

Claxton FAQ

Q: What prompted the February 2023 soil testing?

A: In Summer 2022, a DPW contractor working on a nearby watermain project for the Town was given permission to use a portion of Claxton Field as laydown space. While preparing their laydown space, the contractor excavated some soil and piled it on-site with no advanced notice and without the Town's permission.

This prompted outreach from a concerned resident to the Board of Health. DPW and the Public Health Department worked with its engineer, Weston and Sampson (W&S) to identify appropriate mitigation strategies for the contractor to take to safeguard the site. All immediate strategies have been implemented with further work to be done by the contractor as the project is closed out.

However, in December 2022, the Director of Health and Human Services was contacted by the MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The agency had received a resident complaint through their enforcement portal. In subsequent meetings, DEP requested that the Town perform further testing on the chemical make-up of the soil throughout the site based on the site's historical use as a burn dump.

Q: Why had the Town not done soil testing before now, knowing the fields were built on an old landfill?

A: Claxton was redeveloped approximately 60 years ago as a recreational facility. At that time, topsoil was brought in and leveled to create the field over the existing site. In 2022, as the Town was planning to renovate the softball fields, it had W&S sample the soil to visually inspect the composition. The borings found that materials located below the imported topsoil were not likely appropriate for excavation but that 10-12 inches of topsoil were appropriate to disturb and reuse across the playing fields. Town staff and W&S discussed whether additional, voluntary testing to determine the chemical make-up of the soil was warranted, but decided based on the factors below, that it was not.

- Considering the historic use of the site and types of materials that may be present, W&S did not anticipate the generation of landfill gas or upward migration of the waste materials.
- The Town had already decided to modify the design, treating the subsurface materials as if contaminants are present and proactively adding in relevant mitigation strategies. These modifications include capping the fields with a geotextile barrier and building up on the site, without creating surplus soil that would need to be removed offsite. The design will prevent digging beneath the 12 inches of clean fill into the known debris.

The initial soil borings showing topsoil followed by ash material were consistent with the site's history. Fundamentally, the borings did not provide any unexpected data, nor any new information that would prompt a higher-level of concern about the soil make-up compared to what was previously known before the borings. The likelihood of contact with materials below the topsoil by children or other park users was considered low or unlikely. The renovation design included a geotextile membrane to further mitigate any risk. In 2023, when the MassDEP requested that additional soil testing be done, the Town agreed to do so.

Q: What chemicals were tested for in the February 2023 samples?

A: Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) via EPA Method 8270; MCP 14 Metals via EPA Method 6010 / 7471; Asbestos via Polarized Light Microscopy (PLM); and Dioxins via EPA Method 8290.

Q: What were the soil testing results?

A: In the top 12 inches of soil, the testing found low levels of contamination with concentrations similar to natural soils, which do not require any reporting to MassDEP or remediation. Below the top 12 inches in the subsurface materials, some contamination was found, with lead and dioxins present at concentrations that require reporting to MassDEP under the Massachusetts Contingency Plan (MCP). The Town will continue to engage W & S as a Licensed Site Professional (LSP) on their behalf to work on potential follow-up testing and reporting requirements.

Q: Should residents be concerned about any health impacts they may experience as a result of spending time on these fields?

A: W&S collected samples from both the surface and subsurface soils to determine if contaminants are present in soil at the property and their concentrations. The results of the testing are consistent with the assumed contamination that W & S and the Town discussed after boring samples were taken in January of 2022. The testing found that the topsoil on the field is clean fill (contaminant concentrations are similar to natural soils), and that usage as an athletic field would not carry any inherent risk. At this time the Town has no data to indicate that usage of the field is unsafe and will be keeping the fields open.

Q: How will the Town address the chemicals that were found in the soil?

A: In the next few weeks, the Town will be working with W & S and MassDEP to provide more clarity on the site conditions and any modifications that may be needed to the intended field improvements. At this time, the only major change to the design will include the expansion of the installation of the geotextile membrane to go beyond the field limits to areas that were identified through sampling as having contaminated materials in the subsurface soil. This may also trigger additional permitting requirements through the Conservation Commission.

The Town will work with MassDEP and file information with them accordingly. The Town will work with W & S and MassDEP to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place during the renovation project. Materials would be kept on site and appropriately capped.

Q: What's next for the renovation project?

A: Based on current information, the Town will be moving forward with the project as designed and with the modifications added to the geotextile membrane. The Town will be requesting that the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) review this project for funding in the Fall of 2023. Should this project be funded by the CPC and at Town Meeting this project would go out to bid in the Winter of 2024, with construction anticipated to start in the Spring of 2024.

While there are still more unknowns on this site that will be investigated by the Town, W & S, and MassDEP in the upcoming weeks, the Town understands that this facility is safe for athletics and recreation activities. The Town will work proactively to make any necessary alterations to the design of

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the renovation project, with the goal of keeping this project on its original timeline. As in any location, there are always unknowns that could affect the use of this property, but the information available, along with the consultation of W & S, would indicate that the Claxton Field can continue to function as an athletic facility now and into the future.

Q: What is the plan for softball this season given all of this? What about other events at Claxton?

A: Claxton Field will open on Monday, April 3 (weather dependent) for all permitted activities. For more information about how to permit a field or special event, please visit [this Park & Recreation Department webpage](#) or e-mail parkandrecreation@needhamma.gov.