

# Informal Agreement

- There is an agreement in place for over 50+ years
- The Township & BoE have been abiding by it.
- In the last 5-7 years the following improvements have been made:
  - New fencing
  - New playground equipment
  - Security Cameras
  - Sound barrier lower tennis/pickleball courts
  - Repaired playground equipment
  - Repaired basketball courts
  - Replaced backboards
  - Replaced lights (basketball courts)
  - Refurbished tennis/pickleball courts (lower)
  - Replaced lights at pickleball courts (lower)
  - Paved walking path/sidewalk down to Lower Columbia
  - Paved walking path between courts
  - Sitting area between courts with plantings & trees
  - Rock garden
  - Drainage in upper playground
  - Drainage in walkway
  - Wood carpet replaced annually in upper playground
  - Repaired drainage
  - Moved and repaired walking path
  - Repaired chain link fence
  - Removed softball field (destroyed by Ida)
  - Groom fields, replace bases, add clay
  - Trim trees, cut grass, fertilize, seed, weed, weed wack, empty garbage cans



# BoE Finance Committee

## Lower Columbia Proposal

Berkeley Heights Recreation  
Commission

Debra Varnerin

July 16, 2023

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# Why I am here?

Update you on what  
has been  
accomplished since  
our last meeting  
together

Our **Exciting  
Project!!!!**

An opportunity to  
**Collaborate.**

Our **ASK** of you

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# What has been happening since we last met?

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Completion of Recreation Master Plan

Fundraising

Discussed property boundaries with BoE

Met with turf vendors and received preliminary turf design

Found sewer/drainage maps for property

**Our Exciting  
Project!!**

**Turf Lower  
Columbia (TLC)**

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# Objective

- To provide an athletic field that is safe and available for all children playing sports in Berkeley Heights.
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# Recreation Master Plan (RMP)

Key findings impacting use of fields

- Increased number of sports programs
- Increased participation in sports programs
- Prevalence of Multi-Season sports Programs
- Severe Weather



Columbia Middle  
School physical  
education classes

Columbia Middle  
School boys' soccer  
home field

Columbia Middle  
School girls' soccer  
home field

Berkeley Heights  
Youth Soccer Club  
full sided soccer field

Berkeley Heights  
Recreation programs

Occasional fundraiser

# Lower Columbia Current Usage

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# Lower Columbia Challenges



Drainage

Limited. Since fixed there has been a significant improvement



Availability

In 2019 all CMS soccer home soccer games had to be played away



Divots and ruts

Makes the area a risk for injury



Natural grass

Sparse



Lighting

Only covers a portion of the field

# Why TLC?

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Availability will never be an issue

Drainage will be installed under the turf

CMS becomes a state-of-the-art facility

Makes CMS aesthetically pleasing

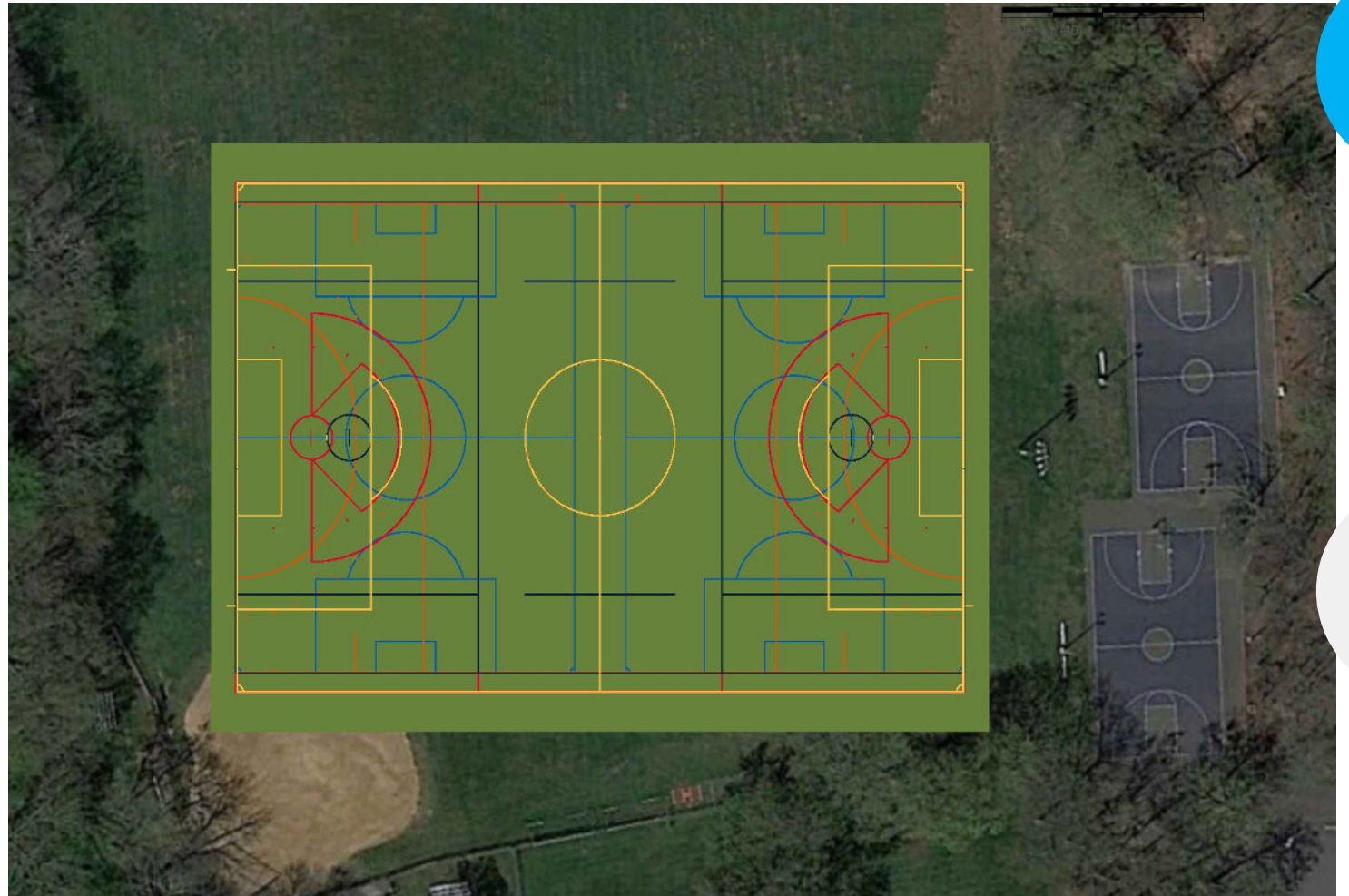
Improves CMS physical education classes and provides more space

Secondary field for GL with lights for Lacrosse, Field Hockey, & Soccer

Provides a better sports experience for all children in Berkeley Heights

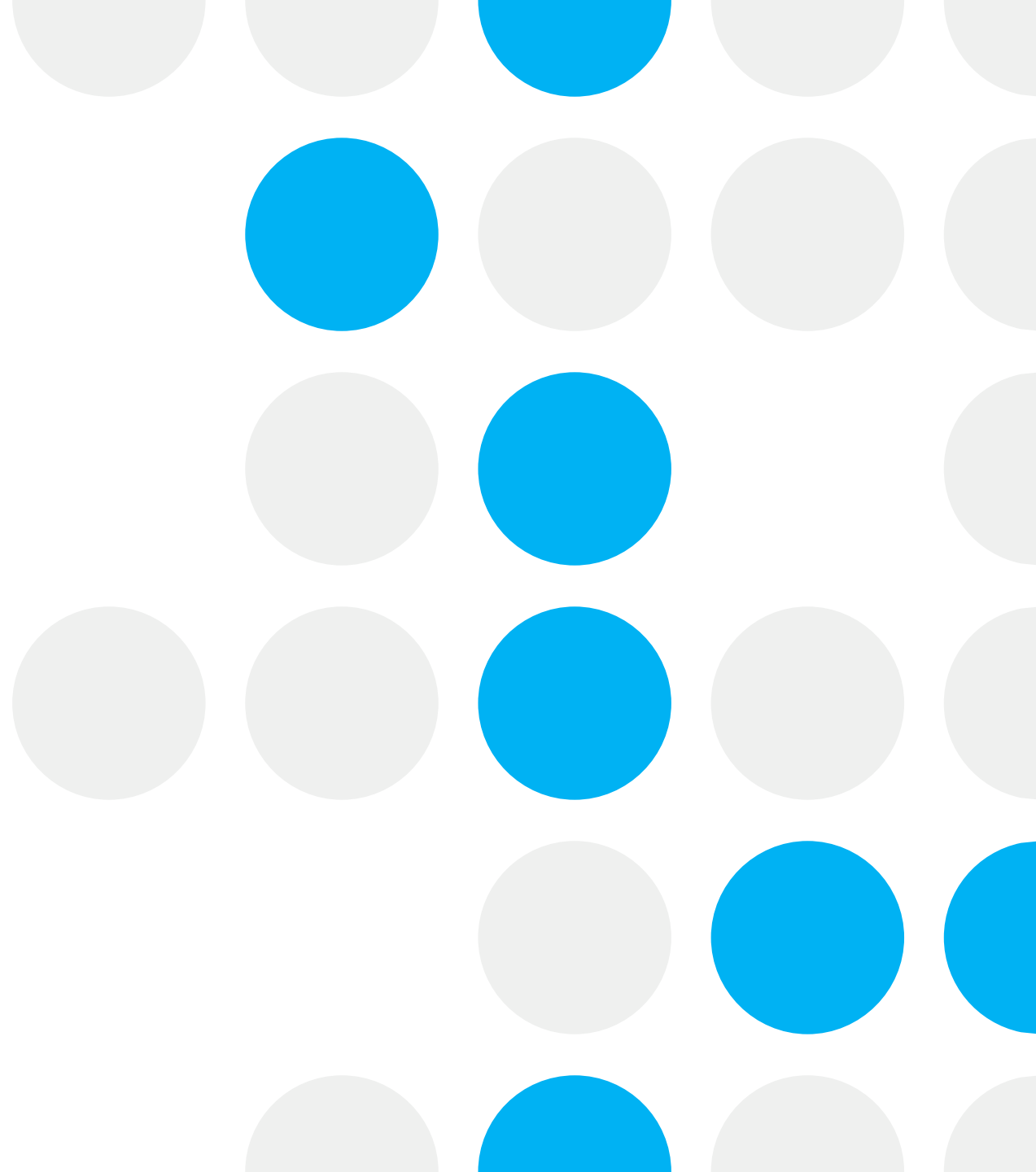
# What is TLC?

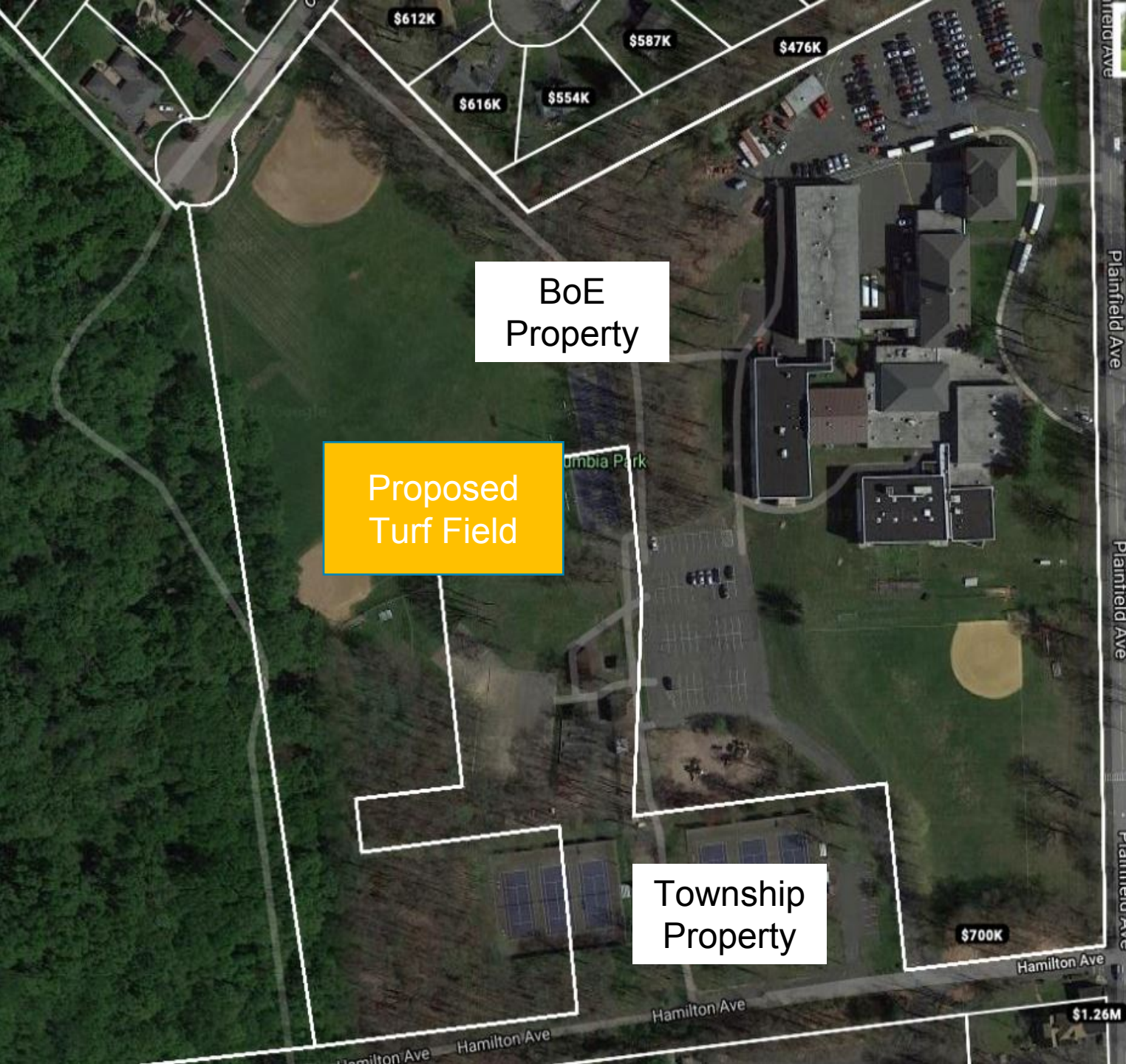
- Synthetic Turf Field to accommodate lacrosse, field hockey, soccer and general use.
- Located along the southern edge of the existing natural grass athletic fields



**Let's  
Collaborate!!!**

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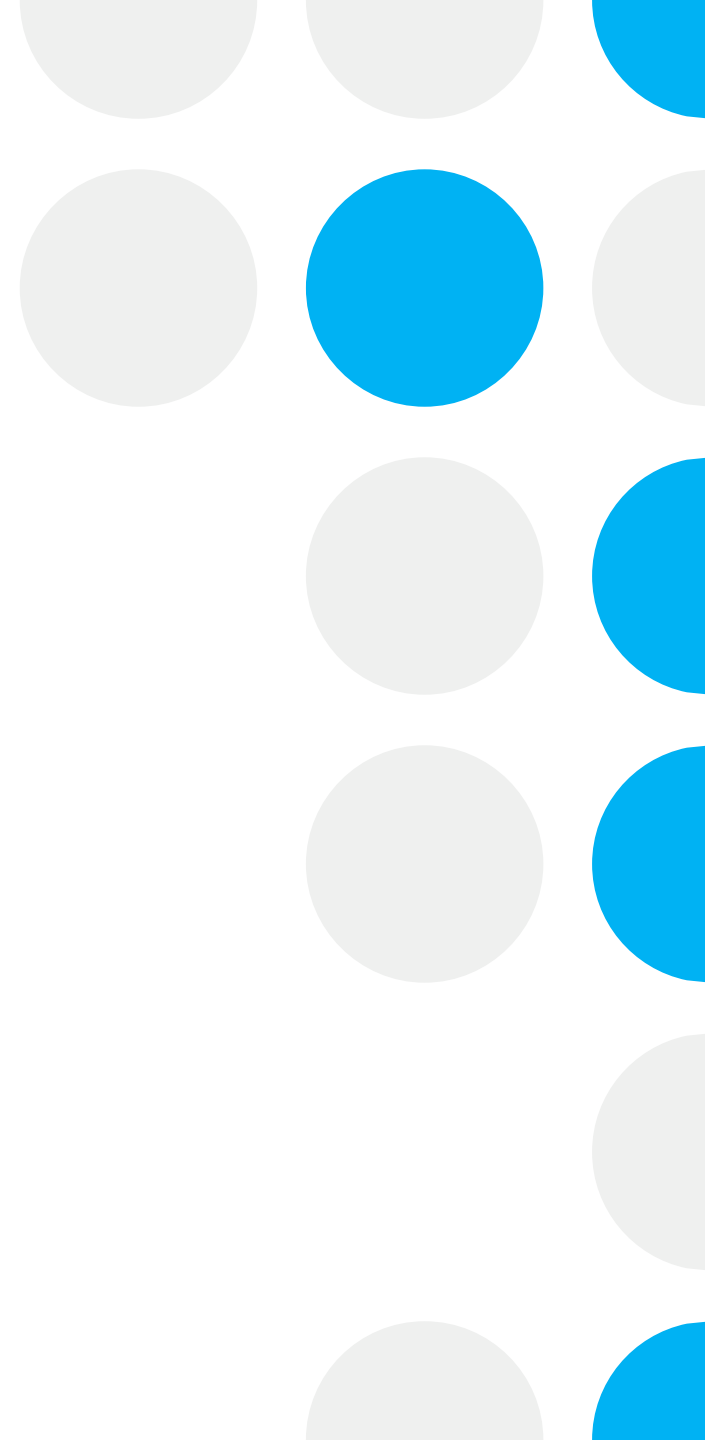
# Ownership Challenge

- Columbia Park/Lower Columbia has convoluted property boundaries.
- Proposed turf field would span both BoE and Township Property (as boundaries exist today)

# The Opportunity

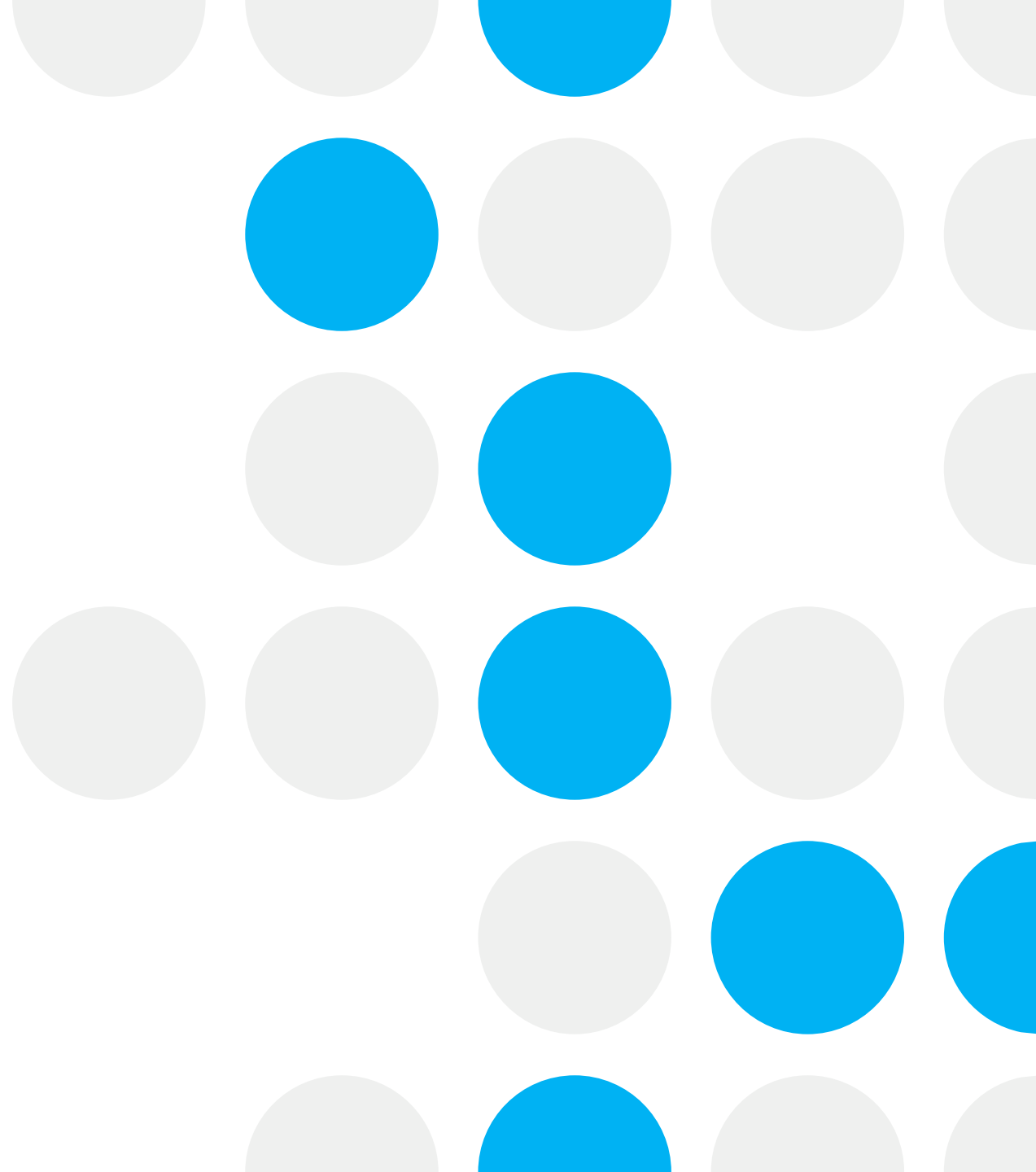
Commit to a collaboration that will;

- Solve for the athletic field needs at Lower Columbia
- Simplify the Lower Columbia Footprint (redraw boundaries)
- Provide a community resource that will be enjoyed by children for decades to come



# **Our Ask of the Board of Education**

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# BoE Financial Obligation

- Recreation Commission would fund design, construction and maintenance of project
- BoE would be given priority access to field
- BoE financial impact would be minimal. Attorney review of;
  - Lease Agreement
  - Redrawn Boundaries





# Our ask

- The immediate next step for the Recreation Commission is to complete land surveys that kick off the Design Phase of TLC.
  - Is the BoE willing to review property boundaries and decide on a path forward that;
    - Redraws property lines to simplify the project.
  - Is the BoE willing to enter into a multi-year lease agreement with Recreation Commission?
    - Lease agreement will give priority use of the new turf field to BoE
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# **Lower Columbia Lease Agreement**

Berkeley Heights Recreation  
Commission

Debra Varnerin

June 20, 2024

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# Objective

- To provide athletic fields, parks and playgrounds that are safe and available for all children in Berkeley Heights.
  - Create a state-of-the-art athletic field that is not owned by Union County.
  - Create an all-inclusive playground.
  - Continue to improve/upgrade the amenities.
  - Obtain grants to assist with funding improvements/upgrades.
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Columbia Middle  
School physical  
education classes

Columbia Middle  
School boys' & girls  
soccer home field

BHPAL football  
practice

Berkeley Heights  
Youth Soccer Club  
full sided soccer field

Berkeley Heights  
Recreation programs

Occasional fundraiser

# Lower Columbia Current Usage

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# Lower Columbia Challenges



## Drainage

Limited. Since fixed there has been a significant improvement



## Availability

In 2019 all CMS soccer home soccer games had to be played away. In 2023 CMS some CMS soccer games were moved to GL.



## Divots and ruts

Makes the area a risk for injury



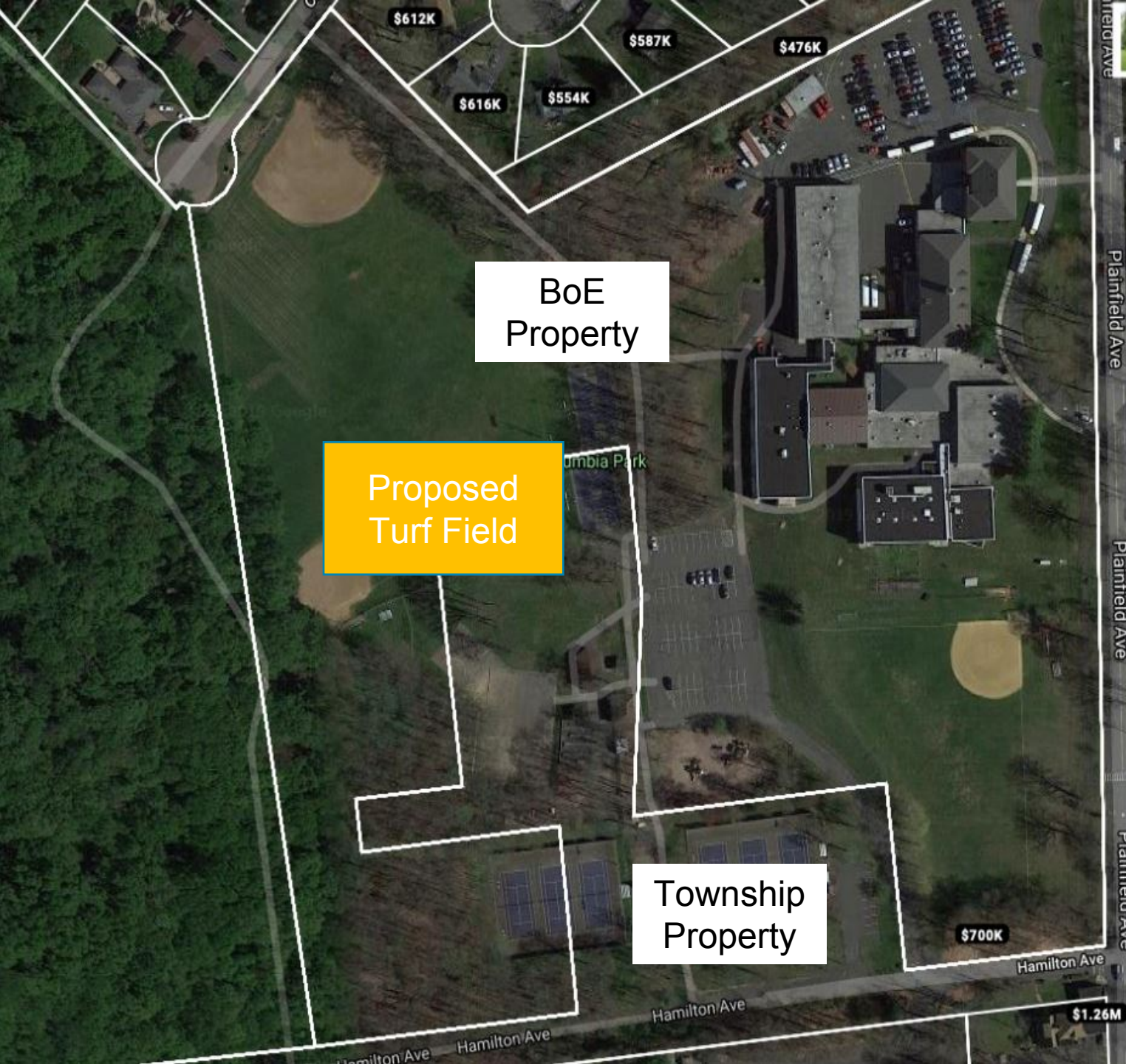
## Natural grass

Sparse



## Lighting

Only covers a portion of the field



# Ownership Challenge

- Columbia Park/Lower Columbia has convoluted property boundaries.
- Proposed turf field would span both BoE and Township Property.
- Basketball courts and tennis courts have split ownership.
- Limits where we can apply for grants.

# Informal Agreement

- There is an agreement in place for over 50+ years
  - The Township & BoE have been abiding by it.
  - In the last 5-7 years the following improvements have been made:
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- 





# Lease Agreement

- Formalizes the existing informal agreement
  - Includes the property known as “Lower Columbia”
  - Approximately 4-5 acres
  - BoE athletic programs will be given priority (as they do today)
  - Usage/rental requests will remain with Rec (as it is today)
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# Recreation Master Plan (RMP)

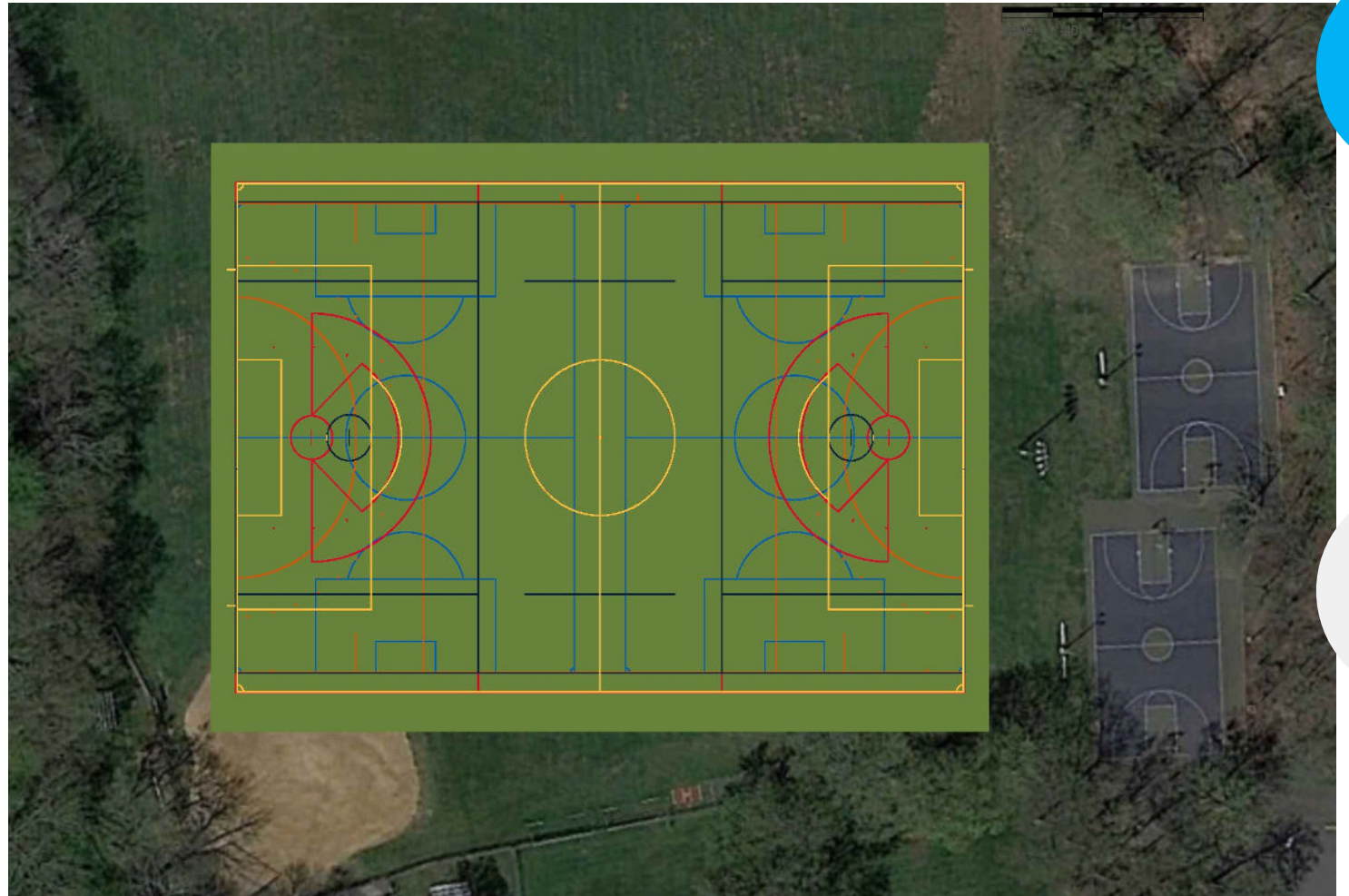
## Key findings impacting use of fields

- Increased number of sports programs
- Increased participation in sports programs
- Prevalence of Multi-Season sports Programs
- Severe Weather
- Need for turf field at Lower Columbia



# What is TLC?

- Synthetic Turf Field to accommodate lacrosse, field hockey, soccer and general use.
- Located along the southern edge of the existing natural grass athletic fields



# Why TLC?

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Availability will never be an issue

Drainage will be installed under the turf

Field will be available to anyone in Berkeley Heights to use (CMS, GL, BHPAL, BHYSC)

CMS becomes a state-of-the art facility

Improves CMS physical education classes and provides more space

Secondary field for GL with lights for Lacrosse, Field Hockey, & Soccer

Provides a better sports experience for all children in Berkeley Heights

# Financial Obligation

- Fund the design, construction and maintenance of project (Rec)
- Increase in electric costs (Township)
  - Could be minimal with new technology
- Sanitize turf 2x/year (Rec)
  - ~\$9,700
  - Rec no longer sanitizes Snyder
- Turf replacement in 10-15 years (Rec)
  - ~\$500,000
  - Rec will put aside \$42K/year
- Increase in garbage pickup (Township)
  - 2 hours per week
- Reduction in resource time for grass cutting and edging (Township)
  - 4 hours per week (April – October)
- Reduction in gas, maintenance and overall use of lawn equipment (Township)
- Reduction in TrueGreen annual contract (Rec)
  - \$1,900 annually (Lower Columbia)
- Field bounce test/leveling/safety tests (BoE since they have equipment)



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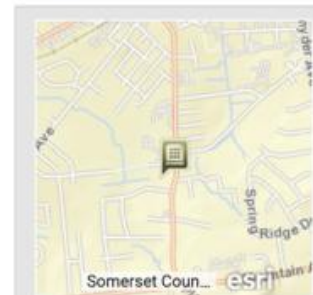
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## FACILITIES

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### Lower Columbia Park



**Lower Columbia Park**  
411 Plainfield Avenue  
Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922

### Maintenance & Field Preparation

Lower Columbia Park is maintained by the Recreation Commission and the field preparation is done by the department of Public Works.

### General Maintenance

- Clay installed as needed
- Fertilization performed early Spring, late Spring, Fall
- Grass cut weekly or as needed
- Restrooms inspected daily, cleaned Weds
- Seeding performed annually as needed
- Trashcan pick-up 3 times per week

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## FACILITIES

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### Upper Columbia Park



### Programs & Amenities

- Soccer
- Softball

### Maintenance & Field Preparation

Upper Columbia Park is maintained by the Board of Education and the field preparation is done by the department of Public Works.

### General Maintenance

- Clay installed as needed
- Fertilization performed early Spring, late Spring, Fall
- Grass cut weekly or as needed
- Seeding performed annually as needed



**Upper Columbia Park**  
411 Plainfield Avenue  
Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922

# Parks and Recreation Facilities Inventory

## Township of Berkeley Heights Parks, Athletic Fields and Recreational Components

Analysis of the Township of Berkeley Heights recreational needs requires evaluation of its present parks, athletic fields, recreational programs and recreational facilities on both the local and county levels. To provide adequate information for this analysis, this inventory provides information regarding parks and the availability of facilities/activities, whether or not these are located in parks. Recreational opportunities may be active or passive. Active recreation often refers to games and athletic activities that are planned or require registration. All other recreational activity is passive.

The Township of Berkeley Heights sports programs has grown in offerings, participation and in the recreational needs. In 2016 and 2017, the Township removed a soccer field and added a baseball field at Sansone Park – removed a baseball field from Veterans Memorial Park.

The Township of Berkeley Heights and Recreation Facilities now consists of seven (7) parks - Columbia Park, Snyder Ave Park, 911 Memorial, Peppertown Park, Veterans Memorial Park, Sansone Park, Passaic River Park. In total, the Columbia Park area is the largest at approximately 28 acres. Veteran's Memorial Park, Peppertown Park, and the 911 Memorial Park are close to the Town's downtown area. With the exception of 911 Memorial Park and Peppertown Park, all of the parks are active. Veterans Memorial, Columbia Park, and Snyder Ave Park have play structures, swings, picnic tables and benches. Columbia Park is an active park with an asphalt path, play structures, a shelter, basketball courts, tennis courts, soccer field, baseball field, softball field, swings, benches, vending machine, restrooms and a drinking fountain. Snyder Park is frequented by many Town and non-Town residents and has been developed as a multi-use synthetic turf athletic, baseball field, concession stand, play structures, spray park, restrooms and drinking fountain.

Recreation areas serve residents and may be designed to provide for a single recreational activity or multiple recreational activities. For the purpose of the Township of Berkeley Heights Plan, the following pages detail the size, location and amenities at each of the parks.

### Township of Berkeley Heights Parks and Fields Inventory

Name	Address	Amenities	Property Owner
Veterans Memorial Park	205 Plainfield Ave	Up to 2 7v7, 1 9v9 soccer fields, playground, concerts, benches, bathrooms, water	Township

Lower Columbia Field	411 Plainfield Ave	Up to 2 7v7, 1 9v9, 1 11v11 soccer fields, 1 lacrosse field, 1 field hockey, 1 basketball courts	Board of Education
Lower Columbia Field at Columbia Park	411 Plainfield Ave	2 basketball courts	Township
Columbia Park	411 Plainfield Ave	4 tennis/pickleball courts, 1 playground, basketball hoops, restrooms, picnic area	Township
Columbia Park	411 Plainfield Ave	2 tennis/pickleball courts, 1 playground	Board of Education
Thomas P. Hughes Elementary School	446 Snyder Ave	1 baseball field, 1 7v7, 1 9v9 soccer field, playground, basketball hoops	Board of Education
William Woodruff Elementary School	Briarwood Dr West	1 softball field, playground	Board of Education
Mary K McMillin Early Childhood Learning Center	651 Mountain Ave	1 baseball field, 2 playgrounds	Board of Education
Mountain Park Elementary School	55 Fairfax Dr	1 baseball field, 1 playground	Board of Education
Governor Livingston High School	175 Watchung Blvd	3 baseball fields, 1 softball field, 1 multi-purpose grass and 1 multi-purpose turf field with track	Board of Education