

EDISON SCHOOL MULTIPURPOSE FIELDS PROJECT FAQs

June 15, 2021

1) What is being proposed at Edison?

The scope of the project is to install approximately 400,000 sq ft of turf, lighted multi-purpose fields behind the Edison Intermediate School property.



The fields will be configured and marked in such a way to allow for the following:

Soccer

- 2 regulation 180' x 360' NFHS fields with NFHS goals on wheels
- 1 regulation 240' x 360' NFHS field with NFHS goals on wheels
- 2 regulation 135' x 195' Youth fields with goals on wheels

Lacrosse

- 3 regulation 180' x 360' NFHS fields with goals

Baseball

- 1 regulation 320' NFHS field, bleachers, dugouts, bullpens, batting cages and backstops
- 1 regulation 300' NFHS field, bleachers, dugouts, bullpens, batting cages and backstops

Field Hockey

- 2 regulation 180' x 300' NFHS fields with goals on wheels

Football/Band/Drill Team

- 2 regulation 160' x 360' NFHS fields with removable goal posts
- 1 new band tower

2) Why does the Town need new fields and how was this determined?

The impetus for this project is the result of recommendations that came out of the [Strategic Parks Plan](#) led by nationally recognized parks consultant Brandstetter Carroll and adopted by the Town Council in January 2020. The recommendations, which were driven by significant public input, identified new fields for youth and adult sports as **top priorities**.

The public input came from a lengthy survey which was completed by nearly 600 randomly-chosen households, as well as an additional broadly circulated online survey which generated over 2,400 comments and 40,000 votes. Additionally, two in-person meetings were held and well attended by several hundred residents and 20 stakeholder groups.

In addition to the stated public demand for fields, the independent consultant benchmarked Westfield's field capacity relative to towns across the country and in the benchmarking, the median for multipurpose fields was 8.3 for our population. Westfield currently has only three multipurpose fields, so the need based on the benchmarking is 5.3 additional multipurpose fields to be considered adequate in supporting the needs of our growing youth sports community.

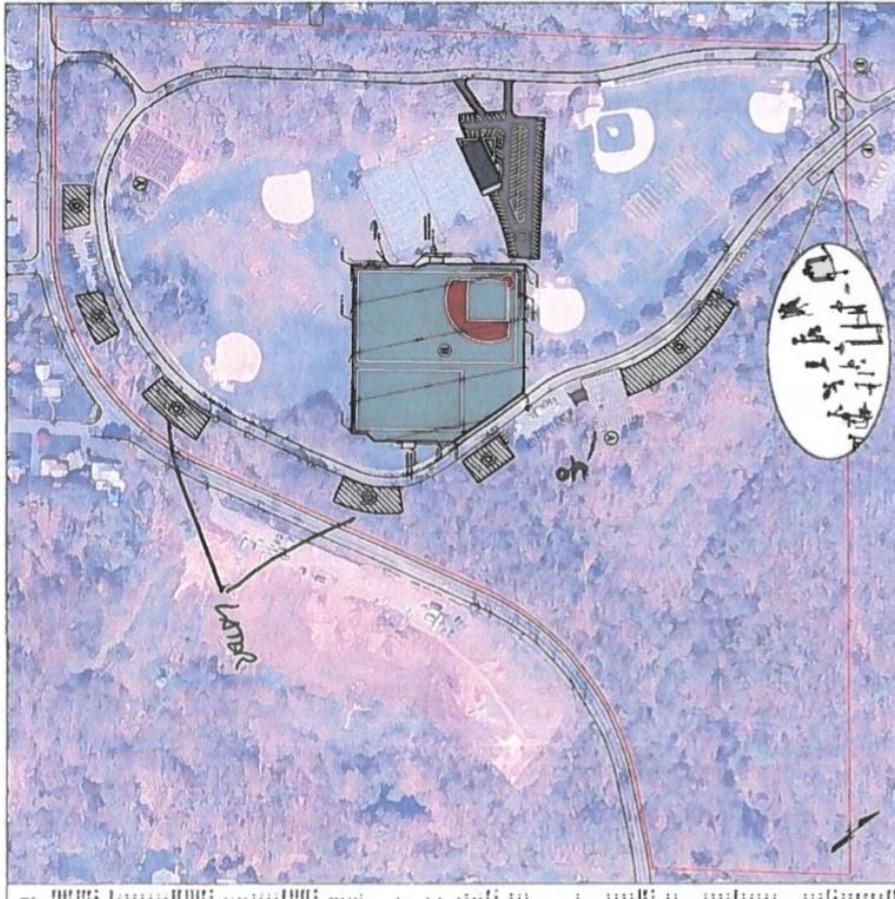
The need for the additional fields is also evidenced in the costs incurred by Westfield's sports leagues every year to pay for practice and game facilities outside of Westfield.

3) Why was this location chosen and prioritized over other potential locations?

The Recreation Commission Parks & Fields Committee spent considerable time analyzing the Parks Plan athletic fields recommendations and considered various approaches to prioritization. Potential field projects, in addition to Edison, were identified at Memorial Park, Tamaques Park, and the Elm Street field.

Ultimately, the Edison School Multipurpose Fields Project was proposed as the top priority because it offers the greatest and most immediate additional capacity for the community, which was a top priority for the Recreation Commission. Currently, this property is owned by the Board of Education and used almost exclusively by Westfield High School for a variety of uses, including band, drill team, and practices for some Westfield High School sports teams. Only Westfield High School baseball games and select track and field event competitions can be held on the existing fields. Additionally, unlike nearly every Town-owned municipal park, Edison is not a Green Acres facility which *allows the fields to be reserved exclusively for Westfield teams and residents*.

By completing the Edison project first, the community gains immediate, extensive expanded capacity that would benefit the largest number of potential user groups, while also offering the least disruption during construction as these fields are currently being underutilized.



Tamaques Turf Field Proposal

5) Why turf fields?

Turf fields were deemed desirable for the following reasons:

- Resilience to heavy use and continuous play, which takes a toll on grass fields, as we frequently experience all around town. The deterioration of our grass fields can render them unsafe at times, making turf safer under various conditions.
- Ability to withstand inclement weather, enabling play to continue regardless of rainy conditions, further expanding playing capacity resulting in fewer cancelled games and practices. This not only benefits user groups, but also the Edison Intermediate School (EIS) students who will have greater opportunities for outdoor physical education.
- Total cost of ownership, including maintenance and upkeep, makes turf a more cost efficient alternative to grass fields. While there is the upfront cost for the installation of the turf, there are no additional long-term, recurring costs that are associated with real grass, such as mowing, fertilizing, weed control, and regular surface repair.

6) Who currently uses the Edison fields, and what additional user groups will benefit from this project?

Currently, these fields are used by EIS students for gym class, the WHS band and drill team for practice, the WHS baseball team, the WHS football team for practice, and WHS track & field (for certain events).

The additional beneficiaries of this project will include a broad range of Town residents, primarily youth who engage in team sports and a variety of non-sports related Town users, while continuing access for WHS student athletes, WHS band, and drill team members and EIS students. Other constituents who will benefit from expanded capacity for both practice time and competition include the Town youth sports organizations engaged in the following sports: Soccer, Lacrosse, Field Hockey, Baseball, and PAL Football.

Adults who participate in recreational sports will also be beneficiaries, as is the case today at the Town's other lighted turf field complex at Houlihan/Sid Fay, as well as other playing fields around town.

7) How was input provided, and by whom, to arrive at the field specs that are being proposed?

In February 2020, the Recreation Commission made recommendations to the Town Council about park improvement priorities stemming from the Parks Strategic Plan, and the Edison School project was determined to be a top priority. This led to advertising a public bid for a consultant to assist the Town in designing a project as well as the formation of a steering committee to guide the process. The committee was comprised of the following individuals:

- Peggy Oster - President of the Board of Education (through December 31, 2020)
- Amy Root - President of the Board of Education (January 2021 - present)
- Councilman Scott Katz - liaison to the Recreation Commission
- Gary Fox - Recreation Commission Chair (through Dec. 31, 2020)
- Jennifer Gilman - Recreation Commission Chair (January 1, 2021 - present)
- Mike Bielen - Board of Education member and Chair of the Board Facilities Committee
- Brad Rothenberg - Recreation Commission member and Chair of the Park & Fields Committee (through December 31, 2020)
- Russ Howell - Recreation Commission member and Chair of the Park & Fields Committee (January 2021 - present)
- Dana Sullivan - School Business Administrator
- Jim Gildea - Westfield Town Administrator
- Don Bogardus - Westfield Recreation Director
- Advisors - School district major users:
 - Sandy Mamary - School Athletic Director
 - Matt Bolton - Edison School Principal
 - Chris Vitale - WHS Band Director

The steering committee reviewed the seven public bid responses and recommended the firm Spiezele Architectural Group Inc. (“Spiezele”), which was formally appointed by the Town Council in July 2020. In August 2020, the Recreation Commission then proceeded to do the following:

1. Provide a public update on progress on various projects including the Edison School Multipurpose Field Project.
2. Make a site visit to Edison School property with the steering committee and the consultant.
3. Conduct virtual calls with other current users including key Board of Ed staff, sports leagues/user groups, and Recreation Commission members.

All of this input was carefully considered and led to the design concepts that are being proposed today.

8) How will this project impact the utilization and maintenance of other existing Town fields?

Once the Edison School Multipurpose Fields Project is operational, it will enable the Town to take some of the grass fields at Tamaques and Memorial out of rotation at appropriate times to allow for reseeding and maintenance, which is not possible today due to the high demand for field time.

9) How will the fields be scheduled and by whom?

The Town’s Recreation Department currently schedules playing and practice time for all of the Town and School District fields in collaboration with the School District Athletic Director and the various directors of the sports leagues. This collaborative practice, already in place, will continue once the Edison School Multipurpose Fields Project is constructed.

10) How will the school user groups be prioritized relative to sports leagues?

Initially it is agreed that the Town, through its Recreation Department, will continue to schedule the use of the fields and facilities, in cooperation with the schools. A formal shared service agreement, with sample schedules for each season, will ensure school user groups will have similar scheduled access to the new fields as what they have today. In addition, the agreement will outline a process for determining scheduling issues in the future and resolving any conflicts over field use.

11) Can teams from other towns use these facilities?

As noted earlier, since the Edison School Multipurpose Fields Project will not be a Green Acres facility, the facility will be reserved exclusively for Westfield residents. That being said, there may be times when permission is granted to outside teams/user groups for use of the facility, but only in special circumstances with permission from the Town.

12) What is the estimated cost and how will it be paid for?

The total estimated cost of the proposed concept if all three phases were to be done at the same time is \$18.2mm. Once the project cost is finalized after donations and sponsorships are considered, if it is determined that spreading out the cost over time is more prudent, the Town could also consider a phased approach in which the estimated cost is \$9.2MM for Phase #1, \$5.9MM for Phase #2, and \$3.1MM for Phase #3, which could be completed over a few years. Due to the Town's legal and financial flexibility with capital projects and bonding capacity, the financing of the entire project will be administered by the Town and full debt service is expected to be borne by the Town and not the school budget.

It is expected that a capital campaign seeking grants, sponsorships, and sports league contributions will commence once the final concept is approved after a public input process. The Town would expect to issue bonds for this project in 2022 and debt service on the project would begin in 2023. This coincides with projected PILOT payments emanating from redevelopment work in Town which will assist in offsetting the annual debt service obligations for this project, and others.

13) Will the Town be seeking additional sources of funding through grants, donations, and sponsorships?

Yes, we will be aggressively seeking donors and sponsors, and will be asking the various user groups for their assistance with the fundraising efforts. If you are interested in assisting with obtaining sponsorships please reach out to Recreation Director Don Bogardus at dbogardus@westfieldnj.gov.

14) Why is the Town of Westfield paying for new fields on BOE property? What are the terms of the shared service agreement?

The Town has been exploring opportunities to construct new fields for many years, but options have been limited due to existing space constraints. The Parks Strategic Plan process revealed the untapped potential of Edison, and the school district has been a collaborative and engaged partner to help the Town bring this to fruition.

The Edison School Multipurpose Fields Project provides an opportunity for the Town and BOE to work together to maximize residents' tax dollars to deliver these facilities.

Westfield has had a history of informal shared service arrangements between the Town and BOE, but this would by far be the most significant and the first one to be formalized with an agreement. Many towns have similar shared service agreements with their School Districts which have served as the basis of this agreement. The Town will be leasing the Edison field property from the School District for \$1/year for 30 years, and will pay for all costs associated with construction of the project.

A comprehensive shared service agreement detailing all aspects of financing, operating, maintaining, and scheduling this project must be signed by both parties before it moves forward.

15) Was the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) consulted?

Yes, an evaluation was completed and reviewed by NJDEP, and it was determined that identified wetlands and buffer areas would not be an issue if it was determined that this plan would move forward.

16) Who is responsible for managing and maintaining the fields? Who pays for the upkeep?

The Town's Department of Public Works will be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the facilities, just as they are for all of the Town's existing parks and fields.

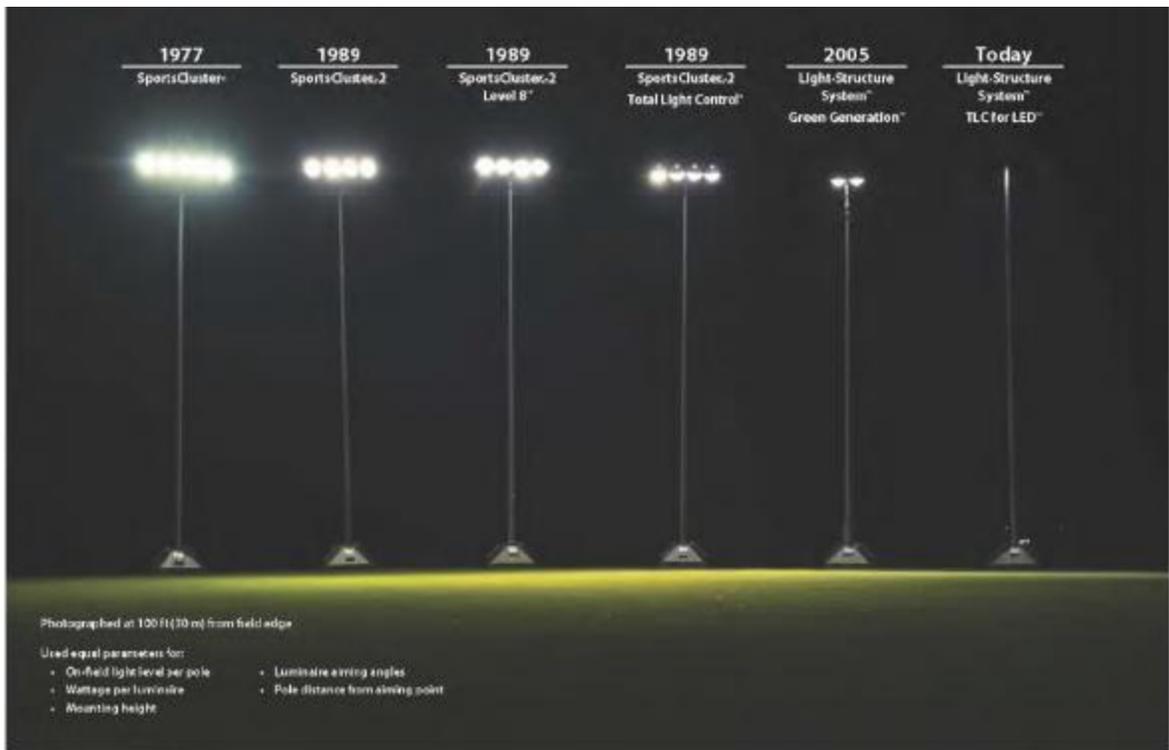
17) Is there sufficient parking at Edison to accommodate an expanded athletic facility?

There are currently 203 parking spaces at Edison on both sides of the school. Spiezle, the firm that constructed the design plan, indicated that existing parking may be sufficient and that a more in-depth review can be performed, if necessary. The fields will be scheduled to mitigate congestion (i.e. staggered start times, no concurrence with WHS football games, etc). The Town is also committed to working with the school district to examine opportunities to better leverage the WHS parking lot during peak periods.

18) Why do the fields need to have lights, and how will this impact surrounding neighborhoods?

Turf fields afford a relative gain in capacity in the face of inclement weather. Lighted turf fields afford absolute gain in capacity via the addition of usable hours after sunset. The overwhelming need in Westfield is for significant, additional, absolute capacity. In order to justify such a significant investment by the Town, the playing time of this facility must be maximized to benefit as many taxpayers as possible.

New technology in sports lighting allows the playing field to be lit for player safety without spillage or glare reaching the surrounding roadways or residences, as displayed in the photos below. It also includes many automated controls on lighting timing which allows for "remote override" to turn off lighting on evenings when weather or other factors lead to cancellation of field usage.



LIGHTING – TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS

19) Will the public have an opportunity to provide input into what is being proposed? If so, how and when will that happen?

Yes, the public will have the opportunity to provide input during at least three public meetings hosted by the Town and BOE between mid-July and late September, with details to be provided in the next few weeks. Additionally, any comments can be submitted to edisonfields@westfieldnj.gov.