

## Parks & Recreation Field Needs Assessment

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BRANFORD TOWN CLERK

Branford Parks & Recreation Department recognizes a pressing need for the construction of a multi-purpose field replicating the sports facility at Branford High School. Over the past decade, Branford's sports population has grown exponentially and we need to provide facilities to accommodate the correlating increase in youth sports programs, participants and athletic teams. While previously children were introduced to athletics and sports participation during their elementary school experience, programs & leagues presently have widened their outreach to include children as young as three years of age. Branford youth lacrosse, soccer, football and cheerleading are all expanding their numbers of participants, with no physical room to grow within the confines of town fields that are already fully scheduled.

We've been fortunate in enjoying some success through expanding our reach to facilities and fields at Flax Mill Soccer Field, Patty's Park (Murphy School), Young's Pond and Branford Hills Park, which have all accommodated the increasing number of participants and teams beyond Hammer, Sliney and Veterans Fields. Foote Family Trust has allowed us to upgrade, improve and maintain the over 44 acre Foote Memorial Park. While all these parks, fields and facilities have provided solid options for Branford's athletes, there is still a need for more playing fields and recreational spaces for sports leagues to operate.

Not only are Branford's youth leagues feeling the space crunch, but Branford adult sports have become nonexistent. We have no viable options to offer sports minded adults and senior residents who want to participate in age-appropriate sports programs within Branford. For many years Branford adults have expressed interest in forming co-ed and same-gender leagues for soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, baseball and softball. It would be a great asset to the social fabric of Branford to provide adult sports leagues, teams and programs. Currently our Town's existing adult baseball and softball teams are relegated to the CT Sportsplex in North Branford. Other groups try to squeeze in pick-up games if they spot a vacant field, but more often than not those fields are scheduled for youth practices, games, clinics and camps.

Growing pains are positive indicators that our town is expanding in meeting its goals and objectives of active and passive recreational opportunities. This growth necessitates a corresponding increase of our sports acreage and athletic facilities to providing residents the opportunity, space and support required to pursue their recreational ideals. The Branford Parks & Recreation Department is committed to providing recreational opportunities through programs and facilities for all of its residents, toddlers through seniors, to experience positive leisure time and promote physical and emotional enrichment. We need additional fields and space to fulfill this promise to the residents of Branford.

The imprint for such a complex already exists at Walsh Intermediate School. Developing the existing facility would not require further land acquisition. Although in need of improvements for the design, lighting and maintenance, there is ample parking which has been expanded adjacent to the facility. Parks & Recreation has provided approximately 250K of Parks & Rec. funds to provide artificial lighting to WIS for youth football and \$250K to Hammer, Sliney Fields and Vet's Park youth soccer programs for the past thirty years. The walking/running track is popular and could be enhanced to entice adults and senior citizens to exercise on a safe, flat, well-lit track. The surrounding acreage could support a baseball field, which would be a great benefit to our growing programs, as our scheduling challenges indicate that our Town is shy at least one baseball field.

Renovating the field which already exists at the Walsh Intermediate School, and creating an innovative, modern all-sports facility for the use of a myriad of sports teams and leagues, youths and adults, organized groups and individuals, would be a solid investment and improvement for our Town, and a huge step in achieving our Department's goals to promote a healthy quality of life for our Branford's residents.