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Good afternoon,

Mayor Fuller has asked me to provide an update to the recipients of this email as I am overseeing the important fields improvement effort for the City. As some may not have as much background on this effort, I'll touch on the history and steps taken to date, as well as future work.

It's been quite the 9 months getting acclimated as the new Parks, Recreation and Culture Commissioner (PRC) and I could not have asked for a better team to join. Despite COVID-19 impacting PRC's programming and our ability to open some of our facility doors to Newtonians, the PRC team has been focused on laying the groundwork for many exciting and much needed infrastructure improvements. For a few examples, we are currently working on proposals to restore Gath Pool, improve Crystal Lake's Levingston Cove grounds, trail improvements at Auburndale Cove-Lyons Field, and (with much anticipation) develop and implement a multi-year plan to improve our athletic playing fields.

It is well accepted that Newton's playing fields need attention and funding to bring them up to a condition that we can all be proud to provide to the community. In fact, previous Commissioner Bob Derubeis and Mayor Fuller increased fields maintenance funding in the City's 2021 budget, though unfortunately, it had to be scaled back in light of the serious fiscal fallout due to COVID-19. I know the Mayor is committed to these increased funds as soon as City finances permit.

Both the Mayor and I realize that there is an enormous amount of work to do on our athletic fields. The Parks & Recreation Commission also agrees with this assessment. Though past efforts were made to plan maintenance and capital improvements, we never achieved full consensus among the stakeholders. Nevertheless, the Mayor and I agree that that should not stand in the way of progress and that we should work with the Commission and others to devise a path forward and move ahead with this important work.

Just before summer, the Parks and Recreation Commission reestablished the Fields Committee, comprised of 3 commission members who work alongside PRC staff and sport group leaders to study ways to improve field conditions. All meetings are held publicly, and I've had the opportunity to present an update on this effort to the City Council's Programs and Services Committee. (The minutes from that meeting can be found by clicking [here](#).)

One of the challenges of working in a city the size of Newton with so many people passionate about our fields is getting information out to everyone who might be interested. To help get more people up to speed, below are five areas we have been focused on in the Fields Committee, and the critical subtopics we are studying.

- Fields Maintenance: Understanding the budget (past, current, future), seasonal field work, irrigation systems, and targeted pest management
- Field Fees: Evaluating options, looking at neighboring community fee structures, and exploring setting up a revolving fund so that fees might be used to improve playing field conditions
- Scheduling: Examining how different scheduling might allow groups to have more time on the fields

- Field Improvement Projects: Soliciting input from all stakeholders on suggestions for work, from small improvements to large capital projects, with a heavy focus on gathering input over the coming two months
- Financing Field Improvements: Identifying the various funding sources available for fields improvement work and ways to more efficiently maintain fields to better utilize resources

I am happy to share that the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department has Mayor Fuller's support to start moving field renovation projects forward for CPA funding as early as this year; we will focus primarily on those projects that will provide the best bang for the buck in meeting our goals for our fields. Projects that improve turf conditions through integrated pest management (IPM) and installing irrigation systems will go a long way. In addition, we must challenge ourselves to explore projects that will bring about additional, greater desired outcomes as well. For example, one way to improve playing conditions (e.g. Albemarle's field has heavily worn out turf) is to offload some of its scheduling to other fields. In order to accomplish this, we will identify flat open space areas in our parks that might be reconditioned to allow for additional, or greater, athletic use. Additionally, we can explore reconfiguring existing fields to add additional playing space, thereby reducing overuse.

I'm grateful that the sport groups have been understanding of my need, given I'm new to Newton, to review all of the data, see the fields, understand their condition, get to know the needs and hear from each of them directly. I can see that each sport group is invested in this initiative and I appreciate their cooperative efforts for the mutual benefit of all field users. There are clearly a lot of components to tackle in the overall fields improvement effort, including capital projects which will be a many-year effort. Fortunately, we can focus on some smaller or mid-scale field renovations throughout this time to bring noticeable and impactful projects to completion.

In addition to these near-term projects, we will devise a multi-year plan to improve all of our playing fields. I am most confident that this Fields Committee effort will result in the PRC Department being able to develop and implement a Fields Improvement Master Plan.

I will keep the full Parks and Recreation Commission and the Programs and Services Committee apprised of our progress and continue to engage with sports groups and other interested residents and neighbors.

Thank you again for your commitment to Newton field users in many sports and across many ages and for your encouragement for improved field outcomes.

Sincerely,

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