

Town Meeting Article 19 – Athletic Fields and Open Space Bond Authorization

The Open Space Bond Program was begun in 2000 with an authorization from Town Meeting to bond up to \$10 million for the acquisition of open land for several purposes, including athletic fields and general municipal purposes. The currently proposed Article 19 proposes to increase that authorization by another \$5 million, and enables the funds to be used to construct athletic fields. The Question and Answer format below is designed to provide key background and information on the Program and the Article to assist you in making a decision at Town Meeting and at the ballot.

QUESTION: What does this article do?

- It increases a bond authorization passed in 2000 by \$5 million. This authorization allows the Board of Selectmen to acquire interests in real estate for open space, water supply protection, recreation and/or certain general municipal purposes.
- It expands the usage of these bond funds to include site development for playing fields in addition to acquisition of the raw land.
- It can continue to be used to partner with other community interests to share the costs of land acquisition for public purposes, such as sites for alternative energy generators.

QUESTION: Why add playing field development costs to the authorization?

- This is the major focus of the Open Space Committee, Board of Selectmen, and Athletic Fields Study Committee (AFSC). The AFSC, created by the Selectman in 2006, has determined that 8.5 fields must be built in the near term to address the needs of the Town and Schools. This is a direct result of a significant increase in participation - over 50% in many sports over just the last 5 years - in organized athletics by Ipswich citizens.
- There is currently no identified source of funding for this purpose.
- The list of potential properties for playing fields is limited if we require that the property be "ready to go". Adding this to the authorization gives us the ability to consider a much broader array of properties and know that we can make them useful quickly should use of any of the existing fields terminate.

QUESTION: How has the bond been used up to this point?

- A total of \$8.615 million has been spent to protect 763.2 acres. Many of these properties are considered the "jewels" of the town's open lands. More than 300 acres are active agricultural lands. Six properties protect the town's water supply. One property has active playing fields.
- Over \$9 million in matching funds have come into the town coffers - so for every dollar of tax revenue spent, more than one dollar of funding from other Federal, State and private sources has been raised through the efforts of staff and non-profit partners.

QUESTION: Why do we need to do this now?

- The primary answer to this is simple: it keeps our options open. We cannot control when the "right" property will come on the market. Having this authorization gives us the credibility required to enter into negotiations when it does become available. This is particularly true for properties enrolled in the Chapter 61 program, which only gives the town 120 days to exercise its right of first refusal.
- There are a number of properties which are suitable for playing fields but which could exceed the \$1.385 million balance in the current bond authorization. Any properties on which you could develop more than one field exceeds this amount.

QUESTION: What is the fiscal impact of this article?

- In the near term, none. This is only an authorization. There is no fiscal impact to the town until a project is approved and the town applies for bond funding. No project can be approved without public hearings and a vote by the Selectmen. In addition, projects over \$1.5 million cannot be approved without Town Meeting approval.
- In the longer term, expenditures are bonded, spreading the tax rate impact over 20 years. Future impact will depend on specific project costs and timing, however past history provides context. Costs to the average taxpayer in 2012 for \$8.615 million spent to date: \$124
- The protection of land for public purposes can provide for many municipal needs while foregoing residential development that could increase municipal costs.

