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Letter: Town of Westfield, Schools Should Work to Upgrade All BOE Fields, Councilman Writes



Opinion

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

TAPinto Westfield File Photo

By COUNCILMAN MARK LOGRIPPO
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In February 2018, only a month into her term, Mayor Brindle [canceled the Town's proposed Tamaques Park field improvement plan](#), a proposal that would have renovated and added additional field space with lights to Tamaques Park. At the time, Mayor Brindle said she only needed a year to propose a new plan for additional field space. Well here we are, almost five years later, and her tardy proposal is a mess.

In the coming weeks, the Westfield Town Council and Board of Education (BOE) will be voting on entering into a Shared Services Agreement for turf fields behind Edison Intermediate School. It is estimated that the project will cost \$9 million, for which the Town Council will vote to issue bonds sometime in 2023. Even though it will be the Town of Westfield and not the BOE paying for the Edison project, the money is all coming from Westfield taxpayers.

Unfortunately, the BOE is not able to stay within the 2% tax increase cap mandated by the state, so they have [moved their school board elections](#) and budget vote from this November to April 2023 to avoid the cap. Most likely, the BOE will be asking our residents for a 4% to 5% BOE tax increase. In my opinion, the BOE should be focused on providing all-day Kindergarten and not laying off teachers like they did at the end of the 2022 school year.

To make matters worse, the Town Council has already voted to give Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) deals to the new Westfield Crossing development on South Avenue, near the Garwood border, and will soon vote to give a similar tax break to the Streetworks project downtown.

PILOT payments do not include any contribution to the school budget. The BOE should have been included in the Westfield Crossing PILOT agreement, and should be included in the Streetworks PILOT, so that those developers pay their fair share toward the school budget and allow the BOE to upgrade all their field facilities and maintain their current staff.

In addition to the tax consequences, the current Edison turf fields plan is problematic for other reasons. It does not address any additional parking spaces in an already congested area. This is especially concerning because it is estimated that another 1,000 vehicles a day will enter Westfield as a result of the Streetworks development. In addition, if lights are installed at the Edison fields, the BOE may not be able to avoid calls for lights at Kehler Stadium, which is already turfed.

Finally, before the Town Council and BOE vote on the Edison project, residents should be made aware of a new proposal for Tamaques Park. In early 2021, Mayor Brindle asked Union County to include 7.5 acres of wooded area in Tamaques Park along Lamberts Mill Road in the County's Master Parks Plan. The details of the possible turnover of the Town's property to the County have [yet to be publicly revealed](#), and may impact the Edison project.

My children both have grown up playing field sports in Westfield, and I understand first-hand the need for additional and improved field space. However, I would like to see the Town of Westfield and the BOE work together to upgrade all our school fields, not just to create a giant sports complex in a single neighborhood. And we should not give away either park property to the County or tax breaks to developers who will not fund our schools. If you agree, please let your voice be heard.

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