

Darien Times, The (CT)

May 31, 2007
Section: News
Page: A010

Fields score donations

Author: Susan Shultz; Times Reporter sshultz@darientimes.com

Score two for the proposed turf baseball field.

The Darien Technology Foundation has agreed to donate the two scoreboards for the new baseball and softball fields as part of the ongoing project at the high school. Last week, the Board of Education heard a proposal on the gift from Schools Superintendent Donald Fiftal and Paul Engemann, director of facilities.

The high school baseball teams have been playing at Middlesex Middle School and Town Hall. Because of drainage issues, improper orientation and wear and tear resulting from other sports use of the field, the natural grass baseball field that was built at the time of the high school has remained unplayable for baseball.

The Representative Town Meeting approved \$1.08 million for the project earlier this year. That included a \$306,000 contribution by the Board of Education and a \$20,000 donation by the Darien High School Building Committee. The rest of the money was raised privately.

Paul Voigt, who has spearheaded fundraising efforts for the new turf field, went before the Darien Technology Foundation with his proposal on May 14.

"Money was raised for the fields as well as bleachers, dugouts and scoreboards," Fiftal said.

Fiftal said that the meeting between Voigt and the foundation was positive, and the group agreed to make the donation in kind, rather than money, so they will donate the actual scoreboards. He also pointed out that while the scoreboards are not exactly alike, the differences are reasonable so they should be in accordance with Title IX. Title IX mandates equal treatment for boys and girls athletic programs.

The differences between the scoreboards include additional innings for the baseball board - nine innings (high school teams play seven inning games but there is room to score extra innings) - and the softball board scores up to seven innings.

The baseball scoreboard also has an additional timer so the field can be used for other sports. The softball field will not be used for other sports.

"We're comfortable answering any questions that might be raised by Title IX," Fiftal said. He also said that any additional cash freed up by the donation will be used toward improving the quality of other amenities such as the bleachers or dugouts.

"The overall project is helped," he said.

Board member Clara Sartori asked if the scoreboards needed Planning & Zoning approval.

"They do not, I met with Jeremy Ginsberg and told him about the boards, and he took it before P&Z and they agreed we don't need it (the approval)," he said.

Board member James Plutte asked if the electrical conduits were already in place for the boards.

"We'll be running the conduit next week for the baseball field, we'll have to trench for the softball field but not far," Engemann said.

Board member Betsy Haggerty- Ross asked if there would be some kind of sign on the back of the softball scoreboard as it would greet people as they drove into the school.

Engemann said that the back of the sign would definitely be painted to blend in, but a sign would not be a problem or cost anything additional if that was the board's preference.

Board Vice-Chairman Kim Westcott asked what would be "better" with this additional money freed up by the donation.

"We're not adding any amenities, the turf pricing came in higher, so it was a question of not doing the amenities or downsizing them, so this donation keeps them at the proper level," Engemann said.

Westcott expressed concern to Pam Dysenchuk, director of the Darien Technology Foundation, who was at the meeting, that this donation could take the place of something else.

"You've been so generous to us, will this field donation diminish your capacity for something more academic in the future?" she asked.

Dysenchuk said that is not a concern.

"It is a bit of a stretch to call it technology, but we have very generous donors and look forward to more projects to fund. We like to have a story every year," she said.

Chairman John Boulton asked if the scoreboard would have a public address system. "No," Engemann said. "Good answer," Boulton said.

Westcott asked if, with this donation, Voigt was finally "done" as he has seemed to continue to return to the town with more

requests.

Engemann said the plan has not changed, and the only issues were higher than anticipated turf costs, and Boulton agreed.

"In Voigt's defense, the plan has not changed much, the scope has not changed, it just got more expensive," Boulton said.

"You're right," Engemann said.

If all goes according to plan, Voigt said the general contracting, done by AFS Construction, will be finished by mid-May, and then it would be two weeks to lay the field turf.

"Ms. Dysenchuk, than you very much for your generous donation, and thank your board for us," Boulton said.

Copyright, 2007, The Darien Times
Record Number: 11980450857268C0