

# **Turf Lower Columbia (TLC)**

Berkeley Heights Recreation  
Commission

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# Objective

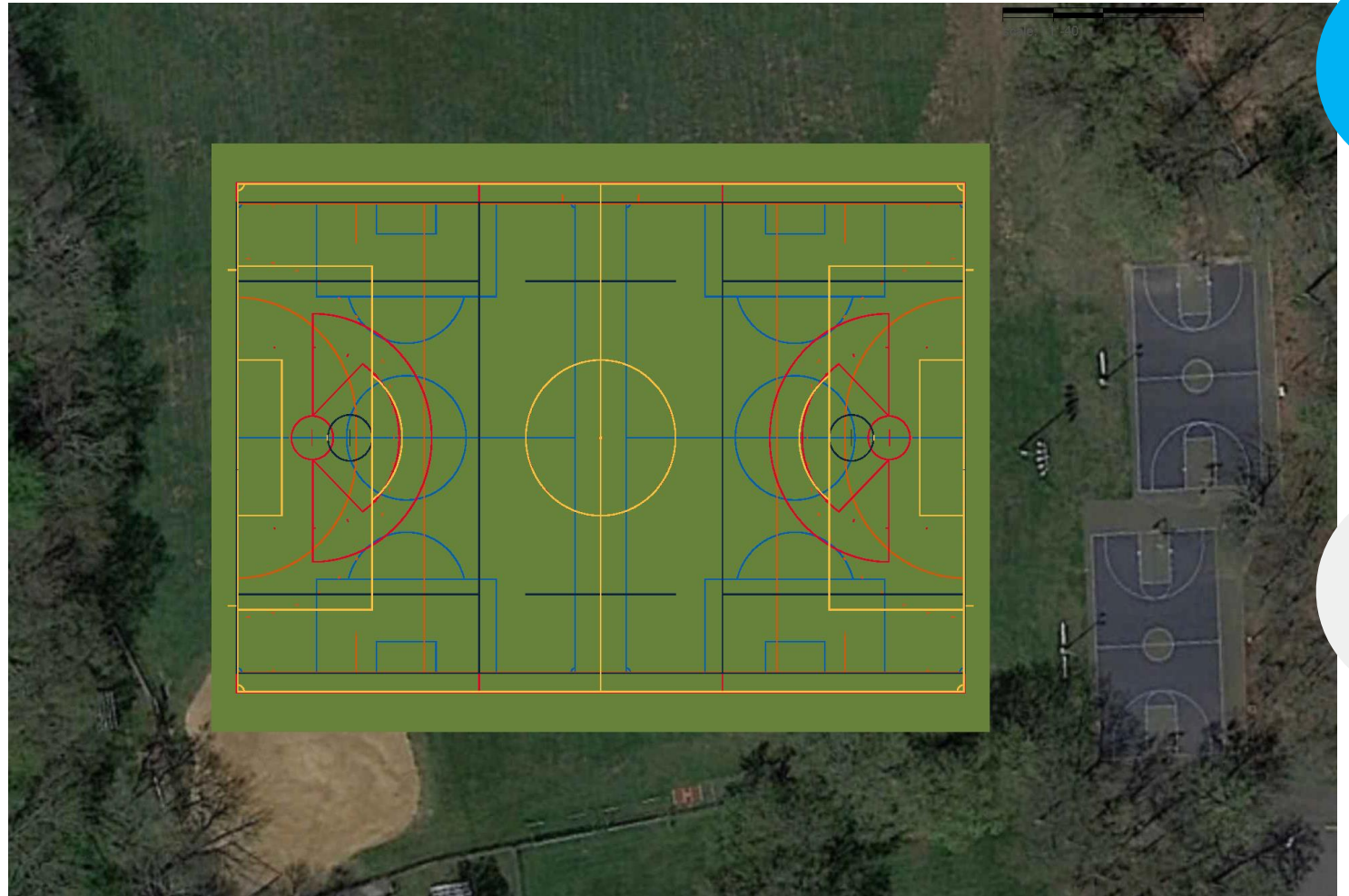
- To provide an athletic field that is safe and available for all children playing sports in Berkeley Heights.
  - Create a state-of-the-art athletic field that is not owned by Union County.
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# What is TLC?

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



# 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
- Most recent UC take-over of fields



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 games were relocated to GL.



## Divots and ruts

Makes the area a risk for injury. Injuries have been reported.



## 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

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

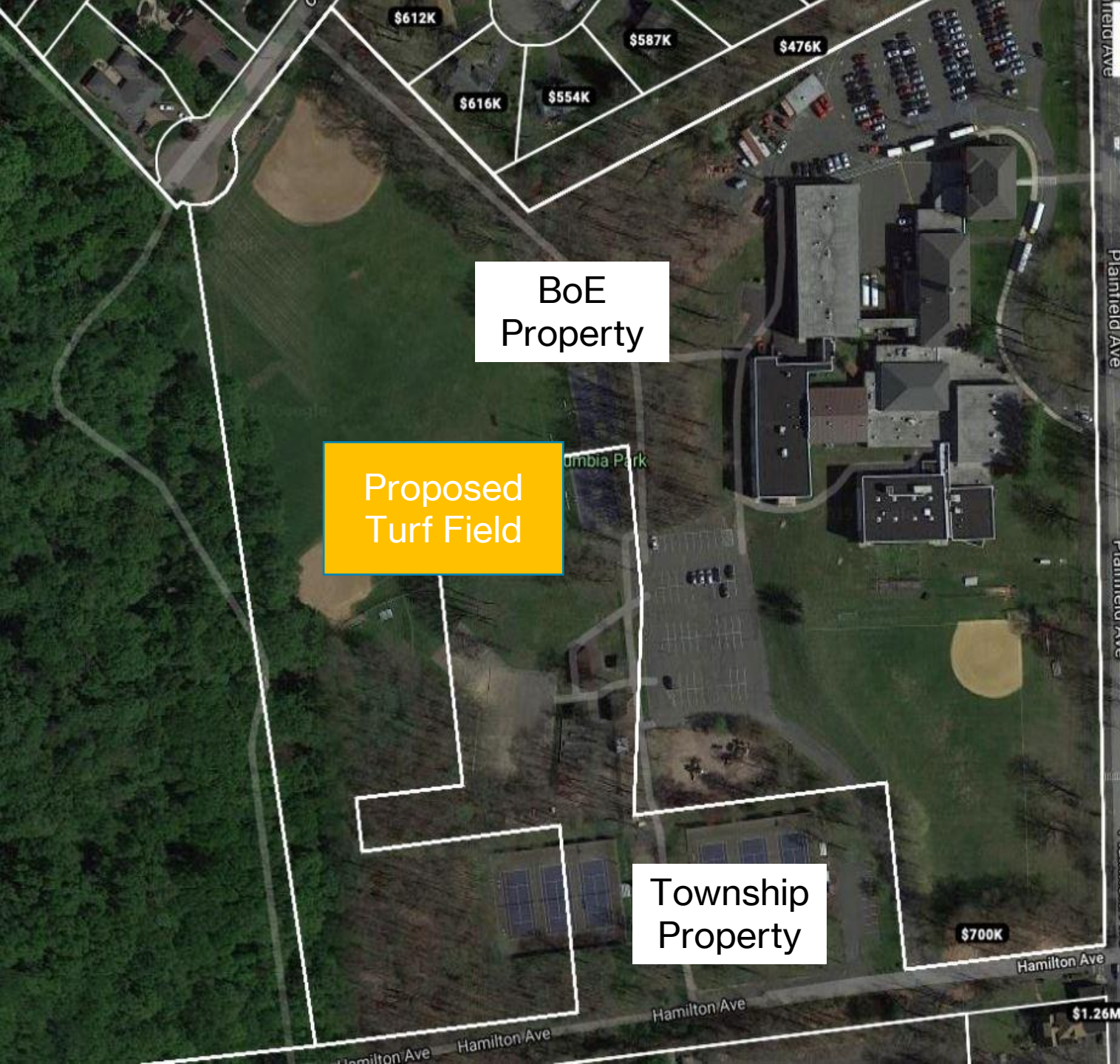
CMS becomes a state-of-the art facility

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





# Ownership Challenge

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



# What has been happening?

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2021 Rec Comm presented RMP

July '23 Discussed property  
boundaries with BoE

Sept '23 Requested lease  
agreement

May 15 '24 Requested lease  
agreement be put on BoE agenda



# Summary of Lease Agreement

- Verbal agreement has been in place for 50+ years
- Township has upheld its side of the agreement by maintaining and improving LC
- THERE IS AN AGREEMENT in place
- Lease Agreement includes the property known as "Lower Columbia"
- Approximately 4-5 acres
- BoE athletic programs will be given priority as they do today
- Usage requests will remain with Rec as it is today
- Field bounce test/leveling/safety will be performed by BoE (they have the equipment)



# Rec & Township 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)



# Missed and at risk Opportunities

- \$500,000 Inclusive Playground grant
- \$71,000 Local Recreation Improvement grant
- \$250,000 donation from Connell
- \$150,000 donation from Fiserv
- Push, advocate for additional funding from Union County
- Simplify the Lower Columbia Footprint (redraw boundaries)
- Provide a community resource that will be enjoyed by many for decades to come

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# Our Ask?

- Add two questions to this November's ballot

1. Do you support the property boundaries for Lower Columbia being cleaned up and given to the Township from the BoE?

For the past 50+ years the Township has maintained and improved the property and would like to continue to do so. Redrawing the property lines and giving the property to the Township would allow the Township to apply for additional grant funding that is not available to the Board of Education. The Board of Education will have priority to use the property.

2. Do you support the BoE and Township formalizing a 50+ year agreement, through a lease agreement, for maintaining and improving Lower Columbia?

For the past 50+ years the Township has upheld a verbal agreement by maintaining and improving Lower Columbia. Formalizing the agreement through a lease agreement will allow the Township to apply for additional grant funding that is not available to the Board of Education.

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