

Dear Mayor and Trustees,

I am writing to help the Board of Trustees get up to speed on the discussion about the installation of permanent lights on Butler Field.

Hardly a “rushed” proposal, the discussion about the installation of lights on Butler Field has been ongoing for more than 15 years, since before the original turf was installed on the field. The shortcomings of Scarsdale’s sports fields are well known by all athletes and parents of athletes, and are even acknowledged by many of the concerned neighbors you have heard from. Every spring, Scarsdale’s grass fields are closed through March and often into the second (or third) week April, making pre-season spring practices difficult to schedule and relegating many teams to indoor practices or no practices at all. In-season, during wet spring and fall weather, our heavily used grass fields are often closed and unavailable for play, meaning our youth and high school teams are frequently denied the opportunity to practice. It is not uncommon to see the Middle School’s modified Field Hockey and Lacrosse teams practicing in the parking lot as the poorly drained Middle School fields can be closed for weeks at a time.

Butler Field is Scarsdale’s only turf field, which allows it to drain and return to a safely playable condition much faster than grass fields. It is much more durable than grass fields and doesn’t get “torn up” by play in wet conditions. Making the durable (and guaranteed/warrantied) turf at Butler Field available beyond the constraints of daylight would help mitigate our perennial field closure issues and is far cheaper and faster response than turfing additional fields. (As an aside, I encourage the Board of Trustees to examine the frequency of field closures, the cost of field maintenance, and to make a determination of whether the community would be well served by turfing an additional field or two, such as the field(s) at Boulder Brook, to better address these ongoing issues.)

This project to add permanent lights to Butler Field is about supporting the children of our community. The lights will allow the opportunity for our teams to play games “under the lights” when more parents, students, and other community members are able to attend and promote greater school spirit. Additionally, having lights on Scarsdale’s only turf field will enable more teams to hold practices on the days when our grass fields are closed due to sogginess, including all of March.

Some field and scheduling issues you should be aware of:

- **Shortened games due to sunset.** League-wide, high school Field Hockey and girls Lacrosse programs have their games scheduled as double-headers, during which the Varsity teams play the first game starting at ~4PM and the JV teams play on the same field immediately following the completion of the Varsity game. The lack of lights at SHS prohibits our JV Field Hockey and JV Lacrosse teams (and their opponents) from having adequate warm-up times and playing their games to completion during months when the sun sets early (predominantly October & April).
- **Forfeited home field advantage during playoffs.** SHS Varsity Soccer and Field Hockey teams (fall sports) have had to forfeit home field advantage for playoff games (that they earned!) because, without lights, SHS can’t host an after-school playoff game (that would be over well before 6PM) due to early November sunsets.

- **Inadequate preseason preparation.** Troublingly, spring SHS and Youth Sports teams are sent into early-April game competition prior to their having even a single outdoor practice because the grass fields have not yet been opened. SHS Lacrosse teams are rightfully prioritized for after-school practice time on the turf during March, but field lights would allow greater opportunity for outdoor practices for SHS baseball and softball teams, as well as for youth teams.
- **Increasing difficulty of parents to attend afternoon game.** As Scarsdale becomes home to more and more two-income families, and people in general are forced to work longer hours, parents find it more difficult to attend afternoon games to watch their SHS players play.

Our grass fields seem to be getting worse due to the cumulative multi-year impacts of intense usage. The lights won't completely solve all of Scarsdale's field problems, but they will provide the community with the easiest option to mitigate these field issues that have gone unresolved for so long.

Some common and recurring misunderstandings that you should be aware of:

- **Neighbors are concerned about "The Lights."** Through the ~dozen public meetings and conversations that have been held with concerned neighbors, the overwhelming reported annoyance of living near Butler Field is the noise coming from the field. The neighbors can hear the noise coming from Sunday morning men's soccer games, from early Saturday lacrosse games, from afternoon practices and games, and especially any time the loudspeaker is used. All these issues exist today, without lights on the field.

The technology of the modern LED lights ensures that there is no light bleed or glare encroaching on people's properties, as the pictures at the end of this letter illustrate. The pushback and concern regarding the installation and use of lights on Butler Field is about how much Scarsdale's turf field should be used: Due to the noise that accompanies the use of the field, a few neighbors would like **to reduce** sports activity on Butler Field, while the installation of lights would provide an opportunity **to increase** sports activity on the field.

The uncovering of the noise issue in the community meetings has been met with eagerness from the BOE and SHS administration to address the problem of the long carry of amplified noise from the loudspeaker. The Athletic Director is pursuing the installation of a modern (~\$50K) amplified sound system that targets the amplified sound at the field and the stands, and away from neighbors. With more speakers positioned closer to the fans, the volume level of the speakers can be much lower, resulting in cleaner, more audible sound for game attendees, with far lower sound pollution leaving the field. Additionally, the administration would enact greater controls over who can use the sound system and when. The new sound system and usage procedures are intended to be implemented regardless of whether lights are installed; this commitment to a new sound system is a win-win for all parties involved.

The unamplified sounds of playing sports, including voices, bodily contact, and whistles, are part and parcel of athletic activity.

- **Lights will lead to more, longer, and later practices.** Through our canvassing of SHS and ISO athletic programs, not a single coach would *prefer* to practice under the lights in the evening instead of continuing to use their normal practice times (usually 3-6PM) on grass fields. When the grass fields are open, practices and games are expected to occur on the fields around Scarsdale as they currently do, with Butler Field “normally” done for the day by 6PM. The lights are intended to be used to extend the usage time of the turf field on days when the turf field is the only option. For these soggy periods when the use of grass fields is not an option, coaches and kids would prefer to practice in the evening under the lights rather than not practice at all, especially when fields are closed for several days in a row.
  
- **Evening practices are detrimental to “student wellness.”** Parent-coached youth athletics (Little League, Lacrosse, Football, Basketball), all occur in the evenings from the time children are in third grade. When sunlight and weather allow, Scarsdale’s fields are filled with elementary school children playing softball, baseball, and lacrosse past 8PM. SHS and youth basketball practices routinely extend until 8:30 or 9PM. Popular club teams (AAU and CYO basketball, club soccer, hockey, etc.) often demand evening practices until 9PM or later for the teams to obtain field/court/rink time. Suffice it to say, it is already a well-established practice for our athletes (and their families) to manage their daily schedules to allow for evening athletic activity.
  
- **The lights will be on “all the time.”** Lights would be used as needed, and not used when not needed. The lights are not needed at all for more than half the year (winter and summer). During the months of usage, the light usage would be principally dependent upon the weather.
  - For games, lights would be used:
    - In November, when sunsets before 5PM require lights for afternoon games.
    - As needed, for twilight games (JV field hockey and lax) games, over by ~7:30PM.
    - Likely fewer than 8 Varsity sports night games (Soccer, Field Hockey, Lacrosse) that will be over by 9PM.
    - Up to five (really, three or four) football night games that will be over by 10PM.
  
  - For practices, lights would be used:
    - For preseason practices in March, weather allowing.
    - In late August, as needed, for preseason (football) practices if the turf is too hot for afternoon play.
    - In November, when the sun sets before 5PM, mostly to accommodate youth soccer practices.
    - When grass fields are closed due to wetness.
  
  - Lights would not be used:
    - In the winter, from about November 15 (when ISO sports end) through early March (when SHS spring tryouts start).
    - In the Summer: June, July, most/all of August.
    - When grass fields are open and teams are able to conduct their games and practices “as usual” in the afternoon.

Half a generation has passed since field lights were first discussed as part of the first installation of turf at Butler Field. In that time, the desires and preferences of homebuyers have evolved in myriad ways: they want wi-fi and cell service; they want central air conditioning and even backup generators. In addition to a top-tier educational system, they want modern field infrastructure that allows their kids the chance to participate in sports despite the limitations of soggy ground and early sunsets. They want the opportunity to see their kids play games after work. They want to meet neighbors and make friends at night games. They want to know their kids are attending a safe and fun school function rather than looking for other adventures on a Friday night.

Reflecting the prevalence of these modern-day attitudes, field lights are commonplace throughout the nation and have been installed in every one of our neighboring peer towns. On this issue, it is Scarsdale that is currently out of step with what today's home buyers want.

Through Zillow, I have examined the before-and-after property values of houses surrounding fields that have recently installed field lights, including Edgemont and Darien, CT. I have found no basis for the contention that property values near the school will suffer on account of this significant infrastructure upgrade. These expressed fears are unsubstantiated conjecture, likely designed to elicit sympathy. If anything, NOT having lights is weighing on Scarsdale property values, announcing the town as behind the times and inhospitable to modern amenities (despite the infamously healthy tax burden).

What we have before us is a very simple conflict. Scarsdale has an opportunity for a privately funded and heavily desired upgrade to SHS, Scarsdale's most heavily utilized public asset. The upgrade would provide a targeted benefit to our children by providing a safe field for them to play on at reasonable hours, even if those hours happen to be after seasonally early sunsets. The lights would also allow safe and fun community events such as night games, without the noise and pollution of the temporary diesel-powered lights the school has been renting for years.

We supporters of the lights are not unsympathetic to the few local neighbors who are concerned about the local externalities that would accompany increased usage of the Village's only turf field. Primarily based on the noise that emanates from the usage of the field, these few neighbors have consistently expressed a preference for lower activity at Butler Field rather than increased activity at Butler Field. No doubt there are unique challenges living next to SHS. Again, the Board of Trustees should consider the possibility of putting turf on an additional Scarsdale field or two, which would mitigate the localized burden of these neighbors.

However, weighing 1) the benefits provided to hundreds/thousands of children and parents who will enjoy the opportunities for practices and games provided by the lights against 2) the transparently self-interested preferences of a few local neighbors, we think the installation of permanent lights on Butler Field is clearly in the best interest of Scarsdale as a whole. It is time to stop denying our children the first-class facilities Scarsdale's current and future homeowners want.

Sincerely,

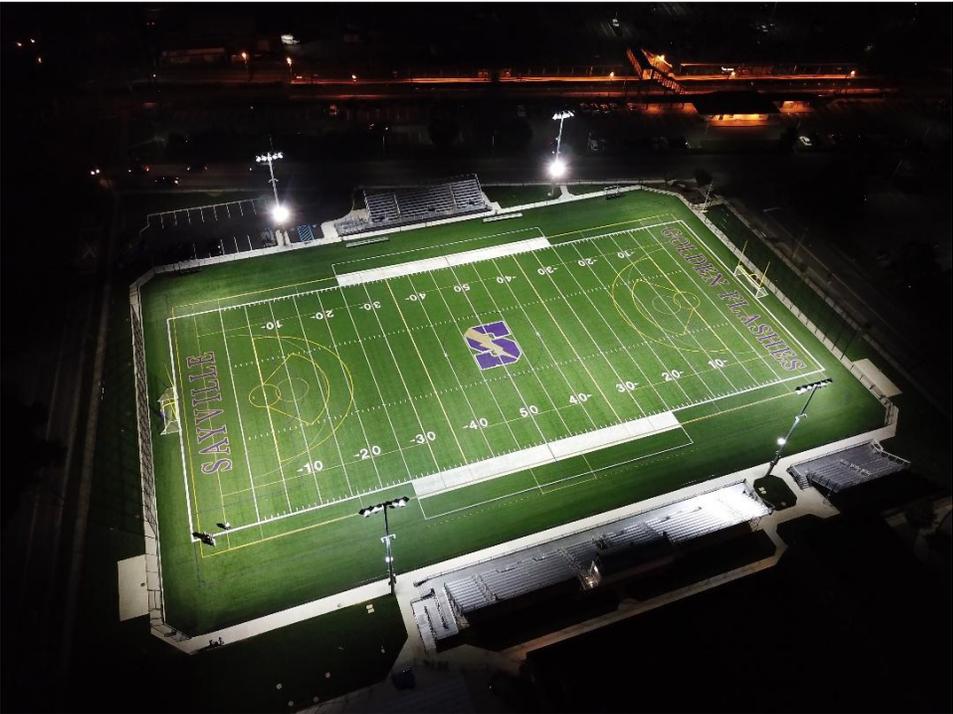
Matthew Conlan  
212 Madison Road

Below are some pictures of Musco field lights, demonstrating the crisp delineation between lit and un-lit areas and low glare to the surrounding neighborhood.

Darien, CT



Sayville, NY



Harrison, NY

