

## Poet's Corner Potential Improvement Project

Over the past few years, there have been conversations about the possibility of significant improvements at the Town-owned recreational property, known as Poet's Corner, and the property adjacent to it owned by the Archdiocese of Boston (aka St. Camillus Church).

### A brief history of Poet's Corner

In the 1940s and 1950s, the Town-owned property known as Poet's Corner was used as a dump/landfill. In the early 1970s, this use was discontinued, and the landfill was capped. This was prior to current Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) standards (which makes any redevelopment of this site more challenging). The current athletic field, playground, basketball court, and now defunct tennis courts were built at that time.

When the site was developed, there was a need for youth baseball fields and the sloping outer property lines weren't considered much of an issue for young players. Since then, other field sports (ie soccer, lacrosse, ultimate frisbee), girls' athletics and the need for multi-generational recreation have exploded, and the Town has had to utilize the outfield at Poet's for a variety of activities. In its current configuration and condition, Poet's Corner is not particularly well-suited to the recreational needs of today.

The area adjacent to this recreational property is owned by the Archdiocese of Boston and has been used as a town snow farm, for construction staging for various projects, as an unofficial parking area, and for unauthorized illegal dumping. The church's half of the parcel has remained untouched for over 70 years and is in a unique position to potentially augment the Town's Open Space and Recreational assets. Currently, Poet's Corner athletic field, playground, and natural open space are in desperate need of renovation and additional parking.

### Looking to the Future

Over the years, the Town has had multiple conversations with the Church about this property. Most recently, the Director of Recreation and some members of the Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) have had conversations with Father Marc Bishop of St. Camillus/St. Agnes Churches and the Belmont Hill School (BHS) administration about a possible partnership to develop the entire parcel of land located at the corner of Dow Ave and Wadsworth Road (Route 2 access road). BHS is proposing to buy the church land and fund a project that preserves recreational open space on the combined Church and Town properties.

The goal being discussed would be to create much-needed shared athletic fields, a new playground, walking trails, a basketball court, and other public site and environmental improvements. A new parking lot with improved access is also part of the project discussion.

*This multi-million dollar project would be funded in its entirety by the Belmont Hill School -* thanks to the Archdiocese of Boston's agreement in principle to sell their portion of the land to BHS in exchange for all parties to agree to shared use with Arlington Catholic High School and St. Agnes School. The Town of Arlington would still own its portion of the site and through its

Recreation Department would be able to use and schedule the field use, much like it does with many other fields in town. The other amenities of the project would be available for public use.

*The Impact of a Moratorium on the use of Artificial Turf*

Ten registered voters placed Article 12 on the warrant for this year's Town Meeting. It seeks to impose a multi-year blanket moratorium on the use of artificial turf in town and to create an Artificial Turf Study Committee with restrictions on voting members. If Article 12 were to pass, the Poet's project CANNOT move forward, and the church has indicated that the property will be sold to the highest bidder.

At its hearing on this warrant article, the Select Board unanimously voted "No action." The Town Manager spoke against this article, citing existing boards, commissions, and processes that exist to evaluate any projects put forward. The proponents of Article 12 have indicated that they will move a similar substitute motion on the floor of Town Meeting. The PRC would like Town Meeting Members to understand the impact if a moratorium passes.

It is one of the PRC's missions to maintain all Open Space and Recreation properties to encourage recreational opportunities within the community for all ages and abilities. If a moratorium on the use of artificial turf passes, there is no guarantee that the church portion of the Poet's property will remain open space or that the Town will have the necessary financial resources to restore its piece of the Poet's property and enhance the recreational benefit it provides

Unpredictable New England weather, rainy springs, and snowy winters have a significant impact on the condition of our fields and our ability to maintain and keep them open. Unfortunately, this affects scheduling, cancellations, and delays of activities for user groups, youth sports, and community enjoyment. Due to its large population and limited open space, Arlington does not have enough available athletic fields to allow overused grass fields, whether treated organically or not, to "rest and recover". This is directly due to the high volume of field users in the Town of Arlington. The ability to rest athletic fields periodically is essential for the long-term sustainability and maintainability of our fields. Having a few, well-chosen sites that can support the installation of synthetic (aka artificial) turf can help mitigate this.

This potential Poet's Corner project would require the installation of synthetic turf fields. With synthetic turf, New England weather would have less of an impact on field conditions which in turn would allow the Recreation Department to open fields earlier in the season to all user groups and rest some grass fields, as needed.

It has been proven that more playing time, physical activity, and fresh air benefit mental health and cognitive development in children and adolescents. In this post-Covid world, we believe that this is a critical concern and want to provide increased opportunities for these pursuits.

We understand that there are questions and concerns about the use of synthetic turf in our community. We are working with experts on both sides of the issue, along with the relevant Town Boards/Commissions/the Town Manager/Town Staff, and members of the public in a process that currently exists and has been used on prior projects. We will listen to the concerns raised and take these into consideration to determine what's best for the community.

**We are asking you to show your support by contacting your Town Meeting Members and asking them to vote NO on any Article 12 substitute motion that would slow the process of evaluating the Poet's project.** This will help us move forward with this incredible, yet time-sensitive, opportunity for the Town of Arlington. Evaluating it already includes ensuring that any environmental/conservation and/or health concerns are addressed and mitigated - just like those that had to be addressed for the Arlington High School, Arlington Catholic, and Hurd field projects. It would be a sad day for the Town if the Poet's evaluation were short-circuited and this precious open space sold to a private entity.

We invite you to attend our Turf Field Forum on May 2, 2023, 7:00–9:30 pm in the Town Hall Auditorium, which will feature a panel of experts, discussing all aspects of synthetic turf fields. Attached please find answers to frequently asked questions about synthetic turf fields.

We hope you will support the Park and Recreation Commission in our continuing efforts to create safe recreational opportunities for our community.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Click on the [Town of Arlington Website](#) for more details.

**WANT TO SUPPORT THE POET'S CORNER PROJECT?**

Step 1: Attend the Town Turf Forum on May 2<sup>nd</sup> at Town Hall 7pm- 9:30pm. After hearing the presentation, voice your support.

Step 2: Click [here](#) to find your Town Meeting Members.

Step 3: Put together your talking points and email the Town Meeting Members in your home precinct. Include your street address at the end of your email. Key points to mention are that you oppose any moratorium on synthetic turf and support the redevelopment of Poets Corner into a community park in conjunction with Belmont Hill School.

Sincerely,

The Arlington Park and Recreation Commission

Phil Lasker, Chairperson

Scott Walker, Vice-Chairperson

Shirley Canniff

Leslie Mayer

Jen Rothenberg

## **PARK & RECREATION COMMISSION- TURF FAQ**

### **1. What are synthetic turf systems comprised of?**

- a. Synthetic turf systems are typically comprised of a drainage stone base, shock attenuation pad, turf carpet, and infill. The turf carpet typically consists of polyethylene fibers stitched into a polypropylene primary backing and polyurethane secondary backing, very similar to a shag carpet in your house. This carpet is traditionally infilled with sand and crumb rubber made of recycled car tires. A shock attenuation pad is often used between the stone drainage base and turf carpet to provide resiliency and safety for the athletes.

### **2. Are synthetic turf fields safe for our children?**

- a. Yes. More than 50 independent studies from groups such as the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, and statewide governmental agencies have validated the safety of synthetic turf.

### **3. Games and practices are constantly being canceled because of rain, sometimes several hours if not days after a rain event, how would a synthetic turf field help?**

- a. Synthetic turf fields can be played on immediately after a rain event. They can handle play literally 24/7 year-round with lights. Adding a synthetic turf field takes the pressure off our natural turf fields thereby improving their conditions of them.

### **4. I've heard that synthetic turf fields cause more injuries than natural grass fields. Is that true?**

- a. This misconception came from news reports from NFL coaches and players. The NFL recently released its latest data that shows that is not true. Synthetic turf fields create a consistent playing surface that is far superior to our natural turf fields in Town in terms of safety, performance, and durability. Synthetic turf field specifications typically require rigorous testing procedures to ensure this at installation and sometimes throughout the life of the warranty, unlike a natural turf field.

### **5. Are there benefits to the environment in converting a natural grass field to synthetic turf?**

- a. Yes. One synthetic turf field is the equivalent of three natural grass fields in terms of use. This prevents other open spaces from being converted to fields. They are also great for stormwater management since the drainage stone base can be designed to act as a storage system, along with the added benefit of groundwater recharge. They also eliminate the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and irrigation and have reduced maintenance requirements.

### **6. Do synthetic turf fields require maintenance?**

- a. Yes, but it is minimal in comparison to natural turf. There is no weekly mowing, irrigation, fertilization and lining of the fields required. It is estimated that the maintenance requirements on a synthetic turf field is about ½ that of a natural turf field. This would help with the limited maintenance budget we have in Town.

### **7. How long does a synthetic turf field last?**

- a. Fields are warranted for 8 years but with proper maintenance and testing they can last longer than that. The drainage stone base infrastructure is reused when replacement is required and in some cases, the shock pad and infill are as well.

### **8. Can synthetic turf fields be recycled?**

- a. Yes. The infill is often recycled and reused in the new field. There are manufacturing plants opening in the US for recycling the entire system. One manufacturer is already accepting fields and using the material to make shock pads. The carpet is also being recycled into plastic lumber products.

**9. Don't many of the surrounding communities have synthetic turf fields?**

- a. Yes. Many surrounding communities have and continue to install synthetic turf fields. Waltham, Lexington, Winchester, Medford, and Somerville to name a few. Many of these were permitted through their Conservation Commissions.

**10. I've heard synthetic turf contains PFAS. Is that a problem?**

- a. Based on recent testing most PFAS compounds tested for were not detectable in synthetic turf from the manufacturer. No PFAS compounds were detected at concentrations above MassDEP standards. No other PFAS compounds were detected at concentrations that would cause a contact or leaching concern to groundwater or surface water. PFAS concentrations that typically occur in the soil as a background condition were higher than PFAS concentrations in synthetic turf from the manufacturer. Because of perceived concerns, manufacturers are now moving away from using PFAS. As a Town, we can require that the synthetic turf be tested and certified as non-detect as defined in EPA Method 537 and California Proposition 65.

**11. Don't many common household products contain types PFAS?**

- a. Yes. PFAS are everywhere. Any extruded plastic fiber uses PFAS as a processing aid. They are often used in stain and water-resistant products like outdoor clothing, carpeting, sandwich wrappers, camping tents, non-stick cookware, and cosmetics. They are also used as firefighting foams and for medical purposes like sutures, stints, and meshes.

**12. I've heard the temperatures of these fields can get hot. Are they safe to play on?**

- a. Synthetic turf fields are used all over the world and in places like Texas, California, and Arizona where sun and heat are much more problematic than they are here. Our sports seasons are in the spring and fall when the temperatures are cooler. Most sports organizations (MIAA, MYSA, etc.) have recommendations to modify play when there is a possibility of a dangerously high heat index.

**13. Is a synthetic turf field a heat island?**

- a. No. Synthetic turf does not 'hold heat'. They return to the same temperature as natural turf with a loss of daytime heating. As compared to asphalt, brick, and masonry, synthetic turf cools much quicker with the loss of daytime heating.

**14. Is crumb rubber safe?**

- a. Yes. There are more than 110 technical studies conducted by academic, private, and government entities that have found little or no significant health risk.

**15. Do the fields at Arlington High School and Arlington Catholic use crumb rubber?**

- a. Yes.

**16. Are the new fields at Arlington High School going to use crumb rubber?**

- a. Yes. This was approved by the Conservation Commission in 2020.

**17. What other products use crumb rubber?**

- a. Crumb rubber is used for playground surfacing, running track surfacing, gym flooring, and rubberized asphalt paving.

**18. How does crumb rubber impact the environment?**

- a. More than 90 percent of scrap tires are being recycled instead of dumped in landfills. It is estimated that crumb rubber infill used in synthetic turf fields diverts about 30 million used tires from landfills and conserves billions of gallons of water by reducing the need to irrigate and avoids the use of fertilizers and pesticides.

**19. Are there natural alternative infills to crumb rubber?**

- a. Yes. Pine, cork, coconut husks and walnut shells are being used. They typically require a little more maintenance but are also cooler temperature-wise than crumb rubber.

**20. I heard there's a plan to redevelop Poets Corner into turf fields as part of a public partner partnership with the Archdioceses and Belmont Hill School. Can you provide more information about this?**

- a. Yes. This plan has been in the works for some time now. It includes a full-size baseball/soccer/lacrosse field on the church property (St. Camillus). This is the land that is currently the parking lot and wooded area. It also includes a little league baseball/soccer/lacrosse field on the Town property along with a half basketball court, a new playground, walking paths, and a parking lot. Much of the wooded area would be preserved as well. This project would create access and increased uses for all ages and would be fully funded by Belmont Hill School.

**21. What would happen to the church property if this partnership doesn't happen?**

- a. The Archdiocese is planning to sell the church property to the highest bidder. It would be a reasonable expectation that a developer would propose a housing development for that site. The opportunity for the Town to have an expanded park and field space would be lost.

**22. I heard that Poets Corner is a former landfill. Is that correct?**

- a. Yes. That's why this partnership is a tremendous opportunity to clean it up and create additional park and field space for community use, not a housing development that would put more of a burden on our school system.

**23. Do the youth sports organizations in Arlington support the use of synthetic turf and the redevelopment of Poets?**

- a. Yes, and yes! Arlington Soccer Club, Arlington Youth Lacrosse and Arlington Youth Baseball and Softball Association all support the use of synthetic turf and the redevelopment of Poets.