms. King said to contact the Department of Public Works should the covers need to be reinstalled.

Mr. Koska said a series of shallow borings was done in the playground area, noting beneath the sandbox and fabric liner was waste. An abundance of caution was recommended and the playground was closed. He noted small quantities of glass and other debris at the surface and in the stockpile, with no visible ash or concentrated waste material. He noted at this point, with the absence of ash or other materials, there is no reason to believe the material is overtly contaminated. He said part of the plan is to collect samples from the stockpile and advance an additional boring within the lay down area.

Steve Deroian, Needham Baseball and Softball said the situation dramatically impacts the program to lose two of four softball fields. He asked for clarification of possible scenarios when test results come back and future field renovations.

Joanne McHugh, 25 Blacksmith Drive asked that parking be considered when at alternative locations. She asked whether there is an opportunity to modify a baseball diamond to support softball?

Ms. Mulroy said significant renovation and maintenance would be required to convert a baseball field for softball. She said the idea is “not off the table” but it would take a considerable amount of renovation, time, and money.

Eric Goldstein, 12 Cogswell Court, Men’s Shul Softball League (MSSL) commented on four men’s softball teams that play on Sunday mornings. He concurred that the size of both Broadmeadow and Avery are questionable and parking is a problem.

Needham High School Softball Team members gave reasons why they believe Memorial Field could be their home field for the season. It was noted the freshman season three years ago was interrupted by the pandemic, suggesting it would be great for current senior girls to have an uninterrupted softball season. Ease of equipment storage, playing conditions on turf, transportation, parking, field lights, and location were also mentioned as positive reasons for Memorial Park to be the home field for softball this year.

Richard Sucher, 16 Winfield Street commented on the high school softball season, and asked how financially prepared is the Town to support whatever location is chosen for softball teams to use? He said any of the sites will take significant funds to get the fields “game ready.”

Ms. Lustig said the field at Broadmeadow was discussed and a quote was received from a vendor to get the field ready for the season. She said the DPW can cover the cost of converting the field into a varsity level field. She commented other

potential options will need to be discussed with the Park and Recreation Department to determine costs associated with converting a field.

Andrew Pittman, 75 Prince Street said a huge influx of children began playing softball during the pandemic because it is outdoors. He commended the Town for its efforts to upgrade the fields. He concurred with the high school girls who spoke earlier and supported their desire to play on Memorial Field. Mr. Pittman said it would be an awesome experience for them. He said he is cautiously optimistic about the results of testing the soil. He asked, “Will the field be renovated per the original renovation project, and will there be funds to do lighting upgrades?”

Ms. Cooley reiterated the Town is committed to renovating Claxton Field. She said, however, if option #4 is necessary and soil must be carted off site, she said it is a very different proposition. She commented that option #1, #2, and #3 are all in line with expectations and funding is in the Town’s plan.

Dan Lee, Needham High School Athletic Director commented on the idea of softball at Memorial Field. He stated the field is a viable option, but it will be tricky to schedule games around other sports.

Joshua Levy commented on the forthcoming soil sample results, asking “Is the Town operating under the assumption that there is some sort of hazard?”

Ms. Lustig said the Town is operating under the assumption that the material below the topsoil will probably trigger a reportable event with higher than minimum levels. However, she said it is the belief that the topsoil and materials are deep enough that there is no potential exposure for anyone playing on the fields. She commented that risk analysis suggests there is no reason to believe anything is wrong with the topsoil, based on earlier work done on the field. She concluded the only difference is that the Town is being asked to test the material.

Mr. Keane commented on the field at Broadmeadow, which he said is used by Little League.

Melissa Gerber Lassonde, Needham Baseball and Softball, commented that Needham needs more fields and multipurpose space. She said as the Town continues to grow, “we are bursting at the seams” with families, adults, and children looking for outdoor space.

Ms. Frail commented the Active Recreation Assets Working Group has a meeting coming up next week and suggested Melissa send her comments to otm@needhamma.gov

Mr. Borrelli summarized the conflicting information about Claxton Field. He reiterated the field is currently closed because it is the winter season. He said a high probability exists that the field will remain open, unless results from testing

indicate the field should close, and that the Town is currently considering alternate locations should the field be closed. He noted the possibility of the originally designed project with lighting. He said the meeting has been informative.

Ms. Cooley said the intent is to gather the group together again once testing results are available to review and discuss timelines. She thanked everyone for coming and offered the Select Board email address selectboard@needhamma.gov should people have additional questions.

6:37 p.m. Adjourn.

Submitted by:
Mary Hunt
March 24, 2023