

Jeff Van Drew (NJ-02) THUD Testimony

Good Afternoon Chairman Price and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart. I am here to advocate for \$1 million in Community Project funding from the Economic Development Account for the rehabilitation of the recreational complex in Little Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey.

This project has received exceptional community support, including from local youth sports associations, the County Parks and Recreation Director, and municipal leadership.

Access to sports and recreation is critically important for a well-rounded community. Recreational spaces are a place for our community to gather and youth sports leagues to compete. These gatherings are where families and children develop community bonds, teamwork skills, and lifelong friendships. This particular complex is very important to the low-income areas of Little Egg Harbor Township.

As it stands the current fields are unusable for large parts of the year because of the climate of South Jersey. Little Egg Harbor Township's Recreation Complex's fields are currently unplayable after rain events, which makes it difficult for the Township and community organizations to plan and execute youth sports and community events. The situation is worsening, with the fields now developing slopes in the middle.

As explained by the Pinelands Soccer Association, the current situation creates safety risks. They state:

“Due to the fields not draining correctly, water sits on the fields which makes the fields unplayable for a longer period of time after storms. Even when we are able to get players on the fields, the ground is softer which leads to our next issue of holes on the fields. Having holes on sports fields leads to an increased chance of a player getting injured by tripping over a hole or

even twisting/breaking an ankle. Another issue with the ground being softer is that the goals, which require anchors, can become a safety issue as the anchors might not be as secure as they should be.”

Community Project Funding will assist the township in paying for field rehabilitation of 4 soccer fields and 1 football field. The proposed project will rectify operational and safety issues through installation of underdrains, soil augmentation, grading, and re-sodding. This project will also reduce long-term maintenance costs.

These improvements will improve the health and safety of all Township residents who utilize the soccer and football fields, including the Pinelands Soccer Association, Pinelands Jr. Wildcats Football Club, and various senior organizations. The improvements will greatly aid the youth sports organizations in providing safe, reliable, and equitable programs to ALL youth in the Township, including those youth from the three low income neighborhoods within the Township.

This project has exceptional community support, provides benefits to low-income communities, and will generally improve the safety and community spirit of Little Egg Harbor Township. Thank you for your consideration of this Community Project Funding Request.