

As a result, the existing fields in our Village are in constant use. This heavy use results in very little down time for our fields which leads to overuse of our existing grass fields. Grass, by its very nature, requires periods of rest in order for it to remain healthy. Our lack of adequate field space has pushed our athletic organizations to over-schedule our grass fields in order to accommodate youth and adult sports in our community. This heavy scheduling has had an extremely deleterious effect on the surfaces of those grass fields.

In the Spring of 2022, Ridgewood's municipal grass surface fields were in such poor condition as a result of overuse, that our Parks Department closed all municipal grass fields from March 7th through May 7th-virtually the entire spring season-in an effort to allow the grass an opportunity to regenerate.

Even when all of our fields are online, many of our local sports teams are unable to schedule practices-or even games-in town and are forced to find field space out of town. We simply do not have enough fields.

Artificial turf, by its very nature, allows for continuous repetitive use by the many sports organizations in town that desperately need available playing space. It can be used every day with little, if any, maintenance thereby shouldering a far more significant proportion of the load required in a town with such limited field space. Today, there are more than 10,000 artificial turf fields in the U.S. (Exhibit M). The reasons for this are twofold, both of which center upon durability. First, as was just mentioned, artificial turf fields are durable enough to withstand the daily use demands placed upon them. Second, and just as importantly, the cost to maintain a town's many grass fields in playable condition is cost prohibitive. It is just not possible to have the equivalent of the Yankee Stadium grounds crew maintain high use fields in playable condition day after day, season after season. Which explains why there are so many artificial turf fields across the country. Sure, grass would be nice. But, where necessary, turf is absolutely necessary to get the job done.

In 2017 the Village Council formed an ad hoc committee to make recommendations regarding the future of the property (Exhibit N). That committee, comprised of many neighborhood residents, recommended the construction of a park with a small-sided 50x75 yard turf field and no baseball diamond. Notably, that recommendation included a specific brand of turf field called Field Turf CoolPlay, wherein it states, at page 10:

Committee has considered the costs and benefits of multiple field surface options and preliminarily recommends Field Turf CoolPlay artificial grass surface that allows for significantly more use; has no exposed rubber; remains significantly cooler than other artificial grass surfaces; maintains a green, manicured appearance; and is economically sensible.

Consequently, many of the same residents who object to the use of an artificial turf field today agreed, at that time, that artificial turf was necessary and acceptable.

FLOODING IMPACT

Five of Ridgewood's main full sized fields are in a flood zone (Exhibit O). When there is a major flood event, all of those fields are underwater and taken offline for up to a month while repairs are made and fields are given an opportunity to dry out. When this occurs, the playing seasons of thousands of athletes of all ages is crippled. A community that doesn't have enough fields for its children on a good

day is virtually incapacitated when a flood event occurs. This area has experienced significant flooding events many times, the most significant of which occurred on the following dates.

October 2023
April 2022
September 2021
August 2014
March 2014
August 2011
April 2007
March 2007

On October 7, 2023, the Village of Ridgewood experienced its most recent flood event when 4 of our 5 major full-sized fields were underwater in the storm that affected northern New Jersey (Exhibit P).

Unfortunately, climate change has made these super storm-flooding events more frequent as the years have gone by. We anticipate this pace will only accelerate in the future.

UNAUTHORIZED HERITAGE TREE NOMINATION TO THE DEP

Most recently, on September 19, 2023, an attorney working with one of the residents of the Schedler neighborhood, nominated a large Sugar Maple tree located on the Schedler property for Big Tree/Heritage Tree status with the DEP (Exhibit Q). In addition to making unsubstantiated claims of its historical status on the form, the attorney misrepresented that the owner of the tree had completed a Right of Access Agreement, which is required for this nomination with the DEP. As a result of this filing and misrepresentation, the DEP issued a certificate granting the Sugar Maple Heritage Tree status (Exhibit R). All of this was done without the knowledge or consent of any official of the Village of Ridgewood.

Upon learning of this unauthorized action, Village Attorney Matthew S. Rogers contacted the DEP to inform them that this filing was done without the authority or consent of the Village of Ridgewood (Exhibit S). When the DEP received Mr. Rogers' letter informing them of the misrepresentation and unauthorized filing, Joseph C. Bennett, Assistant Regional Forester in the State Parks, Forests & Historic Sites Division of the DEP, revoked the Heritage Tree status of the Sugar Maple based upon the aforementioned misrepresentation and unauthorized filing (Exhibit T).

CONCLUSIONS

At this time, the Village Council is preparing an application to SHPO to build a park and a full sized 75x110 yard multi-purpose turf field on the property. We anticipate the application will be filed within the next 30 days.

The Schedler property was purchased to alleviate the strain on the Village's sports fields. Local residents living in the neighborhood of the proposed park do not want the Village to build a larger field on the property and have made unsubstantiated claims of issues surrounding the park in an effort to delay or stop its construction. It is our hope that the documents attached hereto address all of those unsubstantiated claims and will assist you in addressing any issues arising in the future.