

Amherst Recreation Commission supports Petition Warrant Article #24.

The Recreation Commission supports Warrant Article #24 and is working diligently to provide voters with detailed information and responses to specific questions about the purchase. We provided information at the Deliberative Session, are meeting with a variety of local organizations to discuss the Stearns Road purchase and there is information on the Recreation Department's web site, amherstrec.org.

We understand that voters have communicated their position on the purchase and we recognize that there may be others who agree with it. In light of that, we are responding to some of the comments made in recent e mails. We want to be sure that the information provided to others is correct.

As most people are aware, the parcel is located in the 100 year flood plain. As they are also aware, the owner of this parcel received approval from Amherst's Conservation Commission and the Amherst Planning and Zoning Department to develop athletic fields. Currently there are 4 fields that are used for soccer and a community garden program. It is understood that in a very rainy, wet, season fields may be unusable for a period of time. This is not unlike other athletic fields in Amherst; Souhegan High School, Bean Fields, Upper Wilkins and Cemetery experience wet conditions during the spring and fall depending on the weather conditions. This parcel will allow Amherst residents to use it year round; seasonal athletic activities and other forms of passive and active recreation; snowshoeing, cross country skiing, walking, and access to the Souhegan River for kayaking, canoeing and fishing.

The purchase and sales agreement for this parcel is signed by the owner. The Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator were notified the day of the signing, January 28, 2010. Additionally, this prospective purchase has been worked on for more than 12 months with the Amherst Open Space Land Acquisition Committee. During that time the Board of Selectmen met several times in a non-public session to discuss the terms and conditions of the agreement.

In order to insert a petition warrant article, a minimum of 25 registered voters must petition the Board of Selectmen 12 days before the article is presented at the Deliberative Session. If the required number of signatures or the deadline is not met, the petitioned warrant article cannot be presented. Over 45 signatures were obtained from Amherst voters and the deadline date was met.

The Recreation Commission understands the urgency to find a suitable placement for the Cemetery Fields playground and athletic fields. Although the Cemetery Trustees' lease agreement expires in 2014, they have notified the Commission that they may need the space as soon as 2012. Land acquisition and fields/playground development will take a minimum of 3 years if all things are aligned; purchase of property that is suitable, available funding, and lastly construction. From experience in developing the Bean Fields, we know it takes a year to develop and an additional year for field establishment. The benefit of this parcel is that there are 4 existing flat multipurpose fields that will be used immediately to transition from Cemetery Fields.

We acknowledge that a formal appraisal has not been conducted on the property. The Opens Space Land Acquisition and the Recreation Commission are taking into consideration:

- The tract is not raw land but currently has in place four usable, full-size playing fields.
- It is highly suitable for future development of additional passive recreation amenities, including 4 read- to-use playing fields and as many as three additional playing fields, at significantly reduced expense.
- Taking the above factors into account, there is no other property in Amherst that could be acquired and developed to the same extent at comparable low costs.

Beyond basic economic considerations, this purchase is important in relation to the Town's continuing efforts to conserve open land for the enjoyment of future generations.

We are encouraged that many voters support the idea of dev eloping playing fields on this parcel. Please be assured that we will continue maintaining our fields with funds primarily obtained by user fees.

When the commitment of grants was made at the Deliberative Session, they were to be directed to future development of the parcel in addition to capital user fees and donations.

It has been suggested that a plan for the entire be developed. This is exactly the direction the Commission is headed. In the event the warrant article passes, the Commission will request from the Board of Selectmen to expend funds from their Capital Facilities and Development Fund to obtain a comprehensive plan of development for the parcel. This will include both active and passive recreation. We do not want to develop ad hoc. We need a plan that is suitable for the parcel and one that takes many aspects into account; best parking, best use of river front, extending courtesy to the abutters and neighbors, to name a few.

We appreciate the time you have taken to address this important issue.

Please feel free to contact any member or Recreation Director, Nancy McMillan if you have any other questions or concern.

Sincerely,

Amherst Recreation Commission