

DRAFT

Athletic and Recreational Facilities Task Force Final Report

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Members

Al Spranzo	Committee Chair, Sports Council
Jason Cohen	Director, Parks & Recreation Dept.
Norm Kaplan	Commission Member, Parks & Recreation Comm.
Greg Cordova	Selectman, Board of Selectmen
Andrew George	Board Member, Board of Education
Jeff Mathieu	Principal, School Administration
Polly Leonard	Commission Member, Commission on Aging
Kevin Burke	Athletic Director, School Administration
Mike Ryan*	Board Member, Board of Finance
Gary Avery*	Facilities Director (former), Facilities Management
Dave Sousa*	Athletic Director (former), School Administration
David Stollman*	Selectman, Board of Selectmen

*Resigned Members

Charge

To examine the athletic and recreational facilities needs of the Town of Colchester and make recommendations to meet the current and growing needs for the next ten (10) years.

Background

After recognizing the parallel efforts and interest of many diverse entities in town, which each had similar concerns about the quality and quantity of athletic and recreational

facilities in town, the Boards of Education and Selectmen jointly created a unified task force. The task force was given representation from every possible stakeholder group in Colchester, including both citizens and staff.

By charter, the task force was created for a one-year term. Upon convening, the task force developed an aggressive plan to fulfill its charge within the given year. Due to some hurdles, including lack of funding, the process was slowed, requiring that the task force be re-established for an additional year.

Phase I: Data Gathering

The task force developed a four-tiered approach to gathering input and feedback from the community with regards to current and future needs of the town: a community-wide survey, community forums, focus groups, and recommendations from a professional consultant.

Survey

The task force developed an extensive survey that measured the community's current behaviors and future desires, and correlated them with demographics. The survey was widely distributed, and available in both paper and online versions. With over 600 respondents, the survey was considered a valid sampling of the community. See the appendix for the survey and its results.

Community Forums

Following the survey, two public forums were held, where community members were given a brief overview of the task force's work to date, including a summary of the survey results (see appendix). They were also invited to ask questions and contribute more information to the task force's body of knowledge.

Focus Groups

Specific stakeholder groups were convened to get more detailed information about current needs and trends. These focus groups included: seniors, sports leagues, students, and others.

Consultant

The task force made use of the results of a report by a consultant contracted by the Parks & Recreation Department. The report examined the existing sports facilities and the current usage, and made professional recommendations on how to alleviate the current overcrowding of the facilities.

Phase II: Recommendation of Needs

Based on the massive accumulation of data, the task force developed a comprehensive, non-prioritized list of necessary new and/or improved facilities:

- Community center, to include a senior center, indoor pool and gym (approx. 40,000 sq. ft.)
- New track at Bacon Academy (BA), along with required ADA improvements
- Convert BA varsity football/soccer/lacrosse field to artificial turf, and add lighting
- Light remaining fields at the Recreation Complex
- Create additional walking/biking trails
- Build 5 additional multipurpose sports fields
- Install playgrounds at any new recreational complex

Phase III: Assessment of Site Options

While some of the recommendations were improvements to existing facilities, others required finding appropriate sites.

The task force worked with very strict criteria when considering a site:

- The land must be owned by the Town of Colchester
- The land must be developable (no easements or deed restrictions)

Within those confines, four sites were considered:

- Transfer Station, and the approximately 130 acres adjacent to it
- 11 acres off of Pleasant St, purchased by the CES Building Committee for the schools
- 2 acres adjacent to Town Hall
- 10 acres at Cohen Woodlands

In order to properly assess these sites for their feasibility in housing the necessary new facilities, the task force raised \$10,000 in donations to contract a landscape architect. After reviewing proposals and interviewing firms, Stantec (formerly Vollmer) was selected.

After nearly a year of working with Stantec, their final report has been submitted to and accepted by the task force. The following site assessments summarize their conclusions. See the attached report for complete details.

Cohen Woodlands

Immediately labeled as a last option as it was developed and earmarked as natural, open space. After community members requested a thorough investigation of the site, and much ensuing debate, this property was once again shelved as a possible site.

Town Hall

With approximately 2 acres adjacent to Town Hall, this site has been considered as a possible site for a community center, although parking would be an issue. However, it may potentially be used as a senior center only.

Pleasant Street

Having been purchased by the schools with State money, it is required that the site have school uses. There have been varying opinions on the possibility of developing this property, which has many issues including extensive wetlands and steep, rocky terrain. Should it be determined that there is enough usable space that can be developed in a cost effective manner, it would be a good site for sports fields. It could also serve as a possible location for a community center.

Transfer Station

With its sprawling property along the Colchester Spur of the Air Line Trail, many portions of the site seem ripe for development. The possibility of an entirely new recreation complex seems eminently feasible, though there are some environmental issues, such as former landfills, wetlands, and power lines.

Final Recommendations

Priorities

Top Priorities

Rebuild Bacon Academy Track

Indoor Pool

Community/Senior Center

High Priorities

5 new multipurpose sports fields

Third Tier Priorities

Install Artificial Turf and Lights at BA Track

Complete lighting at RecPlex

Fourth Tier Priorities

Expand trail system

Install playgrounds

Implementation

The projects can be bundled together by priority level. The top priorities could be developed as one package, with a combination of funding, possibly to include Town bonding, community fundraising and State appropriations. While it has come to light that the old Colchester Intermediate School may become available to retrofit as a community/senior center/pool, the task force also recommends the Pleasant Street and Town Hall properties, in that order, as possible alternate locations, due to their proximity to the center of town, and the potential use of the center by students during the day.

It should be noted that, while installing artificial turf and lights at the BA track is not a top priority, it would be most cost effective and least problematic to do these

improvements at the same time as the rebuilding of the track.. This option would also partially fill the need for additional fields in town.

While Stantec's report shows many fields marked out at the various sites, these are simply examples of what could be accomplished on each piece of property. Any actual plan would require an in-depth analysis of the site, including site surveys and soil analysis.

Should it be shown that the Pleasant Street property can feasibly hold one or more sports fields, that would be the most highly recommended site to begin meeting the need for more fields. The next best site would be the extensive Transfer Station property area. In either case, the task force recommends working with the Cody Camp Memorial Field Foundation to jointly fulfill the goals of both entities.

As recommended in the Town's Open Space Plan, and echoed in the Stantec report, additional trails can and should be developed that connect the various schools and parks in town, expanding the ability for the community to take advantage of healthy alternatives to driving to local attractions.

Should any sizeable complex develop, it would be appropriate to include playgrounds at each new site.