



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

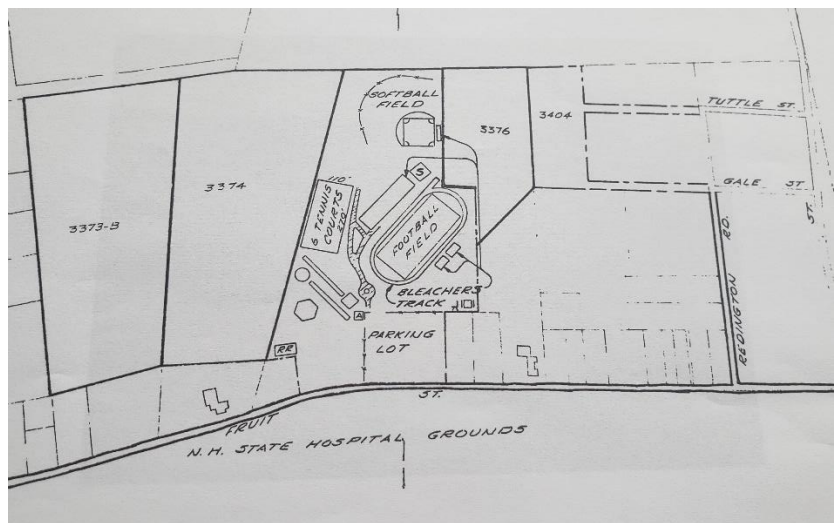
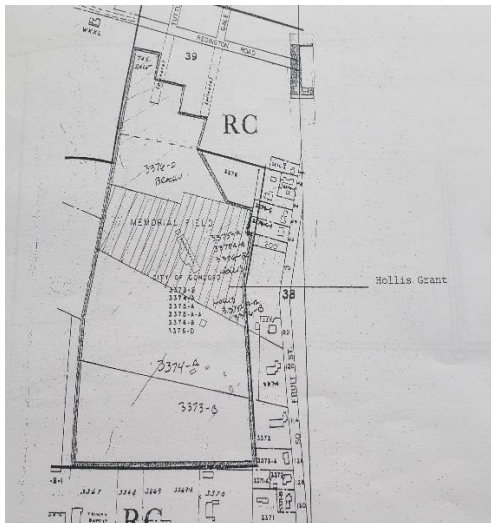
FROM: David Gill, Parks and Recreation Director

DATE: 10/31/2024

SUBJECT: Memorial Field Master Plan Update

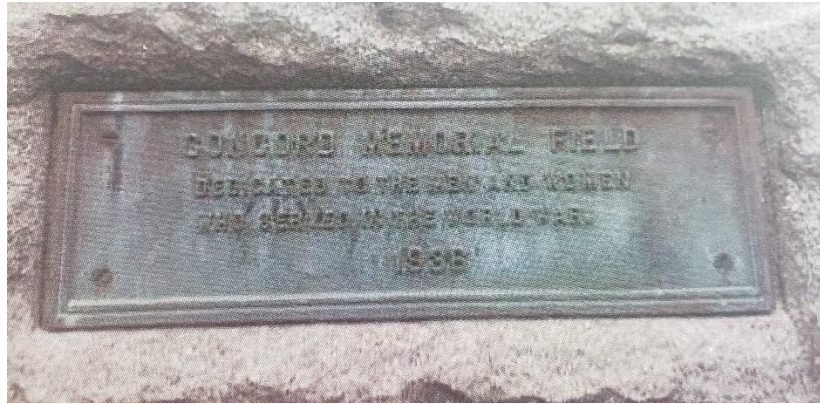
History

Memorial Field Complex has been used as a City Park since 1926 when two tracts of land were conveyed to the City by Allen Hollis for the use of amateur athletic fields. As part of the donation a bronze tablet was to be placed dedicating these two tracts as a memorial to the Concord boys who lives were sacrificed in the World War. The Memorial Field complex is now made up of approximately 14 separate tracks of land over the 36-acre park.



Allen Hollis land donation and the original park amenities

Original facilities included six clay tennis courts, a cinder track, football field and softball field. In 1933 the city installed the first grandstands on the football field, in 1936 the baseball field opened and in the same year a marker was installed at the site dedicated to the men and women who served in The World War. In 1945 the first night football game was held (with portable lights) and in 1947 permanent athletic field lights were install for the football field.

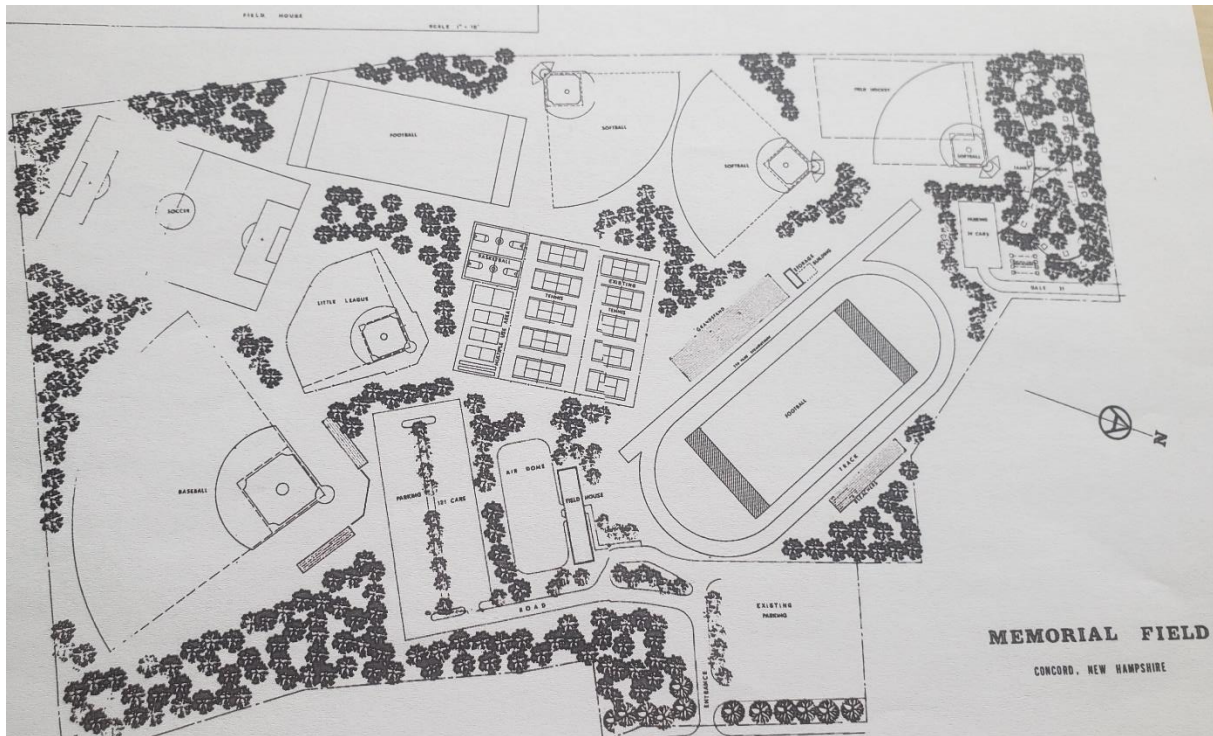


In 1971 City Council funded a feasibility study for Memorial Field to look at the expanding needs of outdoor recreation in the community. An excerpt from the feasibility study are as follows: “Since Memorial Field is the athletic field for the city’s high schools and plays a prominent part in the summer recreation as well, it is necessary for the city to either improve it or replace it”. The latter was rejected since it was determined that adequate land could be acquired to expand and that wetness could be controlled through proper field drainage.

In order to implement expansion needs, additional land was acquired around this same time. The State of NH deeded 9.5 acres for the expressed purpose of expansion of the city’s athletic facilities and another 12.3 acres was purchased with the help of Land and Water Conservation Grant and city funds.

The city undertook an expansion and improvement plan to enlarge the complex that included site underground drainage system, general site improvements and adding fields for: softball, soccer and practice football field, an improved football stadium and new track. At the time of these renovations the two football fields were not made large enough to hold soccer games nor anticipated to be used for lacrosse. The current size of the two football fields limits the use as we cannot fit regulation soccer or lacrosse fields on them.

Interesting to note the 1970s Memorial Field Expansion layout of the complex also included amenities like a field hockey field, an indoor field house with showers, dressing rooms, weight lifting equipment and coaches’ rooms and expanding parking. These amenities were never built.



Master Plan from early 1970s

Over the years the facility grew in size from a small park with a football, softball, track and baseball field to complex that now includes softball fields, multipurpose soccer/lacrosse fields, ten tennis courts, two basketball courts, walking paths and a little league field. The facility also has small maintenance building with public bathrooms. Memorial Field complex is used as the main athletic field complex for Concord High School athletic teams as well as community youth/adult leagues and numerous special events. Over the years the complex has hosted many NHIAA Tournaments, Babe Ruth World Series for baseball and softball as well as numerous championship teams for Concord High School.

During the past ten years the city has invested almost \$800,000 to improve the ten tennis courts, baseball field press box and an engineering study for the baseball and football field bleachers. However, in the years ahead, the complex will require significant investment to improve the drainage of the entire site, new bathrooms and maintenance building, improve general field conditions, bleacher replacement for football field, major renovations to baseball field bleachers, field lighting upgrades and full renovation of the existing walking/running track and related site improvements.

Memorial Field is located in a natural bowl as it is approximately 18 feet below street level of Fruit Street and the surrounding private homes. The area in red is the general area of the wettest conditions in the park and is the general location of the contours measuring 290 feet above sea level. As a reference the varsity football field sits at 294 feet above sea level and overall drains well.



Area in red are fields with the worse drainage issues and is the general area of site improvements in the 1970's.

During the winter of 2022/23 City and School District leadership met to review options for Memorial Field Complex and to explore opportunities to work together on needed improvements. Both groups agreed the first step in the planning phase is to work together and bring in a vendor to help evaluate the existing site, develop a new mater plan for the site and a plan for future joint investments.

As part of the Facility Condition and Master Planning phase there was a review of soil conditions, site drainage (the early 1970s underground field drainage system is no longer working), recommended field and site improvements, new track layout, review if the site can support the addition of an artificial turf field and other needed amenities. As part of this phase there were also public meetings to listen to wants and needs of our residents.

In 2023 City Council and Concord School Board jointly funded a Master Planning Process. The cost of \$141,900 was shared equally between the city and school.

Discussion

As part of the project an internal working team was established with staff from the City and School District. City staff involved included: Tom Aspell Jr, David Gill, Laura Bryant, Jay Burgess, Beth Fenstermacher and School District employees included: Katheryn Murphy, Jack Dunn, Matt Cashman, Tim Herbert and Steve Largy.

The city created a web page to keep our residents informed throughout the planning process. The web site includes information on the history of the complex, videos of community meetings and all PowerPoints. Our web site for the project is: <https://www.concordnh.gov/1943/Memorial-Field-Master-Planning>

During the public meetings and student listening sessions there was full agreement the complex is past its prime and a major renovation is required. The major improvement needs for the complex are:

- Address all drainage issues
- Improve field lights
- Replace all aging bleacher
- Increase onsite parking
- Increase accessibility
- Replace track with full size field (all sports)
- Keep all current uses plus bring field hockey to complex
- Add athletic field outside of track for concurrent use
- Improve bathrooms, add locker rooms
- Keep/improve walking trails and cross-country ski trails.

Working with our consultants VNB and Huntress Sports we developed several concepts for consideration and presented the recommended Master Plan at the second public meeting. The internal City/School working group also reviewed recommended Master Plan.

The proposed new Master Plan along with cost estimates was formally presented to the Concord School Board on October 7, 2024.

As part of this report city staff will give a presentation to City Council.

Recommendation

Ask City Administration to work with Concord School District Administration to discuss next steps and possible funding for the final design, traffic study and permitting for the new park master plan and report back to City Council. If agreement can be reached the final design process will take 12 months.