

Alumni group wants To get GHS runners on track

Propose new track and field facility

By PATRICK O'CONNOR
Recorder Staff, Greenfield, MA
Thursday, October 18, 2005

GREENFIELD - Peter Conway's father ran track for Greenfield High School in the 1920s, and he ran on a grass field. Conway, 72, who was the boys' track coach for 34 years, ran high school track in 1949 and 1950, and he ran on a grass field.

Today, his athletes also run on a grass field. "So you can see how much Greenfield has done for the sport of track - which is zip!" Conway says.

But Greenfield High School alumni association members plan to take the future into their hands by launching a massive fund-raiser to build a high school sports complex that would include an all-weather track and an artificial turf field. But before they start, they want support from town officials. They've gained some.

The Town Council's Community Relations Committee recommended that the full Town Council support the alumni association's proposal. "Our schools need a boost," said committee Chairman Mark Wisnewski, who said the schools have lost students who choose to attend other districts. "This may be a way for us to move forward."

"It's hard to turn down something you know you will need in the future," he added. "And it's "going to be paid for." Wisnewski said Alumni Association members told the committee that "major donors" who want to help the school want to know that the town stands behind the effort. The Community Relations Committee urged the mayor and the



Greenfield High School Alumni Association Vice President Cindy Bompastore (left) and President Steven Lepore (right) stand in the field behind the school with plans for an athletic complex the association is proposing to build. (Recorder/Zachary P. Stephens)

School Committee to support the fund-raiser. Wednesday, the Town Council will vote on the recommendation, Wisnewski said.

According to the alumni association, the estimated cost is \$2.5 million. Steven H. Lepore, president of the Alumni Association, said, if the fundraiser gets going, he's betting on many \$300 to \$500 donations. "If we can get enough of those donations, we can get this done," he said.

Now, the only evidence of a track behind Greenfield High School is torn up corners where runners dig in their cleats for turns. "We don't have a track," said Adam Brown, a high school senior who has run track since seventh grade. "We have a patch of grass." Unlike most athletes, local runners dread home meets, he said. "We don't want " home meets because we don't want slow times," Brown said.

Last spring, in his last race, Brown's time in the 400-meter was 53.9 seconds. He took second, but on any other track, he would have had a better time, he said. "It was my last race, and that affects my postseason," he said.

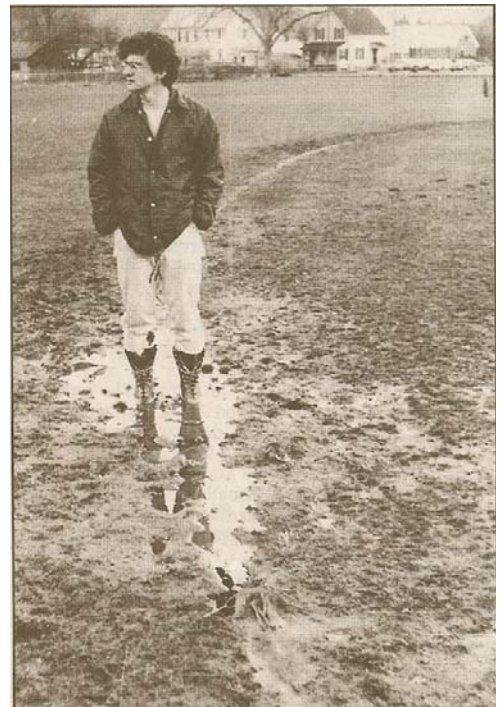
Mayor Christine Forgey, who is a member of the School Committee, said the fund-raiser is a "wonderful idea." However, she said their effort should be in conjunction with a larger effort - whether to rebuild the high school or build a new one. In this year's budget, Forgey allocated \$25,000 to study possible changes to the high school.

By town charter, a planning and construction committee will decide on what needs to be done, she said. "They need to make a decision on whether we need to remodel or build new, and on where it's going to take place," Forgey said.

Lepore said the alumni association would agree to join this larger effort, but he doesn't want to waste time, he said.

"If we raise the \$2.5 million, don't make us wait," he said. "We can't make the kids and the community feel like we are not moving forward. We're energized to do it now." The alumni association proposes that the town build the track on the rear north side of the high school. In the area, there's already a baseball field, a softball field, a football field and a skating rink.

"And we would have an athletics complex," Lepore said. "You're not going to move those facilities." Moreover, the area on which they want to build is vulnerable to flooding. It wouldn't make sense to build the school in that direction, he said. The alumni association proposed that the new track stretch from east to west, leaving room for an additional field on the south side. This concept came from a 1988 design, Lepore said.



Peter Conway, Greenfield High School's boys track coach for 34 years, stands on the third turn of the high school track during track season in the early 1970's. Since then the track has not changed and it still floods, he said

Several nearby schools have all-weather tracks, including Mohawk Trail Regional High School, Turners Falls High School (which has a road surface track with some granulated rubber), Frontier Regional High School, Holyoke High School, Chicopee High School, Amherst Regional High School and Northampton High School. Pioneer Valley Regional High School and Ralph C. Mahar Regional High School have crushed gravel tracks.

"Just about every school that has a track team has an all-weather track," said Conway, who's also a member of the Alumni Association.

"If these schools can manage to have a track, why can't Greenfield?" he asked.

Town officials, he said, want to spend money in different areas. Nothing's set aside for a track, he said. In the past, when money for a track was set aside in the town budget, it was the first to be "lopped off," he said. "They talk about it, but it never passes," he said.

Lepore said he hopes town officials lend their names to a letter that will be sent to potential donors. Forgey, who said she has not yet been shown a copy of a letter, said deciding what to do with the high school is' the first step.

"If they want to fund raise, it's up to them," she said. "I see it as huge. It could offset the cost of the project by millions. "But it shouldn't take place "in a vacuum," she reiterated "It has to be part of a larger picture."

The proposed name for the complex, which would include a memorial space for outstanding local citizens, would be Alumni Memorial Field.

The alumni' association meets today to discuss when they'll start mailing letters.

Sports complex clears hurdle of council support

By PATRICK O'CONNOR
Recorder Staff, Greenfield, MA
Thursday, October, 2005

Greenfield – Town councilors unanimously approved a resolution in support of Greenfield High School Alumni Association's effort to raise money for a sports complex.

"I think it's tremendous" said alumni association President Steven Lepore, after he spoke at the Town Council meeting Wednesday. "This is a win-win situation."

Lepore told councilors that he plans to make a presentation to the Greenfield School Committee to seek their support too. He wants local support before mailing letters asking for donations to the alumni association, he said.

“We may get lucky,” Lepore said. “We may get very lucky and raise \$2.5 million.”

The alumni association has started fund raising to pay for a sports complex that would include an all-weather track and an artificial turf field.

The estimated cost is about \$2.5 million, according to the alumni association.

So far, it has earmarked \$12,500 of donations for the sports complex.

The approved resolution states that the alumni association will fully fund the planning, development and installation of the local sports complex.

Councilor-at-large Isaac J. Mass said he supports the resolution. But he proposed amending it to include discussions on the renovation or replacement of the high school.

In agreement, Councilor-at-large Daniel J. Guin said the two efforts need to go hand in hand. “They have to be in tandem so we don’t build one and tear one down,” he said.

Councilor Mark Maloney, Precinct 4, recommended that the council pass the resolution as is.

“This project has been on the back-burner for 40 years,” he said. Besides, he said, “this resolution does not bind us to anything legally.” The amendment failed to pass, but the resolution of support passed unanimously.

Councilor Brickett Allis, Precinct 2, said he appreciates all the time the association put into the proposal. This is the first formal presentation I have seen,” he said

After the meeting, Lapore said if the money is raised, then they will evaluate how the property will be built. “Our vote is to build it where we want to build it,” he said, adding that the sports complex is not just for the high school. “This isn’t just a high school track. It’s a community project.

Cynthia Bompastore, vice-president of the association, said the support of the town councilors is wonderful. “this gives us a lot more energy,” she said. “Now we can do our mailing to the alumni. We have thousands in the database.