

Portland Town Park: Answers for Frequently Asked Questions

1. What was done to ensure that the Public's opinion was heard and included in this design?

Committee: While working on the design, the Committee incorporated the results of questionnaire that had been previously done by the Parks & Recreation department and from a survey that was offered online during the design phase. In addition, the Committee held a town meeting open to the public back in October 2013 to gather public comments. All Committee meetings have been open to the public so that residents could come and voice their thoughts and opinions. The agenda and minutes of these meetings are posted on the town web site. Representatives of the Committee and the Parks & Recreation Commission have given presentations on the project to a number of private organizations (Exchange Club, Library, school open houses, Family Day, Portland Little League, Portland Soccer Club) as well as to the Board of Selectman throughout the project.

2. Why doesn't the new complex have a pool or a dog park in it?

Committee: From the surveys that were done to evaluate the opinion of the town on what services are desired, it was clear to the committee that having a pool or dog park in town was high on the list. However, it was discussed and decided that there were better locations in town to provide these services. The Committee felt that a splash pad would provide a type of facility that is now popular in a number of other towns and would extend relief to the town's youth during the hot summer.

3. Why does it have more soccer fields, don't we already have enough soccer fields in town?

Committee: At this time the Portland Soccer Club relies heavily on the usage of leased property at the YMCA property at Camp Ingersol. The club does not have a home field and is moved all over town depending on what fields are available for that season. In the past there has been vandalism done at Camp Ingersol on the soccer fields, events that impacted soccer games. In addition, there is the need for work on the fields at the YMCA and the town is adverse to spending money on property it does not own. Town school's fields have filled in some of the fields' needs but access to these fields is limited due to school usage.

In addition, the nature of youth sports has changed and outdoor sports such as soccer and baseball are now played throughout the year. As a result, these sports have outdoor practices and games played in spring, summer and fall. So the old adage of one sport per season no longer applies. Current facilities are set up to handle 1 season for a sport. As a result more field space is required and the necessary downtime for existing fields to recover and be rehabilitated is being greatly reduced.

4. Doesn't Portland have enough soccer fields in town with Oakwood?

Committee: There is a common misconception in town about the fields at Oakwood and their availability to town soccer players. The Oakwood soccer fields are privately owned by the Oakwood Soccer Club. They are not provided for use to the town of Portland and can only be used if you are part of a team that has paid for that access.

5. Why does it have more baseball fields, don't we already have enough baseball fields in town?

Committee: As is the case with the Portland Soccer Club, the Portland Little League also relies on the use of leased property, Tomasso Field. This field is in need of repair and the town is averse to spending money on property it does not own. The field lacks adequate parking and has to be locked to keep out individuals from using the field for non-baseball activities but still is often littered. In addition, given its location it would make more sense to see if the property can be used for commercial usage instead as that seems to have a more favorable impact to the town.

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6. Will the new park have portable toilets or permanent bathrooms?

Committee: The new park will have permanent bathrooms.

7. Will it be safe for kids to play at the park given all the pesticides that were previously used on the property?

Committee: The committee as well as the town is fully aware of the pesticides on this property. The property had been tested for pesticide levels when it was considered for the site of a new school back in 2001. Additional testing has been performed during the current design effort, which has confirmed the presence of residual pesticides. The current plans include provisions to isolate soil containing residual pesticides and prevent park users from potential contact with the pesticides. The town intends to seek approval of the contaminated soil management strategy from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP).

8. Will the traffic on Strickland Street increase and will there be more parking in the local neighborhoods?

Committee: Prior to this committee's efforts to create a design plan for a park on this property, there had been complaints of speeding on Strickland Street

as cars left Route 17. There had been some discussion to cul-de-sac Strickland Street. But due to safety concerns in the event of emergencies, it was decided to leave Strickland Street open to the neighborhoods. The subsequent design is one that should reduce the speed of traffic coming into the neighborhood.

With regards to parking, the park design plan accommodates 226 parking spaces, a number considered to handle the expected traffic. It is also designed in such a manner to handle bus traffic. Secondary parking areas are also available within the design.

9. We already have playgrounds at the schools, why do we need another one at this park?

Committee: Current playgrounds reside on school properties and as such the schools have priority usage of these facilities. The addition of a playground at this park will allow parents in town to bring their children to play without the concern of having to leave the equipment. In addition, parents with children using the other parts of the park will have a section to bring their younger children during park events.

10. I live in the adjoining neighborhood, am I going to hear all the noise now from the park?

Committee: A buffer of trees and other appropriate foliage will be planted along the southern section of the property, the primary property line that is abutting any residential housing. The layout of the park was designed to keep roadways and the most intensively used portions of the park away from the southern border. The Committee and Design Engineer firm are confident that these steps will mitigate potential noise affects to the adjoining neighborhood.

11. Are there going to be lights now shining in the park until late in the evening?

Committee: At this time there is no plan to install lights. Conduits will be installed on the property to facilitate installation of lighting in the future. In the event that lighting was to be installed, the newer more efficient lighting fixtures would be used. These fixtures are more energy-efficient and reduce the excess light in order to minimize impact to surrounding neighborhoods. The town would seek further input from the public prior to installing lights.

12. It seems that synthetic turf fields handle greater usage than grass fields that do not hold up as well against 3-season usage. Why are we not installing turf?

Committee: There was much discussion on synthetic turf and original design plans did include synthetic turf fields. However, feedback received by the Committee suggested that the large initial cost for installation of synthetic turf might endanger the viability of building the park.

13. What will be done to ensure that illegal activities will not be taking place at this park?

Committee: The park will have gated entrances to prevent vehicles from entering during park off-hours. Security cameras are also planned so that the park can be watched for illegal activity and provide evidence if illegal activity occurs.

14. The park seems to be just baseball and soccer fields. What does it offer those not involved with those activities?

Committee: Although the park is trying to address the fields' shortage in town, it has much more to offer. The playground and splash pad will offer activities to the younger children. The recreation barn could offer an opportunity to hold supervised events such as movies for tweens and teens. It could also house the Park & Rec summer programs and camps, taking pressure off our schools in the summer. It would allow children to do multiple summer sports camps as they could be held in the same location.

There will be a walking trail circuit of 0.75 miles, hiking trails in back and an 8 station exercise loop that will provide passive recreation to the adults. And in the winter the park could be used for sledding, cross-country skiing and ice-skating.

15. Will the wildlife currently inhabiting the property be adversely impacted?

Committee: The Park & Rec/Planning & Zoning departments had a study done on the wildlife & plants on the property (Kelly Starr, Natural Resource Specialist Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District). The study showed with recommended steps in the design that there would be minimal impact to the wildlife & plants. The engineering firm also reviewed the DEEP's Natural Diversity Database and did not see anything that suggested that an NDDP review would be needed.

The park facilities will be largely in the open land currently being used for agriculture. The upland portion of the property to the east and the wetlands to the north provide most of the habitat and biodiversity on the parcel. These areas will remain largely unaffected by the construction of the park facilities.