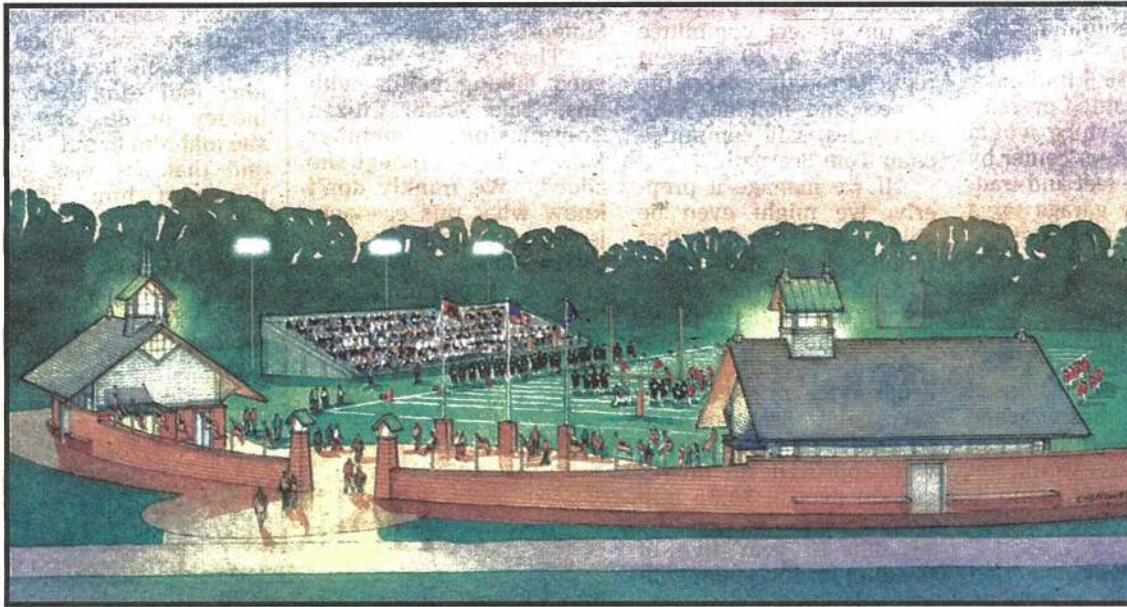


Field of dreams



Rendering courtesy of Duo Dickinson

The proposal calls for an improved field (including reorienting to make it regulation-size for lacrosse and soccer and adding artificial turf), seating for 2,000 and concession stands.

Ciotti proposes \$3 million Strong stadium

By Hannah Vahl
Staff writer

MADISON—A town with a proud athletic tradition needs a stadium to match.

That's the argument that former Daniel Hand High School football coach Larry Ciotti is making to support a \$3 million upgrade to Strong Field financed mainly with private donations and grants.

"We just have such a high level of participation in Madison with youth groups and high school groups in athletics, we feel we need to have a first class facility for these kids," he said.

Madison architect Duo Dickinson has already drawn up plans for an improved field, seating for 2,000 and concession stands. The plans include reorienting the field to make it regulation-size for lacrosse and soccer and adding artificial turf. Concession stands and bathrooms would be upgraded, a gateway created with lit cupolas to guide visitors into the park, and a hall of fame would be added that could house trophies and even play videos of championship games.

The Beach and Recreation Commission unanimously approved the plan three weeks ago, and Ciotti was scheduled to formally present the concept to Selectmen at their Monday

night meeting. The project has yet to gain other necessary town approvals, such as from the planning and zoning and inland wetlands commissions.

Ciotti plans to finance the improvements, which he estimates will take three to five years to complete, with money raised privately, though he hopes

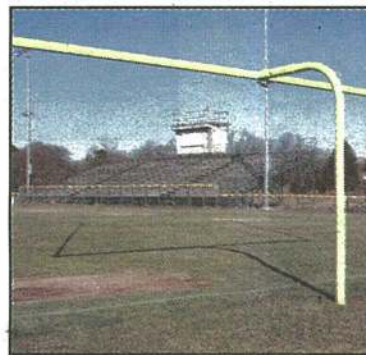


Photo by Hannah Vahl

Madison's high school field is described by some as currently "below par."

funds currently spent on the maintenance of Strong Field can be diverted to the project.

"We have a need for an improved library, a new ambulance complex and senior center... This would be very low priority with very little funding available," he said. "We would rather do it with private funding and grants."

Now an assistant football coach at Yale University, Ciotti started the football program at Daniel Hand High School in 1970. When Strong Field was built, he was one of the volunteers who helped put the bleachers together. Together with current football coach Steve Filippone, he grew the football program into nine-time state champions. As many as 5,000 have been known to turn out for a Friday night football game at Strong Field, which is part of the Surf Club and overlooks Long Island Sound.

"This would create a facility that lives up to the site," said Dickinson. "It is one of the most spectacularly beautiful sites to play sports."

Daniel Hand High School Athletic Director Craig Semple is in favor of the project, which would allow multiple sports to play games on the field.

"Right now it is really a park where we play, although it is a beautiful park," said Semple. The project, he said, would allow "all other sports to have the same opportunity as football and be able to experience that stadium setting. That's what I'd like to see."

Both Dickinson and Ciotti point out that the stadium could

Stadium: Proposal to be privately funded

From page 1

be used for symphonies, dance performances, and even to host college games. But in terms of athletics, the project would vault the field the town currently uses from an ordinary facility to an extraordinary one, he said.

"Part of my job is to recruit the Connecticut schools," he said. "I've seen a lot of high school athletic complexes. Currently (Madison's facility) is below par, but with the new Strong Field, it will be undoubtedly the best in New England."

Hannah Vahl can be reached at 752-2716 or hvahl@ctcentral.com