



To: Town Council

Fr: Paul Bockelman, Town Manager
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
David Ziomek, Assistant Town Manager

Dt: December 2, 2022

Re: Appropriation Order FY23-05C

Recommendation

Consider the additional information provided below in response to the letter dated November 22, 2022 from Superintendent, Dr. Michael Morris, and Athletic Director, Victoria Dawson.

Background

The Superintendent and Athletic Director have requested certain commitments from the Town. Town staff have reviewed the requested commitments and, with this memorandum, provide additional information for the Town Council to consider. Each commitment is listed below followed by the response from Town staff.

Commit to reserving all current and future CPA funding for installing grass fields at ARHS until this urgent situation is resolved.

- The Town Council can only appropriate funds for projects recommended to it by the CPA Committee. There has been no proposal to the CPA committee for a project that addresses all of the athletic fields used by the Regional School District.
- The FY24 CPA grant application cycle is closed. Fifteen proposals were submitted requesting funds in excess of \$8.3 million. The Town expects to have \$2.4 million available for FY24 prior to covering CPA funded debt.
- CPA existing debt payments for FY24 are \$443,460. \$268,250 in debt payments is estimated for FY25 which could be higher depending on the timing of the Jones Library Project.
- Funding a project to install grass fields as requested would will require significantly limiting the resources available for other CPA projects including affordable housing proposals, historical preservation proposals, and other recreation projects like parks and playgrounds.
- The majority of these fields are owned by the Regional School District, not the Town of Amherst. All member towns should be consulted to see if they support a larger project of this magnitude. It should not fall to the Town of Amherst alone.

Commit to immediately funding the design and development of high quality grass fields and to exploring whether additional fields are needed to prevent continuation of the current overuse issues.

- Based on the 2019 Field Study from Weston & Sampson – the Town’s consultant - the estimated cost to replace all High School and Middle School fields is between \$10 and \$12 million. This amount combines the cost for the different phases that cover all of the fields and assumes the reoriented track with a natural grass field interior. Town staff verified this range recently with Weston and Sampson.
- Weston and Sampson estimates that construction of a brand new playing field would cost about \$1 to \$2 million dollars depending on the current state of the terrain.
- The Town does not have capacity within its projected capital funding to add a project of this magnitude.
- The total cost of the synthetic surface field and track option is projected between \$5 and \$6 million with cost escalation factored in. This cost is anticipated to be shared with the other member towns and private fundraising efforts.

Commit to replacing the requisite number of fields by 2026 so that all sports teams, for all genders, will have a safe, high quality playing surface that is usable at all times during both the fall and spring seasons.

- The Town does not have sufficient information to evaluate this commitment. It is recommended that the Regional School District engage engineers to study and develop a phasing plan to determine what is possible and if any swing space fields would be required.
- It should be noted that natural grass fields require significant time after the initial grass has grown before they can be used for athletic events.

Commit to limiting community use of those fields so they can be maintained over time according to industry standards.

- Amherst Recreation uses the fields for various camps over the summer and many community members utilize the track for exercise. The above study should also explore optimal usage levels and the impact limited use may have on school sports, Amherst Recreation activities, and community use.

Commit to funding the additional resources needed to maintain high quality grass fields by immediately increasing the number of DPW staff members who maintain the fields, so they can be adequately cared for before, during, and after construction AND increase the budget specifically for irrigation and other materials needed for field maintenance.

- Weston and Sampson has stated that a grass field can cost \$30,000 to \$35,000 to properly maintain, not including equipment or cost of watering. There are approximately nine fields surrounding the High School and Middle School (some fields are larger than others with various levels of overlap).
- This expense would need to be included in the Regional School District’s budget.
- High quality grass athletic fields require significant amounts of water, fertilizer, and possibly other chemicals to maintain them over a long period of time. Neither the Town

nor the Region currently utilize pesticides on the grass fields and do not have a budget to do so.

Commit to funding the ARHS athletics program to rent field space elsewhere during the construction of the grass fields when there will not be enough field space for the current sports offered.

- The Town does not have sufficient information to evaluate this commitment. It is recommended that the Regional School District engage engineers to study and develop a phasing plan to determine what is possible and if any swing space fields would be required.

Future Considerations

It is the right of the Town Council to determine whether it wants to accept the commitments outlined in the letter from Superintendent Morris and Athletic Director Dawson. Before the Council accepts any of the requested commitments, we recommend the Council request an analysis of the impacts on the Capital Improvement Program.