

Proposed Rahway River Park Field Upgrades Generate Citizen Opposition



A recent sunny afternoon in Rahway River Park

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CLARK, NJ - A groundswell of public opposition to proposed changes in Rahway River Park has generated over 2,700 electronic signatures on a [change.org petition](#), just over 1,000 “likes” on a [Facebook page](#) named “Coalition to Save Rahway River Park” and more than a dozen citizens voicing their concerns to the Union County Board of Chosen

Freeholders at their March 26 meeting. Citizens from Rahway, Clark, Cranford and Kenilworth spoke against the measure at that time.

The field upgrades are a joint venture between Union County and the City of Rahway. The field would be used for five to seven Rahway High School home football games per year. It would also be used for certain county-wide track meets and by municipal and county residents for other sporting events and athletics.

The proposed changes include the conversion of an existing track and field to an artificial turf surface, the installation of a “no more than 1,200” seat aluminum bleacher, and field lighting. While early reports and opposition pages mentioned a 5,000 seat “stadium” with a press box and locker room facility, that notion was dispelled by County Manager Al Faella.

“I can state categorically that there will not be a 5,000-seat ‘stadium’ built in the park. This is an upgrade of an existing field, not a new stadium-type facility,” Faella said.

Those who oppose the measure cite a variety of concerns. They include:

- the potential size and scope of the project
- the negative impact to wildlife and the migratory bird population
- potential health hazards of artificial turf
- quality of life issues including traffic, parking, noise and light pollution
- destruction of grassland, the natural landscape and the open nature of the parkland
- environmental damage due to run-off

Faella said that parts of the Rahway park are preserved for open space, but the proposed field is located in an area that was developed for and has always been used for sports. According to the Union County website, Rahway River Park has multiple fields available for baseball, softball, soccer and football.

Portions of the park were designed by famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead but the park does not appear on the state or federal register of historic places. Opponent Kelly Tropeano of Clark said it should be and that changes in the park violate Union County’s own stated mission of preserving natural spaces.

“As has been the case throughout the history of our parks, Union County is growing, and demands on our recreational facilities are growing, too,” Director of the Union County Office of Communication and Public Information Sebastian D’Elia said in a letter to a change.org petitioner. “By upgrading our existing facilities we can welcome more residents and visitors into our parks, without intruding upon the preserved natural areas that we hold in trust for future generations.”

Opponents of the proposed changes are seeking volunteers to help organize their efforts and will return to the Union County Freeholder meeting on April 16 to reiterate their opposition to the plans.

