

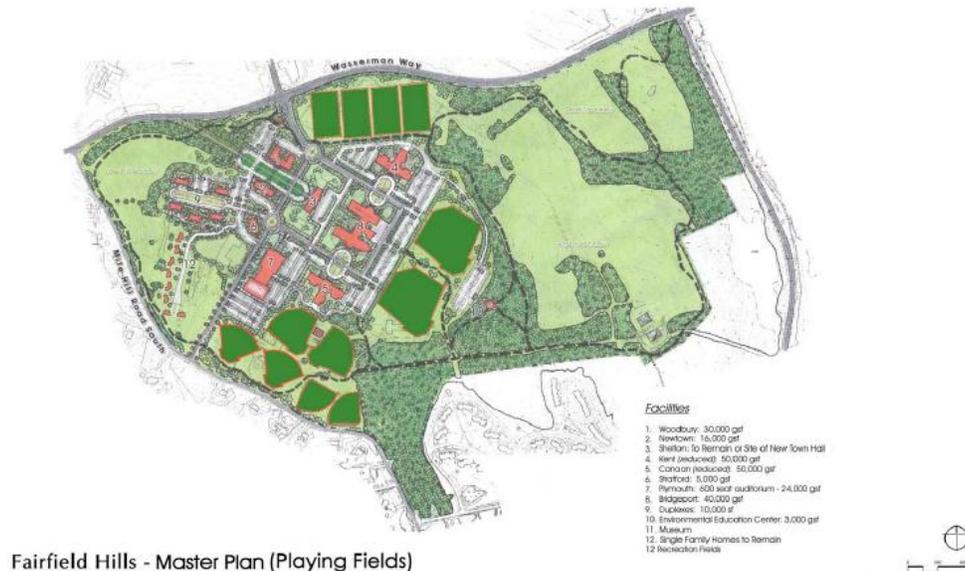
Community Summary

- When initially purchased, the Fairfield Hills campus included one pre-existing softball field and two pre-existing all-purpose fields. There are also two existing youth baseball fields that abut the property.
- The current Master Plan calls for 2 additional adult baseball fields (for a total of 2), 1 additional adult softball field (for a total of 2), 2 additional all-purpose fields (for a total of 4), and 2 additional youth baseball fields (for a total of 4).
- Of these additional fields, so far one adult baseball field has been built, at a cost of \$1,500,000. This included the costs of razing a building, providing lights, and \$300,000 for parking. The field, with the addition of lights, addressed the immediate needs (2005) for fields according to Parks and Recreation Department.
- At present, the Recreation Department's scheduling is tight, and would greatly benefit from the near-term creation of one additional multi-purpose field.
- A comparison of the ratio of Newtown's residents per playing fields, to the ratio of other neighboring towns, shows that Newtown's current field resources are relatively comparable, though slightly more conservative, than other similar towns in the neighboring area. (This would still be true, even with the creation of one additional multi-purpose field.)
- As the town's population increases, there will be a growing need for the additional fields in order to maintain the current ratio of playing fields to residents. At the "build-out" point, all of the requested fields will be needed in order to maintain the current ratio.
- Some advantages of locating additional fields at Fairfield Hills include a centralized location, water and sewage availability, and relative lack of negative impact on surrounding neighborhoods.
- Projected costs for the remaining fields are \$250,000 per acre for natural fields. This translates to \$500,000 for each two-acre multi-purpose field or a two-acre adult softball field; \$750,000 for a three-acre adult baseball field; and \$437,500 for a 1.75 acre youth baseball field. This does not include costs for razing any existing structures, nor costs for creating parking space.
- Natural fields have associated operational costs for mowing, fertilizing, pest control, and irrigation of approximately \$5,000 per acre per year. Fields created from artificial turf do not require this kind of maintenance; however their initial cost per acre is about double that of a natural field.
- There are some potential conflicts and trade-offs regarding "land-banking" for future uses: fields vs. meeting future educational needs. This is explored in further detail in the main body of this report.

Detailed Parks and Recreation Report

Preface: This report focuses on outdoor active recreation. The Parks and Recreation Department is currently discussing options for a Community Center that includes “zero-entry” and competitive-style pools, a teen center, a multipurpose space with dance studio, additional classroom space to support a variety of programming needs, and offices for the Parks and Recreation staff. At this time, the center is considered a part of the ongoing implementation of the current master plan and so will be considered “existing” with regards to future planning.

The 2005 Master Plan notes on page 1 of the executive summary that “*In addition to preparation of the Master Plan, the Town Meeting authorized the following program components*” including seven playing fields to complement the three existing fields on the campus.



Fairfield Hills - Master Plan (Playing Fields)

Figure ES6, from the 2005 Master Plan

The plan further states “*The fields can be constructed in a sequence and within a schedule to meet the priorities of the Parks and Recreation Commission and users as well as coordination with other demolition and construction activities proposed in the Master Plan,*” on page 3 of the Executive Summary. To date, a full-sized baseball field has been built. Lights were added to the field to increase available playing hours, and so reduce the immediate need for a second full-sized field. The Newtown Youth Academy has been built where a second such field was planned. Also, there is discussion about reusing Cochran which would displace several, if not all, of the four additional baseball/softball fields located in/near Cochran’s footprint as shown in the field layout above.

As shown by the figure, the fields consume a good deal of the level space available on the campus, and with parking (not shown), effectively limits other uses to Canaan, Plymouth, and the western and eastern portions of the property.

Why Fairfield Hills

- Centralized location
- Neighborhood opposition to fields, wrt converting other town-owned land to playing fields
- Need for basic infrastructure including water and sewer.

Status Quo

The outdoor fields support various programs, including those provided directly by the town and those associated with third-party organizations. The use of the fields is predicated on having at least 80% of the players reside in Newtown. In addition a surcharge is levied, per player, to offset the operational costs associated with the programs – like the replacement of artificial turf. Currently, the surcharges are \$20 per

player for programs that use outdoor fields, \$10 per player for indoor courts, and \$5 per participant for other programs, like dance classes. With the addition of the lighted, full-sized baseball field, the Parks and Recreation department is able to support the existing programs requested of it, though scheduling is tight and requires cooperation across all of the program coordinators. However, there are not enough playable hours on outdoor fields for any additional program requests, e.g., extending current single-season programs to multiple seasons.

Operational costs for natural fields include mowing, fertilizing, pest control, and irrigation. Costs per acre are approximately \$5,000, not including capital equipment, gas, and union labor. Also, additional labor would likely be needed. Operational costs for artificial turf are lower and are generally covered by the surcharge fund.

To understand how Newtown field resources compare with “like” towns (as requested by the members of the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review subcommittee on Open Space, Recreation, and Social Services), members of the Parks and Recreations department gathered field information from ten other towns, including nine that are comparable to Newtown, as viewed by the state’s demographic reference groupings, and Ridgefield – a nearby town that serves as a model community that is “one level” up, according to the state’s demographic references. The table below shows a very coarse-level comparison of population per field. Please note that detailed comparisons are not supported since fields vary in size and playable hours (e.g., lights and artificial turf).

	Town Demographics		Town Economics		Persons per playing surface			
Town	CERC 2009 Pop. Estimate	CERC 2009 Med HH Income	2008 Grand List Comm. Ratio ¹	'09 – '10 Mill Rate / 2009 Equalized Mill Rate	Total Softball & Baseball	Total Soccer, Multi-purpose	Total Fields	Total Tennis Courts
Trumbull	35047	\$100,644	18.3%	24.07 / 16.18	4381	5007	2336	7009
Simsbury	23166	\$105,420	16.7%	30.10 / 20.71	2896	3861	1655	2896
Fairfield	56544	\$106,767	10.6%	18.90 / 13.34	2356	4350	1528	1767
Newtown	26011	\$114,673	10.4%	23.43 / 16.00	2365	3716	1445	2890
Guilford	21840	\$98,044	9.1%	20.04 / 12.44	2427	2730	1285	4368
Glastonbury	33041	\$103,407	17.0%	29.05 / 19.83	2753	2065	1180	16521
Greenwich	59484	\$126,278	15.5%	8.32 / 5.15	1322	8498	1144	1919
Avon	17558	\$115,186	15.6%	23.41 / 15.17	2195	2195	1097	4390
Madison	18496	\$113,755	6.4%	18.62 / 12.47	2642	1423	925	711
Brookfield	16469	\$102,946	17.7%	18.86 / 13.08	1176	4117	915	5490
Ridgefield	23132	\$137,015	13.0%	20.00 / 13.76	1652	1928	890	11566

The information from the table above suggests that Newtown’s field resources are relatively comparable, though slightly more conservative than “like” towns. The addition of one more multi-purpose field would bring the number of population/multi-purpose fields to 3251 and population per total fields to 1369, still relatively conservative when compared to “like” towns, though it would help loosen the current scheduling.

¹ See the commercial report for a discussion on the ratio of commercial to residential contributions to the grand list.

Discussion

The Parks and Recreation is still requesting the addition of 6 more fields (roughly 12.5 acres) and associated parking preferably close to the configuration represented in Figure ES6, above. The table below shows population per field without the addition of fields for both the lower and upper population estimates provided in the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review committee’s Demographics Report.

	CERC 2009 Pop. Estimate	Total Softball & Baseball	Total Soccer, Multi- purpose	Total Fields	Total Tennis Courts
2008 Zoning	33770	3070	4824	1876	3752
Diversity Zoning	37150	3377	5307	2064	4128

The table above shows that the population per field increases significantly even for the lower estimates provided in the Demographics Report. By adding the requested fields, the numbers approach the status quo, i.e., sufficient fields for the current programming. Fields would have to be made available in other parts of the town, should programming expand.

	CERC 2009 Pop. Estimate	Total Softball & Baseball	Total Soccer, Multi- purpose	Total Fields	Total Tennis Courts
2008 Zoning	33770	2251	3752	1407	3752
Diversity Zoning	37150	2477	4128	1548	4128

Operational costs will increase about \$300,000 per year, provided all fields are natural turf. These costs are reduced, should artificial turf be used. Construction costs for the existing natural, full-sized field have been noted at \$1,500,000. However, this cost included lights, razing a building and providing \$300,000 for parking. Anticipated construction costs for the remaining 6 fields are roughly \$250,000 per acre for natural fields and \$500,000 per acre for artificial. These estimates are based prior field construction projects and reflect only costs associated with field construction, not parking or razing of existing structures. Additional parking will be needed, though. Complete costs are not yet available.

Two issues need to be considered. First, it is possible that other land could emerge that would be suitable for fields, e.g. by future land donations, land opened to such use by sewer extensions, or repurposing open space (where suitable). Should these future opportunities come to fruition, then the placement of fields at Fairfield Hills should be revisited. Second, there exists the potential for conflicts among the potential uses - for example, should 60 acres be banked for a new high school (potentially needed should the upper demographics estimates occur). This raises questions about the initial placement of the fields, willingness to transfer fields to the high school and to takeover or build replacement fields elsewhere (e.g., on the campus or in school property that becomes available). In short there is a tradeoff, re: providing the best placement of the fields in the short term vs. the risk of needing to replace them should a school be needed in the long term. From a Fairfield Hills perspective, it may mean potentially using the land banked for the school, but providing alternative land, should the school be needed.

Needs

- Two additional all purpose fields for a total of four (2 acres each)
- Two youth baseball fields, in addition to the existing two that abut the property (1.75 acres each)
- One additional adult softball field for a total of two (2 acres)
- One additional adult baseball field for a total of two (3 acres)
- Sufficient parking

Parks and Recreation “Wish List”

There is some discussion needed, re: whether these should be part of town offerings or if they might be better provided by private organizations. Note that the town provides lots of outdoor tennis courts in parks. Indoor courts may be better provided through private organizations.

- Ice rink
- Frisbee golf
- Community garden
- Gazebo
- Bocce courts
- Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing
- Picnic areas with playgrounds
- Exercise stations (already noted near trails in the existing Master Plan)
- Completion of the trails
- Dog Park (though there has been progress one providing a dog park across the street)

Points to Ponder

- The requested fields maintain the status quo in terms of persons per field, for the expected build-out populations
- Fields require access to parking and infrastructure, including adequate sanitation and water
- There is often significant opposition to situating a field near a residential neighborhood
- Currently, fields are fully utilized – there is difficulty extending further programs
- Using artificial turf and lights can extend playing hours and so accommodate more games²
- Artificial turf may not support outdoor events as well as natural turf, since the surface should not be punctured

² Whether the additional playing hours are just sufficient for adding desired programs or if they could support some portion of the expected build-out population is something that needs a second pass to estimate.