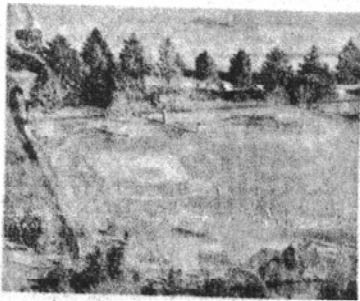


★ INSIDE ★



**Field With No House
Prompts Change**

Some are calling new rule
the "Jerry Seinfeld Law"

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Jerry Seinfeld's private baseball diamond in Amagansett is legal, under a new zoning law, but may still be too close to property lines, according to the town.

Doug Kuntz

Seinfeld Ball Field Is Safe

BY JOANNE PILGRIM

Jerry Seinfeld, the comedian and Mets fan who put a baseball diamond in a field next to his house on Further Lane in Amagansett, will be able to play games there without fear of violating the town code with each crack of the bat.

Last Thursday, the town board adopted a new law allowing homeowners to build "accessory structures" — pools, tennis courts, sheds, or ball fields — on vacant land adjacent to, and in the same name as, their house lots.

Until then, structures or buildings considered "accessories" to a house could be built only on properties where a house already existed.

That's where Mr. Seinfeld struck out earlier. After buying Billy Joel's estate for a record-breaking \$32 million in 2000, he not only undertook extensive renovations to the house, running afoul of town building inspectors by allegedly demolishing more than was permitted, but also placed the ball field on a landscaped, but unbuilt, lot. The 10.5-acre property comprises three separate lots.

To comply with the law, the Building Department said, either the property would have to be merged with Mr. Seinfeld's house lot, or a new house would have to be built to go with the ball field. Plans for a new 5,000-square-foot house were reportedly being drawn up before the law was changed last week.

The extensive renovations to the house, which was built by Mr. Joel and his wife at the time, Christie Brinkley, in the mid-1980s, were necessary in part because of structural problems, according to builders.

In addition, Elizabeth Clark, Mr. Seinfeld's publicist, said in 2002, Mr. Seinfeld and his wife, Jessica Sklar, who have two children, wanted to modernize the house and make it more family-friendly. It was to include eight bedrooms, a study, den, gallery, library, and nursery, as well as many other rooms. Mr. Seinfeld, who collects classic cars, also planned a 5,800-square-foot garage, to hold up to 22 autos. There is also a large pool and a five-bedroom cottage.

When the building permit problem came to light in 2002, Ms. Clark attributed it to an oversight. It was immediately rectified by obtaining proper permits.

In adopting the new zoning law last Thursday, the town board found that requiring a "principal structure" — a residence — to be built on a lot where its owner simply desires a shed, a pool, or even a ball field, is counter to the town's goals of decreasing the density of development.

Allowing residents to use an approved building lot only for a shed or a similar structure will actually reduce density, the legislation says.

According to the new law, residents building an accessory structure on a neighboring vacant lot must save room for a future house, to avoid the need to obtain variances if they or a future owner decide to develop the site. Should the contiguous lot change ownership, the accessory structure must be removed or the owner of the lot must obtain a building permit to add a house within nine months.

It's still no home run for Mr. Seinfeld's ball field, however. The field was constructed too close to property lines, according to the town code, and town officials declined to change the law by reducing the required setbacks, as requested by Jeffrey Bragman, Mr. Seinfeld's East Hampton attorney.

Since noise from "playing courts" could be disturbing to neighbors, the setbacks for tennis courts, basketball courts, and baseball fields are twice the size of those set for other accessory structures.

The rule should not apply to baseball fields, Mr. Bragman argued in a letter to the town board. Baseball games are quieter than the other sports, he said, because the game is played on an unpaved surface. Cheers from players and spectators are directed toward the field, he said. "Additional setbacks should not be required for this graceful and quietly appealing game," Mr. Bragman wrote.

Board members decided to retain the setback requirement. "I think we've done enough to address this," Councilman Pete Hammerle said. However, requiring setbacks from one's own adjacent property line is unnecessary, he said.

Supervisor Bill McGintee noted that Mr. Seinfeld can apply to the zoning board of appeals for variances from the setback law. "My understanding is the neighbors don't object," he said.