

Claxton FAQ

Q: What is prompting the soil testing?

A: In Summer 2022, a DPW contractor working on a nearby watermain project for the Town was given permission to use a portion of Claxton Field as laydown space. While preparing their laydown space, the contractor excavated some soil and piled it on-site with no advanced notice and without the Town's permission.

This prompted outreach from a concerned resident to the Board of Health. DPW and the Public Health Department worked with its engineer, Weston and Sampson (W&S) to identify appropriate mitigation strategies for the contractor to take to safeguard the site. All immediate strategies have been implemented with further work to be done by the contractor as the project is closed out.

However, in December 2022, the Director of Health and Human Services was contacted by the MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The agency had received a resident complaint through their enforcement portal. In subsequent meetings, DEP has requested that the Town perform further testing on the chemical make-up of the soil throughout the site. While the available information about Claxton Field has not triggered testing or reporting requirements under the Massachusetts Contingency Plan, which sets state environmental response requirements for landowners, DEP is taking the position that the Town should test now based on the site's historical use as a burn dump.

Q: Why has the Town not done soil testing before now, knowing the fields were built on an old landfill?

A: Claxton was redeveloped approximately 60 years ago as a recreational facility. At that time, top soil was brought in and leveled to create the field over the existing site. Last year, as the Town was planning to renovate the softball fields, it had W&S sample the soil to visually inspect the composition. The borings found that materials located below the imported top soil were not likely appropriate for excavation but that 10-12 inches of topsoil were appropriate to disturb and reuse across the playing fields. Town staff and W&S discussed whether additional, voluntary testing to determine the chemical make-up of the soil was warranted, but decided based on the factors below, that it was not.

- Considering the historic use of the site and types of materials that may be present, W&S does not anticipate the generation of landfill gas or upward migration of the waste materials.
- The Town had already decided to modify the design, treating the subsurface materials as if contaminants are present and proactively adding in relevant mitigation strategies. These modifications include capping the fields with a geotextile barrier and building up on the site, without creating surplus soil that would need to be removed offsite. The design will prevent digging beneath the 12 inches of clean fill into the known debris.

The initial soil borings showing topsoil followed by ash material was consistent with the site's history. Fundamentally, the borings did not provide any unexpected data, nor any new information that would prompt a higher-level of concern about the soil make-up compared to what was previously known before the borings. The likelihood of contact with materials below the topsoil by children or other park users was considered low or unlikely. The renovation design included a geotextile membrane to further mitigate any risk.

Q: What chemicals will this new round of testing test for?

A: Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) via EPA Method 8270; MCP 14 Metals via EPA Method 6010 / 7471; Asbestos via Polarized Light Microscopy (PLM) and Dioxins.

Q: How long will the testing take?

A: The intention is to complete the work as quickly as possible with the hope of having preliminary results for all chemicals except Dioxins by mid-March and testing on Dioxins by late March. Those preliminary results will help the Town to identify any changes in operation that may result or any follow-up testing needs.

Q: How expensive will the testing be and where will the money come from?

A: The testing and subsequent follow-up work is approximately \$52,000 for testing, analysis, and coordination on communicating these results. A portion of this will be paid for by the contractor who disturbed soil on site, but the majority will be from a fund established for the Board of Health specifically for Professional and Technical work similar to this.

Q: Should residents be concerned about the health impacts they may experience as a result of spending time on these fields?

A: W&S reports that there is a 10–12-inch layer of previously imported topsoil/loam that overlays the ball fields. Given the use of the ball fields, and the layer of imported topsoil/loam, direct physical contact with any contaminants that might be present in the deeper soils is unlikely.

W&S will collect samples from both the surface and subsurface soils to determine the contaminants that may be present in soil at the property and their concentrations. Potential contaminants that are typically present at former burn dumps include polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and metals. The Town will be able to provide more information on the potential health risks and toxicity once we have data about what substances are present and the concentrations of those substances.

Q: How will the Town address chemicals that may be found in the soil?

A: The exact combination of mitigation measures that will be put into place to ensure the health and safety of the community will be developed by the Town of Needham and its engineer, W&S, in consultation with MA DEP. Initial plans (developed pre-testing) included laying down a geotextile membrane on the site and then importing additional clean fill on top of the membrane; this is a proven strategy to mitigate risks from solid waste materials and it has been implemented in a number of parks and fields throughout the Commonwealth.

Q: What's next for the renovation project?

A: The Town will schedule a second Joint Board/Committee meeting to update members and the public on the results of the soil testing. The results will also inform next steps on the pending FY24 capital budget request for Claxton construction funds prior to May Town Meeting.

Q: What is the plan for softball this season given all of this? What about other events at Claxton?

A: Since we will not know the outcome of the soil testing until close to when NHS Softball begins its season, we have proactively made plans to relocate NHS Varsity Softball to the fields at Broadmeadow School and JV Softball to Avery Field. This will provide predictability for the teams' games and practices. The fields will be updated, groomed, and prepared for the high school teams by DPW's Parks and Forestry division prior to the beginning of the season.

Park & Recreation is working with all other user groups to identify alternative locations for activities that are normally scheduled at Claxton Field. If testing results conclude that the field can remain open, Park & Recreation will be in touch with each group to coordinate a return to Claxton Field versus remaining at an alternative location.