



TOWN OF NEEDHAM
TOWN HALL
Needham, MA 02492-2669

2024 Annual Town Meeting
Article 27
Appropriate for Athletic Facility Improvements – Claxton Field
Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need to renovate Claxton Field?

There are two reasons why the Town is requesting funds to renovate Claxton Field. The first reason for this project is the softball facilities at Claxton Field need upgrades. These fields have remained the same for the past sixty-five years. Presently there is no irrigation at this complex to allow for more sustainable turf management programs. Also, these fields have suffered for many years with sink holes and settlement. Most commonly these sink holes appear near the wooded side of the field complex that require constant maintenance. These areas see settlement as a result of old carbon sinks, or areas where stumps or organic materials were buried many decades ago. The lights are also not ideal for lighting the facility. Until the redevelopment of McLeod Field at the DeFazio complex this was the only facility that was appropriate for softball use by High School athletics.

The second reason for this work was discovered after the design project for this site began. The Claxton Field was known to be constructed on an old open burn dump that was informally covered and converted into playing fields in the 1960s. As part of the renovation design, soil testing was conducted by a Licensed Site Professional (LSP) and the project was redesigned to avoid disturbing the lower levels of materials. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) was brought in based on resident concerns and this site trigger the Massachusetts Contingency Plan (MCP) which requires the Town's LSP to monitor the site, oversee construction, and report to MassDEP. As part of this project a geotextile membrane will be installed across the entire site, capping the landfill, and restoring the site for use as recreation.

What amenities will be added as part of this project?

This project will now include upgraded LED lights, a functioning irrigation system, a looped accessible pathway for passive recreation, covered dugouts, spectator seating, upgraded fencing, a warm-up area, and replacement bases and other equipment.

Why has the cost of this project increased so much over the years?

The two reasons for the price cost are general inflationary pressures and increased remediation work. This project transitioned from primarily a surface improvement and amenity enhancement project for a field area to remediation project. The Town recently bid this project out, with the low bid coming in at just under \$3 million. Given the uncertainty of the underground soil, the Town is still requesting a \$3.6 million appropriation.

What is the timeline of the project?

If funding is approved, it is anticipated that this project would break ground in July of 2024 and that construction will be completed by April 2025 in time for High School Softball season.

Why do trees have to come down as part of this project?

The scope of this project increased to cap the entire original burn dump location and not just the areas being disturbed by the field renovation project. As a result, areas that are within the wetland buffer zone are being impacted. To effectively cap this material, 52 trees must be removed, but an additional 76 trees will be planted. This project is under Conservation Commission jurisdiction, and they have issued an order of conditions for this project that the contractor must follow.

Where will Softball be played during construction?

The recently constructed McLeod Field was open for Spring 2024 Softball. Construction on Claxton will occur after the conclusion of the High School Softball season. Other Softball programs will be temporarily relocated to alternative softball fields in Town (e.g., Broadmeadow, Avery, and McLeod).

Will the playground be replaced at Claxton?

No, replacing the playground is beyond the scope of this project. The playground was removed in 2022 after soil borings showed that debris, including glass and plastic shards, was observed 4 to 7 inches below the playground surface. Out of an abundance of caution, the Town removed the playground structures, placed additional soil on top, reseeded with grass and installed a temporary fence around the area. Under this project scope, the area where the playground was will be covered with geotextile membrane and covered with additional soil. The playground structures will not be replaced at this time.

What prompted the February 2023 soil testing?

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. The contractor paid for the mitigation in the laydown space. 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 requested that the Town perform further testing on the chemical make-up of the soil throughout the site based on the site's historical use as a burn dump.

Why had the Town not done soil testing before now?

Claxton was redeveloped approximately 60 years ago as a recreational facility. At that time, topsoil was brought in and leveled to create the field over the existing site. In 2022, 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 topsoil 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 following factors, that it was not:

1. Considering the historic use of the site and types of materials that may be present, W&S did not anticipate the generation of landfill gas or upward migration of the waste materials.
2. 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.
3. The initial soil borings showing topsoil followed by ash material were 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.
4. 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.

In 2023, when the MassDEP requested additional soil testing be done, the Town agreed to do so.

What chemicals were tested for in the February 2023 samples?

Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) via EPA Method 8270; MCP 14 Metals via EPA Method 6010 / 7471; Asbestos via Polarized Light Microscopy (PLM); and Dioxins via EPA Method 8290.

What were the soil testing results?

In the top 12 inches of soil, the testing found low levels of contamination with concentrations similar to natural soils, which do not require any reporting to MassDEP or remediation. Below the top 12 inches in the subsurface materials, some contamination was found, with lead and dioxins present at concentrations that require reporting to MassDEP under the Massachusetts Contingency Plan (MCP). The Town has continued to engage W&S as a Licensed Site Professional (LSP) on their behalf to work on follow-up testing and reporting requirements.

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

W&S collected samples from both the surface and subsurface soils to determine if contaminants are present in soil at the property and their concentrations. The results of the testing are consistent with the assumed contamination that W & S and the Town discussed after boring samples were taken in January of 2022. The testing found that the topsoil on the field is clean fill (contaminant concentrations are similar to natural soils), and that usage as an athletic field would

not carry any inherent risk. At this time the Town has no data to indicate that usage of the field is unsafe and will be keeping the fields open.

Is Claxton still being considered as a potential location for an action sports park and/or pickleball courts?

The Town has contracted with CHA Consulting to conduct a feasibility study focused on the potential to site an action sports park and/or pickleball courts at Claxton, Cricket, Hillside and/or Mills Fields. This scope was informed by the April 2023 recommendations of the Active Recreation Assets Working Group. The final feasibility report is expected before the end of Fiscal Year 2024. This project design does not preclude the ability to site an action sports park or pickleball court at Claxton at a later date, on portions of the parcel that are not dedicated to the playing fields proposed to be renovated under this project.