



Township of Belleville *New Jersey*

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Belleville Breaks Ground on \$5.5 Million Upgrade to Athletic Facilities at High School

BELLEVILLE, NJ – June 7, 2021 – A boy from the local Little League was holding a dripping ice cream cone and surveying a bulldozer and an excavator.

His eyes lit up as Mayor Michael Melham explained to him that these monstrous machines will soon help create an expansive turf field out of all the dirt and rock surrounding him.

Saturday morning's groundbreaking ceremony behind Belleville High School represents the starter's gun on construction of a sweeping \$5.5 million project to enhance and enlarge the athletic facilities in the township.

The highlight of the plan will be a new track that will allow the high school boys and girls teams to host home meets for the first time in several years. And because the plan is to build an eight-lane track, Belleville will be able to host New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association-sanctioned state track meets.

The project will also include a new turf surface and state-of-the-art LED lighting for the football field and a soccer/softball field that will be created from the adjacent smaller baseball fields and land recaptured from a redesigned sloped retaining wall.

The new field inside that track could be used for anything from marching band rehearsals to football practices to soccer games.

With this plan, the township will have almost quadrupled its field turf space in the past three years, Melham said

"I dare say this is Belleville's most monumental public works project in probably 50 years," Melham said. "Today we figuratively set the cornerstone on a project that will benefit Belleville's residents and most certainly our youth, for decades to come."

"It's a big day for Belleville," added Township Manager Anthony Iacono. "Anytime we invest \$5.5 million in our infrastructure is a great day, but what we're doing here today will bring enjoyment and fun for generations of budding athletes."

The project is financed with \$2 million in Green Acres grants. The township also bonded for about \$3 million – which Melham explained is already funded through the municipal budget.

Melham said when the members of the Township Council identified the need to add LED lighting in some areas and replacement of outdated lighting in others, it invited the Belleville School District to partner on the project.

“When we wanted to upgrade the lights,” Melham said, “the Board of Education and Superintendent Richard Tomko immediately stepped up and funded the last half-million dollars for new LED lighting – which is energy-efficient and will save us money in the long run.”

Deputy Mayor Thomas Graziano and Council members Marie Stumolo-Burke, Steve Rovell and Naomi De Peña also took part in the groundbreaking ceremony. So did Belleville Board of Education President Christine Lamparello, Vice President Gabrielle Bennett-Meany and Board trustee Frank Velez.

Several players with the town’s Little League also participated in the ceremony, calling it a home run.

The project is scheduled to be completed by late summer, in time for the 2021-22 school year.

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