

FRIENDS OF THE SCARSDALE PARKS, INC.

**REPORT IN OPPOSITION TO THE CREATION OF A PARKING LOT
IN HYATT FIELD PARK**

The mission of the Friends of the Scarsdale Parks since its founding in 1957 has been “to help preserve and protect Scarsdale’s public green spaces.”¹ As with all FOSP conservation projects, project goals are coordinated and implemented in a collaborative effort with the Village of Scarsdale and its departments of Parks, Recreation and Conservation (PRC) and Public Works (DPW). This collaboration is an integral part of our working relationship with the Village.”²

In accordance with this spirit of cooperation FOSP enjoys with the Village and our inclination to find practical solutions to competing community interests when it comes to the natural environment, we are submitting this report for the purpose of (1) placing in the proper historical context the current Village proposal to use a substantial section of the Hyatt Field Park parkland as a paved, fenced parking lot, and (2) stating our opposition to the proposal for the creation of a parking lot in any part of Hyatt Field Park in the Bramlee Heights neighborhood.

**History of Community Opposition in Scarsdale Village
to Misuse of Parkland for Vehicular Parking**

FOSP’s mission in the stewardship of Scarsdale’s open space and parkland could not be exemplified more clearly than our position on the Hyatt Field parking issue:

- (a) To promote and foster by all proper means in the Village of Scarsdale, New York the preservation, restoration and conservation of existing public park land, public gardens and other public open green space areas in order to maintain the ecological integrity and beauty of Village of Scarsdale owned land;
- (b) To advocate that Village of Scarsdale owned land, including public park land, public gardens and other public open green space areas, whether so designated by deed of gift or purchase or otherwise, shall be protected, maintained and preserved as such and shall not be used for any other purpose;
- (c) To promote and foster by all proper means in the Village of Scarsdale public knowledge and appreciation of and for Village of Scarsdale owned public park lands, public gardens and other public open green space areas and the need for their protection, maintenance and preservation;
- (d) To keep apprised of opportunities for acquisition by the Village of Scarsdale of land suitable for use as public parkland, public gardens and other public open green space areas; and
- (e) To advocate against encroachment by private or public actions on Village of Scarsdale owned public park lands, public gardens and other public open green space areas.³

FOSP has cited with approval the foresight of Village planners in the past who accelerated

¹ FOSP is a 501(c)(3) New York State nonprofit corporation.

² FOSP Harwood Park Wetland Restoration Project Report, at page 2 (May 12, 2015) (“FOSP Wetland Restoration Project Report”).

³ FOSP By Laws, adopted as of April 6, 2016.

acquisition of open space in the 1920s, when real estate values had begun to soar, most notably the tract that became the High School and Library campuses which were once part of the old Butler estate:

“When Scarsdale had large areas of undeveloped land no one thought about the future need of parks and playgrounds. But as one estate after another was divided into building lots, residents who had the welfare of the whole community in mind began to consider the advantages of open spaces.”⁴

Over time the issues shifted, from Village acquisition of open space for public recreational or passive use before none would be left for purposes aside from private development, to the appropriate use of open space. There are a few notable examples that, in the context of Hyatt Park, are worth recounting.

In the 1970s FOSP was among the leading civic advocates for the preservation of Village Center open space. During that period, both the Village Green at 1.8 acre Chase Park on Chase Road (and Woodland Place) and 1 acre de Lima Park on Popham Road (at Autenreith Road) were viewed as prime real estate for the creation of extensive paved parking lots. Needless to say FOSP strenuously and unequivocally opposed these ill-advised proposals.

According to the PRC’s 2016-2017 brochure, 5.1 acre Hyatt Field Park was “built” as parkland in the hopeful post-war era in 1949 and 1952. The current proposal for Hyatt Field Park – where a long-dormant schematic design for parking that would encroach on the outfield of the larger of two baseball playing fields appears to have been set aside, only to be resurrected now – is eerily reminiscent of the issue before the Village regarding Chase Park in the 1960s and 1970s:

“Reactivation of any idea of using the Chase Road lots for parking not only does not solve the total problem [of Village Center parking needs] but suggests a retreat from moral and legal commitments to preserve the area as a park, and as a buffer zone between the business district and residential areas. Some years ago this was thrashed out and one would have hoped that the cogent arguments then advanced by so many organizations and individuals against such use of parkland would have laid the concept to rest for all time. Any village plan for open space and planned business-residential zoning is seriously weakened and its future made problematical by the proposal. There has been no basic change in the relevant factual situation to warrant a change in the earlier decision against turning the Chase Road park into a parking lot.”⁵

The improper use of municipal funds to turn parkland into a parking lot when there are available alternatives was also raised in 1970:

“The use of 61 Popham Road for 'worker' parking would not alleviate the commuter situation, and would involve a zoning change and loss of open space or park-like property

⁴ H. Hansen, Scarsdale: From Colonial Manor to Modern Community, at page 212 (The Town Club, 1954), cited in FOSP Wetland Restoration Project Report, at page 1.

⁵ Letter from Frank H. Gordon, FOSP president, to Saul Horowitz, Jr., Scarsdale Village Mayor, at page 2 (February 19, 1970) (“Gordon Letter”).

in contravention of long-term village plans. It is questionable whether public funds should be spent for such a narrow purpose, especially when the Freightway property is available, suited for parking purposes, already owned by the Village, and appropriately zoned.”⁶

A flyer distributed by FOSP during the 1970 public uproar over turning Village Center parkland into a parking facility reflects the same enduring community sentiment about parkland preservation today:

“Our Village Green is more than real estate. It is a vital part of the village we've chosen for our environment, and in which we have all made substantial housing investments. The Chase Road-Woodland Place meadows are now a part of our esthetic and cultural values. They are a basic part of village life. . . . After announcing in open session that it would not, after all, put in an earlier proposed 60-car parking lot on Autenrieth and Popham Roads, the Village Board, in a surprise move and without public hearing or any discussion, authorized the destruction of this village landmark green area on Chase Road by voting to install 100 parking spaces. . . . The Board says it is retaining the ‘Chase Road’ portion of the area as open space and using only the ‘Woodland Place lots,’ but they are both parts of the whole that make up our Village Green, which for all practical purposes would be destroyed by the parking lot.”⁷

The result of community opposition to the misappropriation of public parkland 46 years ago was the dedication of both Chase and de Lima Parks as inviolable parkland. We recommend the same disposition here, and respectfully request that the proposal for a parking facility at Hyatt Field Park should be tabled permanently.

Save Hyatt Field Park as Parkland, Not as Parking Stock

In recent correspondence to the Village, members of the community nearest to Hyatt Field Park who are most directly affected have expressed their opposition to any use of the parkland for vehicular parking. They and residents of other neighborhoods have advocated for reasonable, alternative solutions commensurate with the largely seasonal increase in parking needs for sporting events at the park. The prerequisite of all these groups is notification to and inclusion of the community in the dialogue and in the evaluation process to find alternatives.

Potential solutions have already been suggested. They would not require encroachment on the parkland but would instead involve reconfiguration of street parking combined with closure of certain access streets that become blocked during peak times of park usage, and a potential, mutually agreeable arrangement for use during non-conflicting hours of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church parking lot on the SE corner of Boulevard and Gaylor Road.⁸

⁶ Gordon Letter, at page 1.

⁷ FOSP Flyer, "Save Chase Road Park" (March 12, 1970).

⁸ See, e.g., Langford, Barbara. "Re: Hyatt Field Park Parking Lot Construction." Email message to Jon Mark, Carl Finger, Steven Pappalardo, Brian Gray (3 October 2016).

Community opposition to the Hyatt Field parking lot proposal is based on an appreciation of the central role that this and other parks play in the lives of Scarsdale homeowners, their children, and park users from neighboring towns. The relevant factors cited by residents who oppose the proposal include, but are not limited to, loss of public space, loss of recreational usage, limited seasonal usage, transiency, loitering and vandalism, pedestrian and child safety, neighborhood and resident usage, non-Scarsdale resident usage, property values, and speeding on local streets.⁹ In the category of loss of public space at this particular mixed recreation-passive park, the open field areas beyond the outfields are frequently used for picnicking by parents (or nannies) with their young children.

The amount of space that would need to be appropriated for 27 parking spaces is not discernable from the almost illegible schematic provided to the community by the Village. But assuming that the proposed parking area would require standard spacing for off-street parking (about 9' wide, 18' long) and the approximate width of a standard traffic turning lane (12'), at least 7,000 sq ft of parkland would have to be appropriated.¹⁰ Any fence or net would take up additional space on the outfield(s). To get an idea of the area needed to park 27 vehicles, envision the lengthy block of center median parking on northbound East Parkway from approximately Popham Road to the Spencer Place-Metro North Station intersection.

Assuming also an allowance for adequate turning space for ingress/egress from and to the street, 27 parking spaces would create vehicle creep extending more than 243 feet from Grand Boulevard to beyond the NW edge of the large baseball outfield. Any safety fencing would have to be at least that length, and high enough to prevent balls well hit across a foreshortened outfield from smashing into windshields and pedestrians.

In the summer of 2016, in a collaboration with the Village FOSP constructed and planted at the NW end of Hyatt Field Park a native perennial butterfly garden. We are therefore cognizant that rising at the western edge of this section of the parkland is a steep hill upon which private residences and local streets overlook the park. At least one resident requires vehicular access to park in his driveway abutting the existing utility path, access which would be impeded by activity on a 27-car lot on a widened pathway. Pedestrians (including children) entering the park via a steep stairway on the hill above the new parking area would encounter additional safety hazards from parking activity.

The proposal for Hyatt Field Park would entail impervious paving in the parkland, on a sensitive Village-mapped wetland area, that would appear to cost nearly \$1,300 per parking space at a total Village-

⁹ Hobbs, R. Craig. "Re: Planned Construction - Parking - Hyatt Field Park." Email message to Brian Gray, Robert Cole, Steve Pappalardo, Jon Mark (1 October 2016). *See also* Berg, Robert. "Re: Hyatt Field Park Parking." Email message to Brian Gray (29 September 2016); Wolfe, Cory. "Re: Proposed Hyatt Park additional parking." Email message to Brian Gray (26 September 2016) ("As discussed, the idea to take away part of Hyatt field and turn it into a fenced parking lot is not an acceptable solution to any parking issues that have been created by the new playground. Hyatt field is the backyard to this entire neighborhood of homes and we rely on this green space both functionally and aesthetically. This outfield area is a beautiful open space backed by trees where kids run around and play especially while the fields are being used. To turn any part of this field into a fenced in parking lot will destroy the beauty of this park.").

¹⁰ Scarsdale Village Code, Chapter 310 Off-street parking. §310-70 J. Size of parking spaces. (1) Each standard size parking space shall be at least nine feet wide and 18 feet long.

estimated cost of \$35,000. Public funds in any amount should not be spent for such an unsuitable purpose on dedicated parkland when there is ample and available street parking. It's no wonder that so many members of the community have expressed such strong and united opposition to the parking lot proposal.

Conclusion and Solution

The public's right to unencumbered use and enjoyment of Village designated parkland should not be abridged nor periodically challenged by the perceived need for vehicular parking. Neighborhood harmony over the unintended consequences of Hyatt Field Park's popularity should not be achieved at the expense of the parkland itself. Otherwise, there would be little left of the dozens of parks throughout the Village that were originally established with the goal of preserving open space.

At a time when new open space in Scarsdale is unlikely to be found for use as parkland, none of the numerous existing public parks, or any other open space suitable for designation as passive or other park use, should be deemed expendable for any other purpose. The reason, as has been sadly demonstrated across the globe, is that once lost open space is unlikely to be restored, at least not anytime soon.¹¹

FOSP therefore respectfully recommends that all of Hyatt Field Park,¹² notable for its 2 baseball fields, resurfaced basketball court and new playground equipment, should be protected and preserved in perpetuity as public recreation and passive parkland, commensurate with its lawful use by the community and designation as parkland by the Village. Going forward, FOSP suggests that the Village should consider the formation of an ad hoc committee comprised of interested parties, including community representatives, to discuss practical ways to address these parking issues and community concerns.

Respectfully submitted by the members of the Board of Friends of the Scarsdale Parks:

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Helen Oja
Rick Reuter
Cynthia Roberts
Loren Levine Schwartz
Tara Smith Tyberg
Todd Wolleman
Julia Zimbalist

¹¹ The often quoted lyric is apt: "Don't it always seem to go/That you don't know what you've got/Till it's gone/They paved paradise/And put up a parking lot. . . ." Mitchell, Joni. "BigYellow Taxi." Ladies of the Canyon (1970).

¹² The entire park was extensively restored by the Village in 2015-2016.