

*Park and Recreation Master Plan*

# Rockwood Field

Worcester, Massachusetts

**January 2006**



**City of Worcester Department of Public Works and Parks**



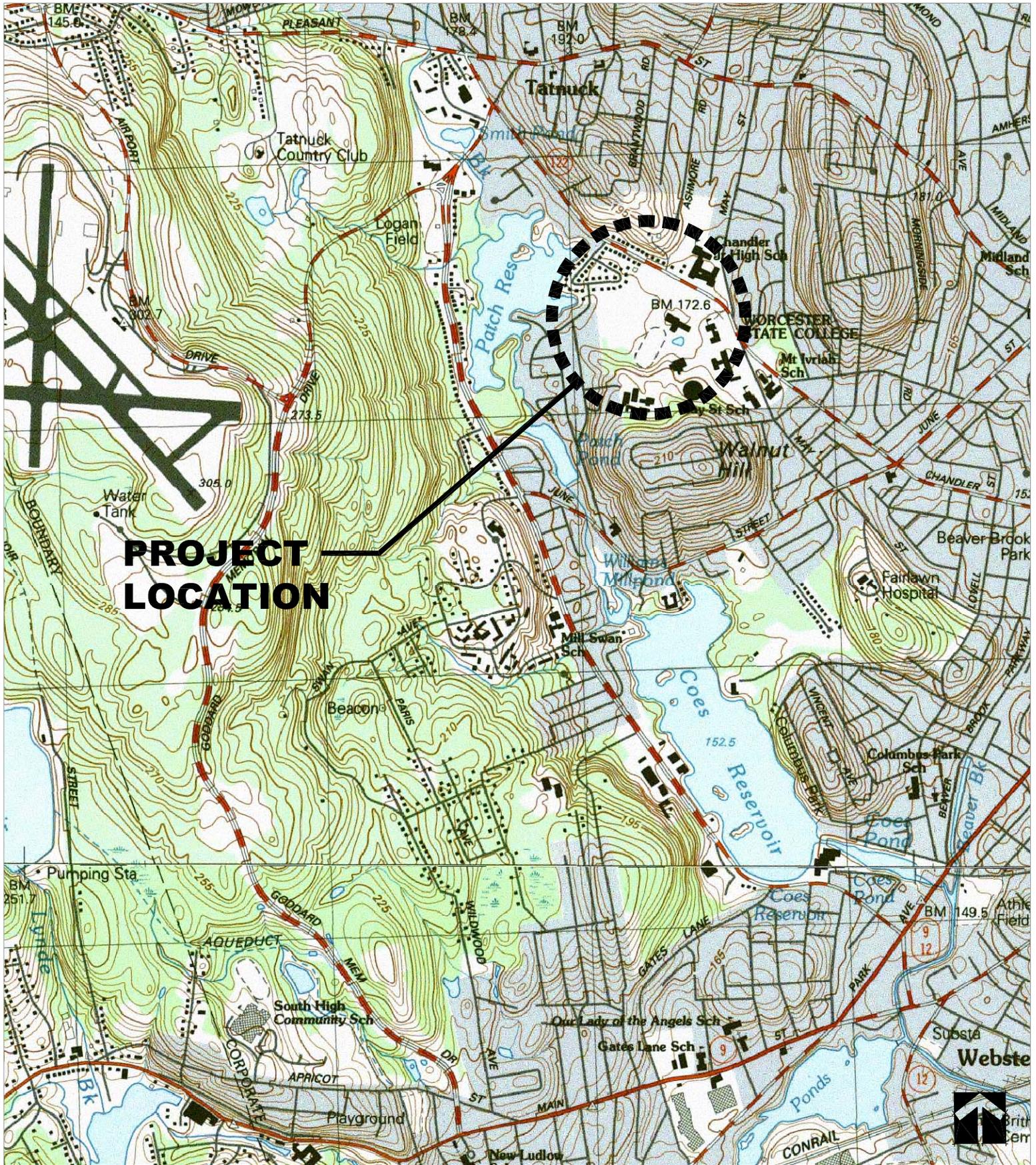


Figure 1 - Locus Map

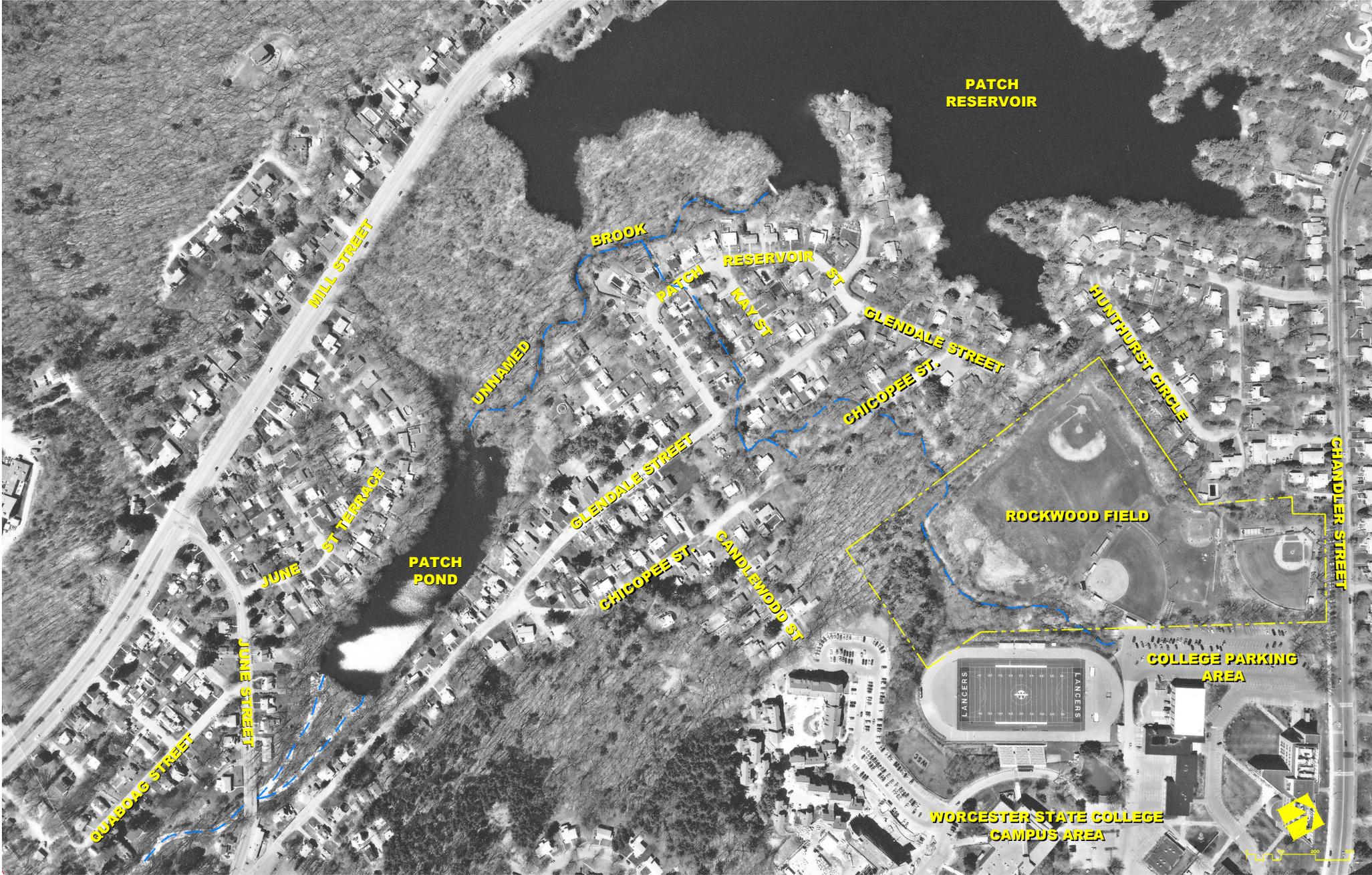


Figure 2 - Rockwood Field Neighborhood Aerial Photograph

# *Park and Recreation Master Plan*

## ***Rockwood Field***

### ***Worcester, Massachusetts***

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## Acknowledgements

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We gratefully recognize the residents of the City of Worcester, especially those residing within the neighborhoods surrounding Rockwood Field, whose attendance in such great numbers at the community meetings was critical to the forging of this Master Plan. The hopes, concerns, needs and ideas of abutter residents and other park users have been addressed throughout the document, and all recommendations have been developed in a manner that improves recreational opportunities for all residents of the City, while also improving conditions for those that live in close proximity to the property. It is clear that Rockwood Field is a fabulous park and open space resource and we believe that the Master Plan strikes the right balance between protecting and enhancing adjacent properties and providing improved facilities (both passive and active), particularly to the youth of the City.

We wish to express our appreciation to members of the Worcester City Council, Worcester Statehouse Delegation, Worcester City Manager's Office, Worcester Department of Public Works and Parks, Jesse Burkett Little League, West Side Babe Ruth, Worcester Youth Soccer and other committed public and private servants that contributed in so many ways to this Master Plan. We also wish to thank representatives of the Worcester State College community, for participating in the process, for providing useful background information related to the property and for providing comfortable facilities for the hosting of all public hearings and community meetings.



*Views from left to right of the Chandler Street Park Edge, underused Baseball Field and heavily used Jesse Burkett Little League Field.*

## Introduction

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During late summer 2004, the City of Worcester Department of Public Works and Parks engaged Weston & Sampson Engineers, Inc. and began collaboration with community stakeholders to develop this comprehensive Master Plan for the Rockwood Field property.

During the late fall of 2004 and the first half of 2005, representatives of the Worcester Department of Public Works and Parks and Weston & Sampson developed conceptual and final master plans, which were generated in response to the needs and desires of residents, sports leagues and various Worcester State College programs, as expressed at a series of public informational meetings.

The final DRAFT Master Plan, to be presented to the Worcester Parks Commission during a January 2006 public hearing, reflects the desire of most participants to achieve the following:

- Improve and reduce the existing impacts and inconveniences (related to noise, light spillage, trash, traffic circulation, parking, and aesthetic issues) experienced by residential abutters during peak field use periods.
- Provide improved facilities (passive and active) for residential abutters, youth sports leagues and for residents of the City at large.
- Provide improved facilities to be shared with Worcester State College athletic programs in exchange for College participation in the funding of capital improvements and park and field maintenance upkeep, and the sharing of College parking and support facilities.
- Enhance the overall aesthetics of the property, improve passive recreational and educational opportunities, enhance environmental features and create an attractive and safe setting for various recreational pursuits throughout the year for all City residents, including the very young, senior citizens and the disabled.
- Analyze and implement storm drainage management measures and facilities in order to improve playing conditions and reduce flooding at the park site and to down stream abutters.



*The Master Plan identifies a dramatic shifting of high activity use facilities and zones, like the batting cage and infield area at the Jesse Burkett diamond, away from residential abutters at Chandler Street, Hunthurst Circle, Glendale Street and Chicopee Street and toward the Worcester State College campus with their parking facilities and athletic complex located immediately adjacent to the park.*

This report represents the culmination of the master planning process. The document contains narrative and graphic depictions of the Master Plan with relevant sections dedicated to identifying the full extent of potential improvements, potential phasing scenarios and implementation strategies. The general theme was to improve facilities and programming opportunities, lessen burdens to abutters, and improve environmental stewardship.

Implementation of the improvements outlined in this Master Plan will require significant effort. The Funding Opportunities section of the report identifies potential granting agencies, non-profit entities and other sources of capital dollars or in-kind services that might help with refurbishment of various parcels and facilities.

*It is important to note that a “Master Plan” is typically general and that recommendations are not “cast in stone”. It is fully intended and anticipated that as particular projects are implemented the actual scope of improvements will follow the recommendations contained in this report, but will be refined in order to meet actual field conditions.*

## Background

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The Master Plan addresses the entire Rockwood Field parcel, which encompasses nearly sixteen acres of land, including several acres of undeveloped land located along the southern perimeter of the site. The undeveloped area contains a brook, wetlands and steeply sloping and wooded terrain. The developed sections of the park contain the following primary facilities:

<b>Rockwood Field – Major Facilities</b>
Jesse Burkett Little League Field (200’ to outfield fence)
Worcester Fast Pitch Softball Field (210-220’ to outfield fence)
Little League Field (Farm) (175’ to closest obstruction)
Little League Field (T-Ball) (120’ to closest obstruction)
Baseball Field (approximately 330’-400’-330’ to left, center, right field – no fence)
Various Support Buildings, Storage Containers, Batting Cage, Bleachers...
Parking at Chandler Street for 41 vehicles

The aerial photograph on the following page identifies the location of the major facilities referenced in the chart above.

Documentation, in the form of plans, mapping, and studies for most of the property is limited. As a result, we have made use of the City’s GIS mapping to develop the conceptual drawings associated with this Master Plan. Worcester State College was generous in the lending of important campus mapping and surveys that allowed us to better understand and assess global storm drainage issues.

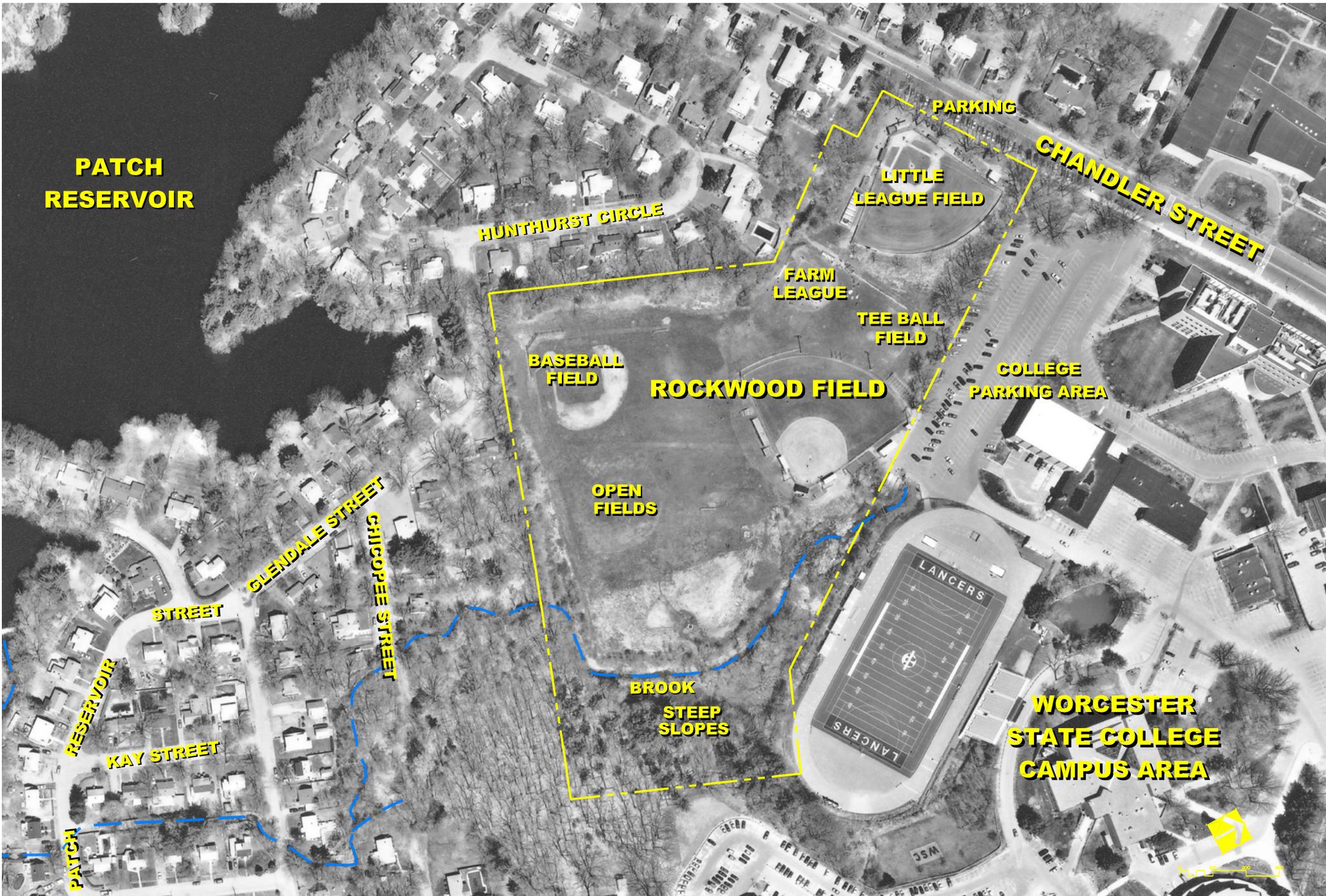


Figure 3 - Rockwood Field Aerial Photograph

## General Goals and Objectives

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At the beginning of the process, the Department of Public Works and Parks articulated several simple and straightforward goals for the Master Plan as follows:

- Develop a community endorsed Master Plan for the property. Engage the community in an organized and thought provoking dialogue in order to develop logical concepts for the enhancement of the property.
- Undertake Master Plan guided improvements. This effort must be sensitive to issues related to security, neighborhood needs, organizational needs and environmental constraints.

## Specific Goals

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- Drainage along the boundary of the Worcester State College is poor and will need to be addressed if we (the City) are to realize the full potential of the property and related facilities.
- Rockwood Field's existing use, future use, connectivity and current/future amenities must be examined in detail by all stakeholders involved and interwoven into a document that is complete and will become the guidebook, or strategic plan, for implementing a phased series of improvements for the property.
- Establish design sensitive solutions to inherent site limitations and conditions. The master planning process must include comment and cooperation of the neighborhood as well as all current park/facility permittees including Jesse Burkett Little League, West Side Babe Ruth, Worcester Fast Pitch Softball Association, Worcester Youth Soccer and Worcester State College.
- All improvements must be ADA accessible for the use and enjoyment of facilities by all.
- Propose amenities that are durable, long lasting, maintained with limited resources, and economically feasible and that may be undertaken through a combination of capital improvement funds and in-kind/volunteer services and donations.

## Community Participation

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In order to develop a master plan that met the recreational needs of the surrounding neighborhoods, Worcester residents at large, various sports and athletic leagues and programs and Worcester State College, the Department of Public Works and Parks and Weston & Sampson conducted a series of meetings, both formal and informal, to present ideas and receive community input. Over the course of six months, the Department of Public Works and Parks and Weston & Sampson representatives met with residential and institutional abutters, as well as other interested parties to present concept plans for the property, receive comments, and address concerns. Following is a listing of the major public forums that were held. Each meeting attracted between 30 and 50 community members.

<b>Schedule of Meetings for Public Input</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Meeting Purpose / Participants</b>
August 16, 2004	Rockwood Field Proper	Press Conference to announce the intention to develop a Master Plan through a funding partnership with Worcester State College
October 6, 2004	Worcester State College Campus Center	Public Hearing to review community concerns about current park uses, facilities and residents desires for particular site improvements
December 16, 2004	Worcester State College Campus Center	Public Hearing to present initial findings in regard to existing conditions and initial concepts for improving existing facilities
March 2, 2005	Worcester State College Campus Center	Public Hearing to present refined concepts and confirm community needs and desires
April 4, 2005	Worcester State College Campus Center	Public Meeting to present DRAFT master plan and information on state-of-the-art sound systems and lighting systems in order to reduce impacts to residential abutters

It is important to note that at times discussions were animated and contentious. Major issues of conflict centered on the following key issues:

- Residential abutters generally supported less intensive park development and the elimination of facilities in order to limit activities in and potentially reduce disturbances caused by traffic, light, noise and the like.
- League representatives wanted to improve and expand current facilities in order to offer the highest level of support for the various athletic programs. There was an opinion that there is a general shortage of active recreational facilities in the City and that Rockwood Field provides an excellent opportunity to provide improved facilities.
- Worcester State College has expressed willingness to participate in capital funding to improve facilities, in long-term funding and related support to provide upkeep of certain facilities and to enter into a cooperative arrangement to share parking facilities.
- Residential abutters aired grievances related to the College's scheduling of large-scale events at the property that create traffic headaches for the neighborhood and other conflicts related to operation and management of the campus that create problems for abutters.

The Master Plan attempts to bridge differences and to reach a common middle ground by suggesting substantial improvements to the property that will provide benefits to all stakeholders, including residential abutters, City leagues and Worcester State College. The actual extent of potential improvements is specifically defined later in this report.

## Historical Timeline

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George I. Rockwood donated the land that now makes up Rockwood Field to the City of Worcester in 1940. An overview of the historical timeline of the Park is identified below:

Date	Event Description
1940	George Rockwood donates the land to the City with his intention to create an area that would be placed under the Parks and Recreation Department and developed for public park and playground use and enjoyment. The 15.78 acres of land had been used previously as pasture and had a value of \$3,000.
1942	Softball diamond and park roadway constructed
1950	The City Council approved and ordered that a portion of Rockwood Field, a public playground, be used for school purposes.
1954	The City Council approved and ordered the section of Rockwood Field, transferred to the School Department in 1950, be transferred back to the Parks and Recreation Commission.
1955	Baseball backstop constructed.
1966	Baseball infield was remodeled and the Little League field was enclosed with fencing.
1995 - 2005	Worcester Fast Pitch Softball and Jesse Burkett Little League invest labor and materials to improve and upgrade facilities at Rockwood Field.
1942 - 2005	Multiple sports programs make use of the facility including Little League baseball, Babe Ruth Baseball, Adult Baseball, Various Softball Leagues, Youth Soccer Leagues, Football Leagues and College Athletic Programs and Teams

## Existing Conditions

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During the early stages of the project, representatives of Weston & Sampson gathered all available mapping and plan information to support the master planning study and development efforts. The City provided GIS mapping for the property and aerial photography was obtained for the development of all conceptual master plans and drawings. Data from Worcester State College was also made available and heavily relied upon, especially in regard to identifying storm water management issues and designs.

WSE representatives also undertook a considerable amount of field reconnaissance work to observe how the facilities are used, better understand all of the physical characteristics and limitations of the land and the corresponding conditions of all natural and man-made features at the property. The following is a summary of our findings.

## Topography

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The topography (terrain) varies significantly from the front of the property at Chandler Street to the back, or south of the property near the Worcester State College stadium complex. The developed portion of the property forms two basic tiers or terraces. The upper tier is located adjacent to Chandler Street and includes the Jesse Burkett Little League Baseball Field. The lower tier contains the other Little League fields, softball field, baseball field, open field area and the wetlands and stream complex that wraps around the southern perimeter of the developed fields. As this area is 10 - 12 feet below the elevation of the top tier, much of the area is out of view from Chandler Street. A very steep slope is located to the extreme southwest corner of the property (to the south of the stream and wetlands complex) where a 30-foot drop in elevation is exhibited over a short distance. Following is a summary of the basic topographical characteristics of Rockwood Field:

Representative Park Location	Elevation
Parking Area at Chandler Street	+ 572
Jesse Burkett Little League Field (Upper Tier)	+ 570
Other Fields (Lower Tier)	+ 558
Stream / Wetlands	+ 550
Top of Slope at Worcester State College Dormitory Parking Area	+ 582
Worcester State College Athletic Facility	+ 562



*An approximately ten-foot change in elevation between the lower tier fields (shown in both photographs above) and the Jesse Burkett Little League Field adjacent to Chandler Street preclude views between tiers. This could potentially help to improve distractions to abutter residents located toward the west of the park property through the development of new facilities within the lower tier.*

## Soils

It is believed that little of the original soil cover remains within the Rockwood Field complex due to extensive previous development, filling of wetlands and disturbance. Soils located below the lower field areas are classified as a smoothed Urthodent complex and Urban soils; which are characteristic of areas formed by excavation or filling of areas for athletic fields, highway medians and landscaped areas. Typically, soils of this type consist of fine sandy loams and gravels.

Soils located below the upper (Little League) field area are classified as Merrimac Fine Sandy Loam, which are characteristic of soils found on the side slopes of glacial outwash plains. Soils of this type are generally well drained and provide a good growing medium for vegetation.

The soils located within and adjacent to the wetland area near the baseball and softball fields are classified as Walpole Fine Sandy Loam, which is typically found in low lying areas, depressions, or excessively level areas. This poorly drained soil is often associated with high seasonal water tables, high mortality rates for seedlings and excessive frost/heave action during winter months.

Soil Conservation Service data for Worcester County indicates that basic soil types are as follows:

Soil Symbol	Soil Types
MeB	Merrimac fine sandy loam 3-8% slopes
Ur	Urban Land
Ud	Orthodents, smoothed
PaC	Paxton fine sandy loam 8-15% slopes
Wa	Walpole fine sandy loam



*Heavy use and a lack of organic matter (left photo) have limited the opportunity to establish suitable vegetative cover within certain areas of Rockwood Field. Poor quality soils, frequently inundated by flooding from the adjacent drainage channel have created areas that cannot be sustained and that detract from the site's function and appearance (right photo).*

## Vegetation

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Existing vegetation at the Rockwood Field property is characterized and summarized as follows:

- A mature stand of deciduous trees located between Chandler Street and the Jesse Burkett Little League Field provides an attractive edge to the park and helps separate the busy transportation corridor from the site. Heavily compacted soils due to unrestricted vehicular and pedestrian use in this vicinity are impacting the health of the trees.
- Extensive areas of exotic invasive species of vegetation that thrive in the disturbed soil conditions that contain insufficient organic matter. Large quantities of noxious weed vegetation can be observed in particular within the slopes that separate the upper and lower park tiers and at the perimeter of all field complexes.
- Mostly undeveloped upland sections of the Rockwood Field property including the steep slopes at the southwestern portion of the property that contain 50 year old stands of mostly deciduous trees with sporadic white pine trees. These woodlands are mostly characterized by Oak, Birch, Beech, Maple and Ash species. Where soils are unprotected, erosion has occurred and impacted the viability and health of individual trees.
- Extensive wetland plant species within and surrounding the stream and wetlands complex that forms the perimeter of the lower tier field complex.
- Thin stands of deciduous trees that serve as vegetative buffers between the developed fields and residential abutters located to the west and south of the property.



*Deciduous hardwoods (left photo) can be found along the edges of the park at Chandler Street. Although the trees provide an attractive and useful screen between park and roadway, many individual trees are badly impacted by unrestricted traffic within the area. At the back of the property, a vigorous wetland complex is contained along the edges of the stream system.*

Particularly in the undeveloped, wet portions of the property, opportunities abound for academic research of ecological systems and for the development of environmental educational opportunities, either in a formal or informal way. Since the wetlands ecosystem is adversely impacted by numerous current factors, there may be an opportunity to study how an environment recovers as stormwater management improvements are implemented both at the property and within surrounding areas of the City.

## **Stormwater Management Issues**

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Water quality issues within the associated wetlands complex and stream, buildup of silt and sediments, high seasonal groundwater table, and flooding during peak storm events have plagued Rockwood Field and downstream neighborhoods in recent years. Some of the basic issues related to storm water management and flooding are summarized below:

- Rockwood Field receives significant amounts of piped stormwater runoff from a roughly 200-acre area of the City located up gradient to the site and from the adjacent Worcester State College campus. A 48-inch pipe from Chandler Street and a 24-inch pipe from Worcester State College (originating at Lake Ellie) “daylight” into a small pool of water located to the rear of the softball field. The pooling area is located on both City and State property. Water flows through and off of the site via the meandering drainage channel/stream and wetlands system at the southern perimeter of the lower tier field complex.
- The build-up of silt and sediment in recent years has drastically reduced the depth of water within many sections of the stream channel and the adjacent wetland, although blocked drainage at the southwest corner of the southern property is causing wetlands species to evolve in areas previously maintained as fields.

- The combination of a blocked drainage pipe and an earthen dike located at the southwestern corner of the property causes extensive flooding of field areas during normally wet weather months and well into the normally dry summer months, rendering large sections of the lower tier field complex unusable and not maintainable. Former recreation facilities are now located within areas that are evolving into wetlands. A follow-up drainage study is planned in order to identify the potential for re-establishing the function of the drainage pipe and potentially implement other mitigation measures, while continuing to protect residential properties and other public lands and resources located down stream.
- Anecdotal information seemed to indicate the presence of another storm drainage pipe that drained portions of the lower tier field complex and directed water in a northeasterly direction and into the nearest lobe of Patch Reservoir on the other side of Glendale Street.
- During major storm events, combined sewage flows into and through the property, degrading the quality of wetlands and creating poor water quality issues.



*A former track and field feature has been abandoned due to frequent flooding problems and perennially wet soil conditions (left photo). A former baseball outfield fence is undetectable in the photo at right, which also has been abandoned as an outfield area due to flooding and wet soils.*

Rockwood Field is located within the larger Tatnuck Brook Watershed. Water flows off of the Rockwood Field property to the west, below Chicopee Street and Glendale Street, via open channels located to the rear of residential properties, into a stream that flows directly into Patch Pond and eventually into the much larger Coes Reservoir. The Tatnuck Brook Watershed Association (TBWA) is very active with stormwater management and water quality issues within the Rockwood Field vicinity and throughout the City of Worcester. TBWA is also part of the larger Blackstone River Coalition. Additional information is available at: [www.clarku.edu/tbwa](http://www.clarku.edu/tbwa)

The Department of Public Works and Parks is working on long-term infrastructure improvements that will help to improve water quality issues and reduce flooding at the Rockwood Field property and related wetlands complexes.

## Other Site Utilities

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Many utility systems are available along the Chandler Street corridor and in place at Rockwood Field. Clearly, electrical service supports the lighting of fields, PA systems, scoreboards and support buildings with restrooms and concessions. Water service supports irrigation systems at various fields and the building uses, and sewer service is available to the concession and restroom building off of Chandler Street. Storm drainage features (specifically related to the field complexes and other site features) are abandoned, underperforming or non-existent. As individual projects are planned and implemented, utility infrastructure will require additional assessment for adequacy and availability and new services established to meet new demands.

To improve aesthetics, comply with the requirements of granting agencies and more fully appreciate the scenic quality and diverse natural settings, consideration should be given toward eliminating or burying any remaining or planned electrical, telephone and/or cable services to below ground under future improvement programs.

## Abutters and the Neighborhood Community

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The site is located within a largely residential neighborhood that includes the Worcester State College campus to the east and an extensive natural, undeveloped complex of lands that includes Patch Reservoir and Patch Pond, Tatnuck Brook and all associated wetlands located to the west. A number of residential properties located on Chandler Street, Hunthurst Circle, Glendale Street and Chicopee Street immediately abut the park site. As these residents have been impacted at various times by noise, light spillage, trash, traffic and other activities related to use of facilities, they attended meetings in large numbers and expressed their desires to reduce impacts to their properties as the master plan was developed. Throughout the process, concept plans were developed and presented that shifted major activity zones away from these residential abutter properties and toward the Worcester State College campus.

## Parking, Access and Park Circulation

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Parking provisions are limited to 41 angled parking spaces at Chandler Street. During peak traffic times in particular, backing onto the very frequently busy street can be difficult and unsafe. Parking is available to park patrons at Worcester State College during off-peak college periods (primarily nights, weekends and during summer months). During other periods area residents have indicated that the parking of vehicles by Rockwood Field users on neighborhood streets creates conflicts and inconveniences to property owners. League officials have indicated that they direct parents and other visitors toward the Worcester State College parking amenities located just to the east of the park, but if parking is not available, conflicts can occur within the surrounding neighborhoods.

There is no formal vehicular access onto the premises, although park maintenance vehicle access can be gained from both Chandler Street and from the Worcester State College parking area located just east of the lower tier. Pedestrian access into the park is available from the same locations, and from Glendale Street where the park is located immediately adjacent to the street. Due to a lack of

formal links to the surrounding neighborhoods, and between recreation facilities, pedestrian access within the property can be difficult, especially for the elderly and disabled with few facilities being ADA compliant.



*Backing out onto Chandler Street can be difficult especially during peak travel periods (left photo) and pedestrian accommodations are nearly non-existent from Chandler Street into the Jesse Burkett Little League (left photo) and the Worcester State College parking area located immediately adjacent to the large field complex at the lower tier of the park (right photo).*

## Recreation Facilities

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**Jesse Burkett Little League Field-** this regulation Little League Field possesses 200-foot outfield fence dimensions and is maintained in very fine condition by league representatives. Turf is excellent and the skinned and turf infield is well groomed during baseball season. The ballfield is irrigated and fencing encloses the entire field. A press box/concession/restroom building is located immediately behind the backstop. The building is not ADA compliant and is substandard in other regards. Player's dugouts are enclosed and covered. The field is not presently lighted. A storage container and dumpster are located in this vicinity near Chandler Street. These features adversely impact the visual qualities of the park.



*The Jesse Burkett Field is well-groomed and heavily used during peak Little League periods. A team from this league represented Worcester in the Little League World Series in Williamsport, PA several years ago.*

**Other Little League Fields-** the Farm League field is not enclosed by fencing and turf conditions are typically fair throughout. The entire infield is skinned. The nearest obstruction is a section of fencing at the softball field located approximately 170 feet from home plate in straight away center field. Player's benches and concrete pads, fencing, backstops and other amenities surrounding the infield are in fair or poor condition. Residential abutter properties are located a short distance from the right field foul line. Foul balls often leave the premises and end up in the backyards of abutters. The Tee Ball field contains partially skinned base paths, a very small backstop and few other amenities. Turf conditions are consistent with the Farm League field discussed above. The nearest obstruction is the softball fencing at a distance of approximately 120 feet to left field.



*The two other little league fields are located within the lower tier of the site, at the base of the slope that separates the Burkett Field. The fields are much more modest in scale and function, with most ancillary facilities in just fair or poor condition.*

**Softball Field-** heavily used by both City and College athletic programs the turf and infield areas at this facility are well maintained and well groomed, especially during peak seasons. The built facilities surrounding the field are generally in fair to poor condition and substandard especially in regard to ADA and current building codes. Fencing encloses the entire field area. Extensive, but somewhat dilapidated bleachers are located behind the player's benches, backstop, and beyond the right field fencing. Lighting is outdated and sound systems disturb neighbors during summer months, when windows are apt to open and residents spend a lot of time on their decks or in their yards and gardens. A hodgepodge of trailers, support buildings, utility cabinets and related site features create a cluttered and aesthetically unappealing character within the area of Rockwood Field that interfaces with the Worcester State College parking area. Parking, shared with the College is conveniently situated for accessing the fields at this lower tier, although no formal pathways or ADA enhancements are available to park users.



*Numerous leagues and the Worcester State College women's softball team heavily use the softball field. Field conditions are quite good, but ancillary facilities are outdated, substandard and increasingly difficult to maintain.*

**Baseball/Multi-Purpose Field-** due to frequent flooding, wet soils, excessive frost heaves and poorly graded and rutted expanses, the baseball field and overlapping multi-use field is underused and often unavailable for use. The diamond is overgrown with weeds, base paths are poorly defined and the backstop is in poor condition. There are no other ancillary facilities at the baseball diamond. The field is not enclosed, so outfield dimensions to the nearest obstructions are generous and in excess of 400 feet throughout most of the field perimeter. The field is used for a variety of formal and informal play activities, when playing conditions are suitable. The field area is expansive and possesses great potential for reprogramming when drainage and soil conditions are corrected.



*Grass is green during the fall season, but mostly weed infested. Soils are heavily compacted and wet during spring and early summer months and during peak storm events. Flooding badly impacts much of the multi-use field complex during spring months.*

**Support Buildings-** currently, a hodgepodge of support buildings is located at the property. From the outset of the master planning process, there was a desire to merge as many uses as possible into a single community building and to eliminate the myriad of storage containers, trailers, concession facilities and related structures in order to improve site aesthetics, ease upkeep and maintenance requirements and provide more useful and conveniently situated facilities to park users.



## Recommended Master Plan

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## General Themes for Improvements

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There is a unique opportunity to dramatically improve the quality of passive and active recreational facilities at the Rockwood Field property while reducing inconveniences to residential abutters to the property. Several basic themes for improving the park have been established and are reflected throughout the Master Plan as outlined below:

- Reduce inconvenience and disruption to local abutters and neighborhoods
- Improve environmental conditions
- Improve site aesthetics
- Improve playing conditions and opportunities for all facility users
- Provide new recreational opportunities (passive and active)
- Provide new support facilities
- Continue to forge a cooperative relationship with Worcester State College to fund capital projects, assist in property maintenance and the sharing of access and parking facilities

If adopted and implemented, the Master Plan (see Figure 4 as included later in this section) would provide very positive benefits to residential abutters, the youth of the city and Worcester State College as generally summarized below:

- Reduces the total number of fields at the complex from 5 to 4.
- Shifts the high-activity Jessie Burkett Little League baseball field diamond away from residential abutter properties and toward Worcester State College.
- Shifts the high-activity baseball field diamond away from residential abutter properties and toward Worcester State College and the undeveloped wetlands at the southwestern portion of the park property.
- Identifies the need to replace outdated lighting systems with new cut-off style floodlights that would dramatically reduce the amount of light spillage to adjacent residential properties.
- Identifies the need to replace outdated public address systems with state-of-the-art systems that will better control sound and reduce distractions to residential abutters. In conjunction with this, the city recognizes the need to limit the use of public address systems to specific time periods and for specific events.
- Provides opportunities for improved field ancillary facilities in the form of new bleachers, batting cages, bullpens and press boxes - all at a scale that is appropriate for the level of play.

- Through the elimination of fixed fencing at the baseball field, creates new opportunities for informal play and passive recreation within the large rectangular field area that results.
- Implements extensive planting efforts along the northern and western edges of the park property in order to supplement existing vegetation and provide increased physical separation between the park and residential abutters located on Hunthurst Circle, Glendale Street and Chicopee Street.
- Includes additional tree planting within the park interior to provide better separation between uses and to provide shade and improved aesthetics for all park users.
- Establishes the need to create additional parking on-site to alleviate congestion at Chandler Street and to enter into cooperative arrangements with Worcester State College for the purposes of sharing their parking facilities for park events.
- Replaces the dangerous on-street angle parking at Chandler Street with new angled parking separated from Chandler Street and located within the park proper.
- Provides a new, stand-alone community building with allowances for concessions, restrooms, storage and public meeting spaces at the lower tier of the park, out of view from Chandler Street, away from residential properties and in close proximity to Worcester State College. (This proposal would eliminate the small, substandard and visually unappealing structures from the Chandler Street edge of the park and elsewhere.)
- Provides opportunities for new park facilities including a children’s playground, park benches and other related site furnishings.
- Provides new circulation systems to link all park facilities and to provide improved access for the elderly and disabled.
- Identifies a new perimeter loop pathway system for walking and jogging with connections to Worcester State College, Chandler Street and residential areas located off of Glendale Street.
- Establishes a course of action for improving chronic drainage and saturated soil conditions through the implementation of a series of storm water management, soil replacements and regrading efforts. Eventual improvements will help to alleviate downstream flooding of abutter properties as well as on-site flooding of large portions of the field complex during major storm events.
- Identifies need to create new environmental educational opportunities through the establishment of boardwalks, nature trails and interpretive signage.

## Specific Site Improvements

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The narratives that follow describe the basic scope of improvements to be undertaken within the Rockwood Field property. It is important to note that the potential scope of improvements has been presented to the public at numerous forums and that a great deal of comment has been received. The Master Plan itself represents a good-faith attempt to provide new and refurbished recreation improvements in a manner that improves conditions for park users and residential abutters alike. The narratives that follow are intended to describe and support Plan Figures 4, 5 and 6, which are included at the back of this report section.

## Figure 4 – Rockwood Field Master Plan

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The Rockwood Field Master Plan (Figure 4) identifies a series of new and refurbished site improvements throughout the Rockwood Field Property. The chart included below identifies the basic site improvements grouped by types that include Active Recreational Facilities; Passive Recreational Facilities; Park Support Buildings; Park Access, Parking and Circulation Improvements; and Aesthetic Improvements.

### **Site Improvements Summary**

#### **Active Recreational Facilities**

- Lighted Little League Baseball Field (200' outfield dimension)
- Farm League Field (175' outfield dimension)
- Lighted Softball Field
- Lighted Baseball Field / Multi-purpose Field
- Open Field / Multi-purpose Field
- Children's Playground

#### **Passive Recreational Facilities**

- Perimeter Loop Path
- Picnic Tables and Park Benches (for reading, resting, contemplation and other passive pursuits)
- Wetlands Trails and Boardwalks
- Environmental Education / Interpretive Signage / Park Information Kiosks

#### **Park Support Buildings and Structures**

- Community Building (concessions, restroom, meeting room, storage)
- Press Box / Concession (at Softball Field)
- Press Box / Storage (at Baseball Field and Little League Field)

#### **Park Access, Parking and Circulation Improvements**

- New Parking Area at Community Building
- Reconfigured Parking at Chandler Street for Improved Safety
- Shared Parking at WSC
- Service Access to Park from Chandler Street and WSC
- New Pedestrian Entrances and Connections to all Facilities

#### **Aesthetic Improvements / Other Site Enhancements**

- Naturalized Plantings at Park Perimeter
- Tree Plantings throughout the Premises
- Wetlands Restoration and Replication
- Storm Drainage Improvements throughout Property
- Restored, Stabilized and Sustainable Surface Treatments (eliminate erosion)
- Cut-off Floodlighting at Fields (to reduce light spill to surrounding areas)
- State-of-the-Art Sound Systems

## Active Recreational Facilities

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*Lighted Little League Baseball Field (200' outfield dimension)*- Perhaps the best-known facility at the property (due to the fact that it is visible from Chandler Street and it is associated with the Jesse Burkett Little League that played recently in the Little League World Series), the Master Plan identifies the redevelopment of this facility at a different location and with new orientation. At present, the busy and active infield area is located adjacent to residential property owners in the northwest corner of the site. The new alignment identifies the shifting of the infield toward the parking area at Worcester State College. Under this scenario, the infield backstop is shifted nearly 300 feet away from the current location. The plan also calls for the removal of storage, concession and restroom facilities to the adjacent lower tier of the property and for the installation of new plantings (native tree and shrub species) and wood screen fencing to provide a natural, more dense buffer between the park and nearby residential properties.

Basic improvements to be included as part of a new Little League Field development would include the following:

- Backstop and fencing
- Player's benches /dugouts
- Bullpen
- Bleachers
- Press box
- Skinned base paths, pitcher's mound and home plate area
- Natural turf infield and outfield
- Cut-off floodlighting
- State-of-the-art public address system
- Automated irrigation
- Pathway connections to parking areas, park entrances and other facilities
- Utility systems

*Farm League Field (175' Outfield Dimension)*- The farm league field serves as an important training ground for younger children learning the basics of baseball. The Master Plan identifies a new facility footprint in the same basic location as the current field, although the infield is shifted slightly further away from nearby residential abutters. Since younger children use this facility and the play is less intense, it is believed that activities at this field would create few distractions to residential abutters. New plantings (native tree and shrub species) will help to provide a natural and denser buffer between the park and nearby residential properties. It is important to note that a small "T-Ball" field is removed from this park vicinity in order to facilitate the slight shifting of the farm league field away from residential properties as well as the implementation of new amenities.

Basic improvements to be included as part of a new farm league field development are described below. Of note is the fact that this facility is much less elaborate compared to the Little League Field and that improvement plans do not include the installation of features such as lighting, sound systems or dugouts.

- Backstop and fencing (sections of fencing may be removable)
- Player's benches
- Bleachers
- Skinned base paths, pitcher's mound and home plate area
- Natural turf infield and outfield
- Automated irrigation
- Pathway connections to parking areas, park entrances and other facilities
- Utility systems

**Lighted Softball Field (225' Outfield Dimension)**- The softball field supports extensive use by city women's, girls and men's softball leagues and the Worcester State College women's softball team. Consistent with historical precedent, the high-use infield and backstop areas are located adjacent to Worcester State College, away from residential abutter properties. The Master Plan identifies a slight reorientation of the facility and proposes the full refurbishment of this park amenity in order to provide improved quality and safety for users and to reduce impacts to residential abutters by replacing outdated lighting and public address systems. In addition, the plan calls for eliminating the myriad of park support buildings, trailers and related structures that adversely impact the visual qualities within this section of the park site, to be replaced by a community building and press box concession facility as described later in this section.

Basic improvements to be included as part of a new softball field development would include the following:

- Backstop and fencing
- Player's benches /dugouts
- Bullpens
- Bleachers
- Press box and concession stand
- Skinned infield
- Natural turf outfield
- Cut-off floodlighting
- State-of-the-art public address system
- Automated irrigation
- Pathway connections to parking areas, park entrances and other facilities
- Landscape improvements and tree plantings surrounding the field
- Utility systems

**Lighted Baseball Field (325'-390' Outfield Dimensions)**- The Rockwood Field Master Plan identifies a new baseball field footprint, at a completely new location. The intention is to shift the high activity use zones (infield and backstop) away from adjacent residential properties and toward undeveloped park areas and the Worcester State College campus located to the south and east. The move of the field is predicated upon the undertaking of extensive stormwater management and drainage initiatives. A refurbished facility would yield dramatic results for leagues and for

residential abutters, by shifting activities toward more remote areas within the park and by provided dramatically improved playing conditions and amenities. The baseball field would be used by city leagues and by the Worcester State College baseball team. State-of-the-art lighting and sound systems would reduce impacts to abutters. Fencing would be removable, allowing maximum flexibility for use of the large, open field during off-season periods. Extensive landscaping, in the form of naturalized planting would help to integrate the facility into the park setting, while increasing visual buffers between properties. The shifting of the field to the new location also increases the likelihood that user and visitor access will be gained from the Worcester State College campus, and not from the residential streets located to the west of the park property.

Basic improvements to be included as part of a new baseball field development would include the following:

- Backstop and fencing (including removable outfield fencing)
- Player's benches /dugouts
- Bullpens / batting cage
- Bleachers
- Press box
- Skinned base paths, pitcher's mound and home plate area
- Natural turf infield and outfield
- Cut-off flood lighting
- State-of-the-art public address system
- Automated irrigation
- Pathway connections to parking areas, park entrances and other facilities
- Utility systems

**Open Field / Multi-purpose Field-** The reorientation of fields and the elimination of the small T-Ball field allow for the creation of a small open field area for informal play and passive recreation near the park boundary and Glendale Street. This area can be used for neighborhood play (throwing a Frisbee, kicking a soccer ball, flying a kite, snow shoeing or cross country skiing for instance), especially during off-season periods when the baseball outfield fencing is removed and the area increases in size.

**Children's Playground-** Programmed for a location within the footprint of the former T-Ball Field and adjacent to the proposed parking area and community building, is a children's playground. The playground would be designed to accommodate children of various ages and abilities. The area would be handicapped accessible with special surfacing, access points and equipment. The playground would serve children from both the neighborhood and larger community and include other amenities. Facilities would also be inviting and suitable for use by younger siblings visiting the property while older sisters and brothers make use of the fields.

The playground would encompass approximately 5,000 square feet and include the following basic amenities:

- Age appropriate play equipment for children with differing abilities
- Age appropriate signage
- Access ramps, walks and transfer stations
- Resilient surfacing
- Benches, trash receptacles and other site amenities
- Appropriate enclosures to ensure child safety and protection
- Landscaping and related site amenities

## Passive Recreational Facilities

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**Perimeter Loop Path-** The Master Plan identifies the potential for creating an extensive loop path system that encircles much of the property. The length of various path sections would be identified for patron use. The perimeter loop path provides opportunities for park users to walk, run, jog or hike within the confines of a pleasant park and open space setting and away from the busy urban environment that surrounds much of the property. The path would be surfaced with asphalt or stonedust for maximum use and flexibility. Park benches would be strategically located around the loop pathway system at pedestrian nodes to provide a meeting place or place for rest. Interpretive signage would present information related to exercise and good health. The loop path would contain connections to Worcester State College, surrounding neighborhoods, parking locations and other park facilities.

**Wetland Trails and Boardwalks-** Rockwood Field possesses many unique and interesting environmental features. To maximize opportunities for passive recreation, the master plan identifies the opportunity to create wetland trails and boardwalks through the undeveloped southern portion of the property. Installation of such amenities would be undertaken in conjunction with storm water management, drainage and wetlands restoration efforts. Interpretive signage would be used to present important environmental information related to the site's wetlands, streams and wildlife habitat and highlight the city's desire to improve water quality throughout the area. Worcester State College and Worcester School Department representatives would be consulted and enlisted to help develop and maintain environmental educational features.

## Park Support Buildings and Structures

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**Community Building-** The need to develop a single, centrally located community support building was identified during the master planning process. This would allow for the elimination of numerous, sub-standard and unattractive park support buildings and structures currently located at the site. Importantly, the community building and associated activities are located within the footprint of the former T-Ball field and within the site's lower tier. The location is away from Chandler Street, away from residential properties and in close proximity to parking at Worcester State College. A small parking area would also be developed in front of the community building, in order to provide service access, handicapped parking and limited additional parking for park users.

The building would be designed in an appropriate style to complement the park and open space setting, would encompass approximately 2,000 square feet and provide the following basic spatial allowances:

- Community meeting room
- Restrooms
- Concessions
- Storage (for leagues and Worcester Department of Public Works and Parks)
- Utility room

**Satellite Park Support Buildings-** In order to support convenient and efficient park operations, several small, satellite park support structures are proposed as summarized below:

- Press box at rear of new Jessie Burkett Little League field backstop
- Press box and concession amenity at rear of new softball field backstop
- Press box at rear of new baseball field backstop

The installation of the concession amenity in conjunction with the press box at the softball field will allow for a conveniently located but separate concession operation to be managed by Worcester State College for their events at both the softball and baseball field. With differing seasons of play, events and funding sources, it is desirable to separate the City and State concession operations in this manner.

## **Park Access, Parking and Circulation Improvements**

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**Parking Amenities-** The Master Plan identifies several improvements relative to parking at Rockwood Field. In particular, the angled parking spaces at Chandler Street are reconfigured so that a new sidewalk would provide continuous and direct pedestrian travel within a dedicated pedestrian corridor. Also, drivers would no longer have to back out onto Chandler Street in order to exit the premises. The backing out move is now accommodated within the confines of the park proper in an area that is separated and protected from Chandler Street.

A small parking area (for 10-20 cars depending on the final design) has been created within the lower tier of the park adjacent to the children's playground and community building. This parking area would be accessed from the Worcester State College parking lot and drive. Handicapped accessible parking stalls would be included within the parking area.

In addition, the City of Worcester will continue to coordinate with Worcester State College officials to outline and establish specific shared parking criteria and arrangements for use of the extensive college parking area located immediately adjacent to park.

**Service Access-** It is intended that service access into the park will be provided from Chandler Street and from the new parking area to be constructed at the community building. Service entrances would not be available for general public use and service gates would preclude unauthorized access onto the premises.

***Pedestrian Access-*** The Master Plan identifies the need to provide safe, convenient and attractive pedestrian access points around the perimeter of Rockwood Field. Access points need to correspond to historical pedestrian desire lines in order to be used and in order to prevent the continued wear and tear to various park areas. As a minimum, it is intended that prominent pedestrian connections would be made to the Worcester State college campus and to Chandler Street. Additionally, a neighborhood park entrance would be well used in the vicinity of Chandler Street. Park entrances should provide safe, convenient, consistent, obvious and attractive impressions to the surrounding community.

## **Aesthetic Improvements / Other Site Enhancements**

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Rockwood Field is an important open space and recreation resource for the neighborhood, larger Worcester community and for the Worcester State College community. As such, an environmentally sensitive and sustainable development plan is of great importance. This Master Plan proposes reconfigured facilities and other important environmental and site enhancements that would help to improve the lives of residential abutters, help improve the recreational experiences of city youth and improve and restore the inherent environmental character and qualities of the site.

To this end, extensive naturalized tree, shrub and wetlands plantings are proposed throughout the site. These enhancements will help restore wetlands, improve wildlife habitat, create a more park-like setting and strengthen the buffers that provide separation between park, park activities and surrounding residential abutters. Formal pathway connections will link all facilities within the property and link to adjacent land uses. Formal pathways will dramatically improve accessibility and eliminate erosion along pedestrian desire lines and difficult to maintain park areas and slopes.

The installation of state-of-the-art light and sound systems at select fields will dramatically reduce distractions and other impacts to residential properties located to the north and west of Rockwood Field.



Figure 4 - Rockwood Field Master Plan



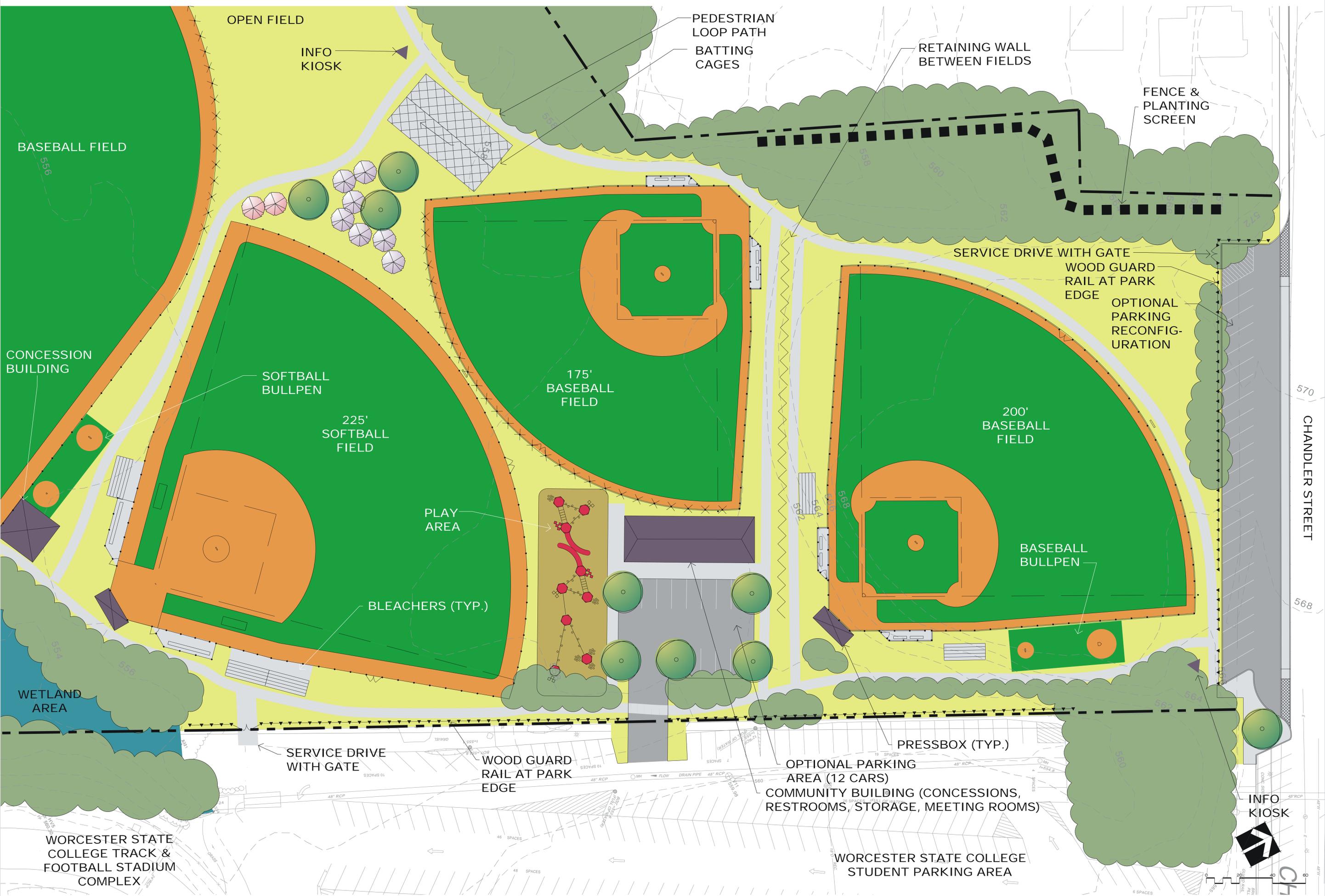


Figure 6 - Rockwood Field Master Plan - 225' Softball, 175' Baseball, & 200' Baseball Fields

## Budget Estimate

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The following preliminary costs have been established for the basic restoration program, as identified on the related master plan drawings and as described in various narratives.

<b><u>Budget Estimates</u></b>	<b><u>Cost</u></b>
Storm Drainage Improvements – Lower Park Tier	\$400,000
Farm League Field (175’ outfield dimension)	\$200,000
Lighted Little League Field (200’ outfield dimension) with new orientation	\$600,000
Lighted Softball Field	\$500,000
Lighted Baseball Field / Multi-purpose Field	\$1,100,000
Community Building and Parking Area	\$600,000
Other Improvements (Electrical Service Upgrade, Parking Lane at Chandler Street, Trails, Boardwalks, Pathway Systems, Children’s Playground Equipment, Site Furnishings and Signage, Tree Planting and Landscaping)	\$600,000
<b>Budget Total All Improvements</b>	<b>\$4,000,000</b>

## Project Phasing

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To ensure the protection of all existing and proposed park facilities, the first phase of improvements is intended to solve chronic storm drainage issues at Rockwood Field. As a result, a Phase 1 Program, which will ultimately depend on the amount of funding available, would include completion of the above referenced storm drainage improvements and construction of the community building and parking area on the former T-Ball footprint. The community building construction would allow for the consolidation of various temporary and permanent support structures that are currently located throughout the property and allow for the eventual relocation of field footprints away from residential properties.

Other construction phases will be established based on funding availability, coordination with youth league, college programming, scheduling requirements and the logical sequencing of construction activities at the property.

Master Plan Approved by  
**Worcester Parks  
Commission**

January 26, 2006

Master Plan Approved by  
**Worcester City Council**

March 16, 2006