

ADDITIONAL FAQs FOR EDISON FIELDS

What specifically will be voted on in the referendum?

In simple terms, a YES vote will move the Edison Fields project forward, and a NO vote will stop the project. Residents will vote on whether or not to approve the \$11.8M bond ordinance that will fund this project, which was approved by the Town Council on May 23, 2023.

The precise legal wording is governed by New Jersey State statute, N.J.S.A. 40:49-10, which provides the form of the proposition question as it must appear on the ballot:

To vote upon the public question printed below if in favor thereof mark a cross (X) or plus (+) in the square at the left of the word YES, and if opposed thereto mark a cross (X) or plus (+) in the square at the left of the word NO.

Shall an ordinance of the governing body of the Town of Westfield Entitled “A Bond Ordinance to Authorize the Undertaking of the Edison School Multipurpose Fields Project In, By and For the Town of Westfield, in the County of Union, State of New Jersey To Appropriate the Sum of \$11,800,000 to Pay the Cost Thereof, To Make a Downpayment, to Authorize the Issuance of Bonds to Finance Such Appropriation and to Provide for the Issuance Of Bond Anticipation Notes in Anticipation of the Issuance of Such Bonds,” be ratified.

Why has the cost of the project increased from \$9M to \$11.8M?

The initial proposal, introduced in June 2021, had an estimated cost of \$18M. In September, 2021, following resident feedback, the project was scaled back by nearly half, with the revised plan covering 60% of the initial surface area, with an estimated cost of \$9M. It should be noted that the approved plan keeps 40% of the space with natural grass.

The current bond ordinance that will be on the referendum is for \$11.8M. Following is a detailed breakdown of those estimated costs, along with the changes from the previous \$9M estimate:

\$7,500,000 – Turf installation and new stormwater management system

Previous estimate was \$5,575,000. This increase in this portion of the bond funding provides the Town with additional investment capacity, as needed, for two of its top priorities for the project:

- Sustainability: To select the best and most environmentally friendly turf and infill products as the marketplace continues to evolve.
- Stormwater management: To design the best resiliency in terms of stormwater management for this project and to be compliant with the forthcoming new NJ Inland Flood Protection rules that had not been underway at the time of the original estimate. It should be noted that all professional engineers who have been involved believe this project will materially improve the stormwater management on this site.

\$1,500,000 – Sports field lighting and associated utility work

Previous estimate was \$1,225,000. This portion of the bond funding enables the Town to choose the most advanced lighting technology on the market with negligible spillover. Professionals who have spoken on behalf of opponents of this project have acknowledged that modern lighting technology is “as good as advertised” in only lighting what is intended to be lit.

\$500,000 – Facility upgrades

Previous estimate was \$373,650. This portion of the bond funding enables the Town to include additional and replacement sidewalks for safety purposes, as well as robust landscaping/buffering to diminish the impact of light and noise, field equipment, fencing, and a new band tower.

\$600,000 – New restroom facility and associated utility work

Original estimate was \$300,000. This portion of the bond funding is needed to provide the restroom facility for the proposed use, along with the utility work necessary to accommodate the new facility.

\$550,000 – Design, Survey, Geotechnical work, DEP and other necessary permitting and Construction Management for the entire project

No previous estimate, as this was not included in the original analysis scope, but the Town has since publicly bid these services and confirmed the associated costs. A project of this scope requires professional engineering expertise to achieve the best outcome and to properly comply with all state regulations.

\$1,150,000 – Construction contingency and financing costs

Previous estimate was \$1,121,000.

\$11,800,000 TOTAL

Less \$565,000 down payment

= \$11,235,000 total debt authorized

The \$11.8M in authorized bonds is likely more than the anticipated final project cost to ensure maximum financial flexibility so that the most environmentally sensitive materials, updated stormwater mitigation measures, and adequate screening landscaping for the neighbors can be considered. Any unused authorized funds will be redirected to future uses – in this case, supporting concurrent grass field initiatives.

How will the project be financed? Will taxpayers have to pay for the \$11.8M bond?

The Town plans to use three primary forms of funding for this project:

- PILOT funds from the Westfield Crossing development
- Well-managed debt service leveraging the Town's AAA credit rating
- A substantial capital campaign seeking grants, sponsorships, and contributions

PILOT Funds

When the proposal for the PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) was announced in 2021 for the Westfield Crossing development on South Avenue, the Town indicated that those funds – expected to yield \$20M over the 30-year developer agreement – would be utilized to offset a large portion of the related debt service each year for Edison Fields, thereby mitigating the burden on taxpayers.

Well-Managed Debt Service

Debt service, which is the repayment of the bonded funds for the project, would not start until 2024, at the earliest. As previously noted, the \$11.8M is likely more than the anticipated final project cost to ensure maximum financial flexibility. As with all debt service, the full authorized amount does not get absorbed into the municipal budget at once, but rather over a 15-20 year period, as we do with other large-scale investments like municipal equipment purchases, road paving, etc.

In the first several years of debt service, the Town will likely utilize Treasury notes, which require interest-only payments, before it moves to the bond market to help offset the remaining debt service after PILOT payments. Because of the Town's enviable AAA rating, we are in a position to obtain the most favorable terms and interest rates for our debt service, just as we do for other capital and municipal projects each year, allowing us to minimize the burden on taxpayers. For context, the Town has carried, on average, \$3.14M in debt service each year over the last six years, during which time the average municipal tax increase was the lowest in over a decade.

Capital Campaign

In addition, we anticipate a capital campaign seeking grants, sponsorships, and sports league contributions to further offset costs. In fact, interest in donating toward this project has already been expressed by several local associations who are in the process of finalizing their plans.

What is the timeline for the project if the referendum passes?

The Town will work closely with the Board of Education and Edison School administration to coordinate a schedule to minimize disruption to students. The anticipated timeline is for construction to begin in 2024, with a targeted completion date in the first half of 2025 or earlier.

What if the referendum doesn't pass?

If the referendum fails, the bond ordinance is formally repealed, which means that the Edison Fields project will not move forward, and any funding bonded and allocated for Edison Fields cannot legally be repurposed for any other initiatives, including upgrades to grass fields.

To reiterate, after a comprehensive Strategic Parks Plan process and more than two years of research, resident discussion and input, and data provided by independent experts leading up to the referendum, this governing body, guided by recommendations from the Recreation Commission, has determined that the Edison Fields Project is the most prudent use of funding and resources, and is the only plan that we feel comfortable and confident supporting as a next step, for the following reasons:

- An initial investment in artificial turf and lights at Edison solves for the largest capacity increase in the shortest amount of time, which will then enable us to begin our plans to improve the Town grass fields.
- In the absence of additional capacity provided by the Edison lighted turf fields, maintaining and sustaining adequate grass fields is not feasible, and therefore would not be fiscally prudent – due to the playing time demands that are required.
- Edison is the only proposed project that will also benefit our student athletes, trainers, coaches, and marching band due to its proximity to locker rooms, training facilities, and equipment storage at Kehler.
- This agreement delivers efficiencies and enhanced services for our taxpayers – in this case, fields that would equally benefit the Town sports leagues, WHS athletes, and students – an outcome that is only possible at Edison.

Can the Town proceed instead with the Tamaques plans or other natural grass fields?

There are compelling, well-researched, and professionally vetted reasons why Edison was chosen to be the first step in a multi-fields plan. Chief among them are the benefits to the school and student athletes that can't be realized at Tamaques, as well as the ability to solve for the largest capacity increase in the shortest amount of time.

Some have suggested the Town begins with turf fields in the wooded area of Tamaques that was a former dumping ground, off of Lamberts Mill Road. That provides two challenges: One is the more complicated nature of the Tamaques site, which would need to be leveled and cleared, unlike Edison where a flat, open surface currently exists.

The second is that Tamaques Park is a NJ Green Acres facility, which means it cannot be reserved exclusively for Westfield residents and must be open to anyone in the state. Other NJ Green Acres fields in Westfield that are subject to statewide use include Clark Park (the land adjacent to Roosevelt Intermediate School), Gumbert Park, Memorial Fields, and Sycamore Field.

The property at Edison School is owned by the Board of Education and is not a NJ Green Acres facility, which allows its use to be exclusively for Westfield residents and leagues to help solve our long-standing capacity issue.

For these reasons and the many others discussed over the past 2+ years, this administration will pursue additional field improvements – including artificial turf, improved grass fields, and

lights at Tamaques, as well as the exploration of natural grass upgrades and maintenance as additive field space in other locations – only after Edison Fields is approved.

To reiterate, in the absence of expanding field capacity, it would not be fiscally prudent to spend resources on improving and maintaining grass fields, which are exceedingly difficult to protect from overuse in a municipal setting. Such protection inevitably requires significant usage limitations, which is counter to a key objective of this project. This determination has been informed by experiences from other municipalities, as well as various pilot tests in Westfield, which have proven that spending dollars on grass field maintenance without the ability to reduce playing hours is not a good use of funds.

If the referendum passes and we are able to proceed with the Edison Fields Project, we anticipate prioritizing Tamaques as a next step by assessing the recreation potential of the seven acres in the park adjacent to Lamberts Mill Road that were previously a dumping ground. Plans under consideration for that area would potentially include a permanent ice rink, pickleball courts, multipurpose athletic fields, additional parking, and a new entrance and exit off of Lamberts Mill Road to reduce vehicular traffic in the park to make it safer for pedestrians, bikers, and sports team participants. That assessment has been put on hold pending the result of the Edison Fields referendum.

New turf fields (with lights) at Tamaques, in combination with Edison, would provide us with sufficiently expanded capacity to next develop a long-term plan for maintaining well-constructed grass fields that could sustain appropriate hours of play.

Will the fields be used primarily for games or practices?

Edison Fields is intended to be utilized primarily as a practice facility, which will help minimize disruption to the neighborhood, as well as allow Town leagues to substantially reduce the number of hours spent leasing practice fields outside of Westfield. Unlike nearly every Town-owned municipal park, Edison is not a Green Acres facility, which allows the fields to be reserved exclusively for Westfield teams and residents.

Intended users include:

- Westfield Schools: Band and sports, predominantly for practices
- Town of Westfield: Practices/games for Westfield youth sports teams, opposing teams and any expressly permitted users (as is case with existing Town and School fields)
- EIS: Gym classes and other uses as needed
- Smart use / good neighbor policies intended to include:
 - No usage during Kehler events known to draw larger crowds (varsity football, track invitationals, graduation, etc)
 - Limited or no usage during certain EIS evening events
 - Lights on no later than 9:45PM, as is the case with existing Town recreational lighting
 - Seating limited to small / portable bleachers and/or “bring your own” (similar to Houlihan/Sid Fay)

- Designated drop-off / pick-up areas
- Concurrent use policy, to include Kehler Field activity, to assure parking capacity is effectively managed
- Implement street parking restrictions, as requested, with new signage effectively managed
- Usage limited to Westfield schools, residents, and opposing teams, unless expressly permitted
- Traffic officers / crossing guards will be provided during spring and fall seasons for the first two years of operation during peak periods to oversee traffic flow, pedestrian crossing, and to provide ongoing professional input on policy adaptation and development

How will artificial turf improve stormwater management at the site?

This project is as much a stormwater management project as it is a recreation project, and is expected to significantly improve stormwater runoff for this neighborhood and reduce the risk of flooding with new properly designed drainage. Due to its proximity to Robinsons Branch creek, the entire design plan must be approved by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection before moving forward, and any plan will have to not only improve stormwater runoff from current conditions, but also meet the state's most updated flood protection requirements.

Because this is an area of priority in the project, the Town increased its investment capacity in the bond ordinance in order to ensure that all appropriate measures can be taken to address stormwater mitigation.

Why can't the Town pursue natural grass like WSA did at Elm Street?

Over the past two years, we obtained the input of three independent, professional experts: Brandstetter Carroll, who led the Strategic Parks Plan; Spiezle Architectural Group, who led the Edison project design; and CME Associates, who performed an independent assessment, at the request of the Town Council, verifying that lighted turf fields are the most fiscally prudent option to achieve our field usage goal, grounded in the reality that it's not practical to rely solely on grass fields where demand far exceeds capacity.

Natural grass cannot sustain more than ~650-800 hours of use/year (if really well constructed and maintained). Existing usage of Town & BOE natural grass fields already significantly exceeds this benchmark

- Town: 1,091 hours avg/year (max = 1302, min = 871)
- BOE: 823 hours avg/year (max = 1327, min = 492)

For this reason, adding turf is critical to alleviate the current overuse of grass fields that already exist. Maintaining existing natural grass fields without the supplement of a lighted, turf field to

relieve some usage capacity is not a prudent use of funds. With the addition of Edison Fields, the Town's field locations will still be approximately 85% natural grass.

Additionally, our town sports associations rely on heavy usage of fields outside of Westfield, including Garwood Park, Unami Park, Nomahegan Park, Madison Ave Park, Rahway River Park, Echo Lake Park, Wardlaw Hartridge, Oakridge Park, and others.

The WSA partnership with the Board of Education to manage the Elm Street field has allowed the WSA to fill needed requirements that they lost from allocations of field time assigned by Union County, but has not added to the Town's overall field capacity.

The partnership spans from June 2022 through the end of 2024. The field was out of service for the entire fall of 2022 and had limited usage in spring 2023 – only for training and for nine-player teams (9x9). Beginning this fall, through the end of 2024 (half of the total span of the partnership), the WSA will schedule 9x9 and 7x7 games on the field. Usage is monitored based on the impact of rainfall and in the spring, about 15% of the scheduled days were canceled due to wet conditions.

According to the WSA, they are not yet realizing any savings from this investment in the Elm Street field; the objective in 2024 is to reduce some of the costs used to rent field time outside of Westfield. It's also worth noting that usage is only able to be controlled on the natural grass Elm Street field because of the heavy WSA schedule that continues at Houlihan/Sid Fay, Wardlaw-Hartridge, and Garwood – all of which are artificial turf fields that can withstand much higher usage.

How many hours of in-town play will be gained by installing lighted turf?

According to data from the Strategic Parks Plan, 4,622 households are not currently having their field needs met in Westfield, broken down as follows:

1,761 from soccer

1,182 from baseball/softball

931 from lacrosse

748 from football

The projected net gain in playable hours with lighted turf at Edison is approximately 2,500 hours per year (from the current use of 1,836 to the projected use of 4,356). In addition, Edison Fields will reduce the burden on families who pay for more than 6,300 hours of leasing field time outside of Westfield – the majority of which is on fields with turf and lights.

Will the Town pursue newer, more sustainable turf products to mitigate environmental concerns?

The marketplace continues to evolve rapidly, as many communities seek out the best options for a more sustainable approach to artificial turf. The Town is committed to seeking out the most environmentally sensitive and recyclable artificial turf materials without PFAS and without crumb rubber infill as they become more readily available.