



**AstroTurf**  
THE NEW GREEN WORLD  
N E W S

**Sport Specific:**

- American Football
- Canadian Football
- Football (Soccer)
- Field Hockey
- Baseball
- Multisport
- Commercial Golf

**Other Uses:**

- Residential
- Miscellaneous

### Local Towns In Connecticut Are Looking To Greener Pastures With Artificial Turf

Waterford, East Lyme school districts weigh benefits of artificial turf

Courtesy of *The Day*  
Written by *Karin Crompton*  
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In the mythology and machismo of football, the perfect game usually looks something like this: Snow swirls and wind howls. The field's surface has been turned into a thick pudding. A football player emerges from a pig-pile at the end of a play, a chunk of sod in his face mask obstructing his vision.

Now *that's* football, right?

Indeed. But what happens the next day, when the Pee Wee league has six games scheduled on the same torn-up field?

The answer, for increasing numbers of schools and towns, is to install artificial-turf fields. Norwich Free Academy is the only high school in this region with an artificial-turf field, albeit an older version, but now the East Lyme and Waterford school districts are seriously considering the idea.



Waterford has a proposal, still in the research phase, for a complete facilities overhaul, including transforming the football field into a multipurpose field with artificial turf that could accommodate all the fall sports.

"They clearly are friendly to multiple use," said Athletic Director James O'Neill. "On the other hand, there are a lot of traditionalists who say, □If a horse can't eat it, I don't want to play on it."

Bruce Cohen, who with three other men is leading the effort to build two artificial-turf fields in East Lyme, said, "It's not if, but when. We're going to do it and everybody around us is going to do it. It's just a matter of time."

The partners plan to raise money for two fields through a nonprofit organization called The East Lyme Turf Drive. They estimate the cost at \$1.5 million.

One field would be laid out at the high school, replacing the existing football field, while the other would be at Bride Brook Park, adjacent to the Janet S. York Correctional Institution.

"You wouldn't believe the number of municipalities in this country that are going to this," said Fran Shields, director of athletics at Connecticut College. "And it's not just colleges. They're putting these things in parks in New York City."

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For years, AstroTurf® dominated the artificial-turf market. A brand name that has come to be used in everyday conversation the way Kleenex is substituted for facial tissue, AstroTurf® gained brand recognition after the Houston Astrodome used it to surface its field in the 1960s.

Today, about 35 companies make artificial turf in the country, according to Jeffrey Bruce, president of Jeffrey L. Bruce & Co., a landscape architectural consulting firm in North Kansas City, Mo.

"What you're looking at today is what we call the third generation of artificial fields," said Bruce, who describes a metamorphosis from the original AstroTurf® to a nylon material that was slick and hard -- the surface on NFA's field -- to the latest systems, which are often described as looking and feeling like natural grass.

The newest turf is made of polypropylene or polyethylene, or a combination of the two. These are much softer fibers than the nylon carpet traditionally associated with turf burns. Shields describes it as "carpet with little fake blades of grass."

The carpet is laid onto a prepared surface and then filled with about 1.5 inches of ground rubber or a combination of ground rubber and sand. The lines of the field are stitched into the carpet and the seams are glued together.

Underneath, the drainage, also called the subsurface, is a conglomeration of coarse stone and pipes. Some fields incorporate a porous pad over this layer, before the turf carpet, for extra cushioning.

"When you walk on it, you feel like you're walking on someone's plush living room (carpet)," said Cohen. "There's a big bounce to it and it's very soft. You can wear sneakers, you can wear spikes, you don't get skin burns, and it absorbs a massive amount of water. It just drains away."

Cost estimates range from about \$600,000 to \$800,000. The East Lyme group estimates each field will cost about \$750,000. The Connecticut College field cost \$1.4 million, but it included many extras, Shields said.

To fund the \$1.5 million cost of the two fields, the East Lyme proponents expect to conduct major fund-raising, but the school board has a policy against corporate donations. The school system has sometimes been flexible about the rule, allowing a brick walkway that enters the field to recognize sponsors, for example.

Everyone seems to agree that the school district cannot ask taxpayers to fund the entire project.

Kevin Seery, immediate past chairman of the East Lyme Board of Education, said in December that the town needs more field space for everyone from the varsity football team to power walkers and the marching band.

"The question is, how do we address that and how do we advertise for it?" Seery said. "I'm sure nowhere on that field do we want to see the Nike or Reebok logo, but we have to decide how we go about doing this in a tasteful way. ... Other towns have it. We don't."

Cohen, Jerry Fortier and the other two parents pushing for the project made a presentation to the school board last fall. Fortier said the group researched the idea for several months beforehand.

"We're trying to make this a townwide initiative," he said.

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Artificial-turf suppliers say low maintenance costs offset the initial price of installing the fields.

NFA Athletic Director Gary Makowicki described the maintenance as "very minimal."

"We have a machine like a sweeper vacuum, which runs over (the field) to clean up and pick up debris on the field," he said. "Other than that, every two years we have to redo some of the lines on the field. The boys and girls lacrosse and field hockey lines have to be redone every couple of years."

But Bruce, the landscape architect, cautions people on its limitations. Those include the life expectancy of the newest fields, which is eight to 10 years. While softer, the material is also less durable. Towns and schools need to establish a capital account and set aside perhaps \$50,000 yearly to prepare for the replacement.

"People aren't thinking ahead, and they're purchasing a lot of times on the fact that they don't have to maintain them or they don't have to maintain them as much," Bruce said. "These do require maintenance and I think everyone highly underestimates the amount of maintenance to keep them in good condition."

AstroTurf, LLC is developing a product it claims can prevent against fungus and bacteria, among other agents, that can collect on the fibers.

But what be of more concern, Bruce said, is the temperature of the turf fields, which can become extremely hot.

"You will look at temperatures on the average of 60 degrees above ambient air temperature," he said. "If it's 90 degrees out, the surface of the field is 150."

Still, he said, there are many towns and schools for which artificial turf is a good idea.

"There are certainly school districts that have almost an impossibility of acquiring new land," he said. "We did that with a New Rochelle, N.Y., school district. They have very high program use, they're using it 24-7, and the school district has very limited capabilities in terms of maintaining natural grass."