

Article 24: Will the Town Vote \$625,000 for Purchase of Playing Fields?

PRO:

Acquisition of Four Existing Full Size Multipurpose Fields on 57+ Acres With The Ability To Develop Pas-sive Recreation Areas

The Amherst Recreation Commission is supporting petition Warrant Article # 24. One of the ways we are showing our support is to supply the voters with facts that will help them to make an informed decision when voting on March 9th.

Article #24 is requesting the voters to raise and appropriate \$625,000 to purchase a land parcel (commonly known as Brewster Fields on Stearns Road) to replace Cemetery Fields. The following data should be helpful to you to understand the reasons and benefits of purchasing this parcel.

The Cemetery Trustees have notified the Recreation Commission that they will need the approximate 42 acres, known as Cemetery Fields, to develop Forest view Cemetery. Cemetery Fields houses two full size playing fields, a 60-foot baseball diamond, and a full playground; the fields are used by an average of 1600 participants in a six month period. When Cemetery fields are taken out of use it would leave approximately 1600 children with no place to play. Individual teams would either have to limit the amount of practice and competition time they currently use, or teams would have to be eliminated

The immediate purchase is not to develop more fields or playgrounds; it is to replace the existing fields that will be eliminated.

Cemetery Fields will revert back to the Cemetery Trustees sometime between the years 2012-2014. Stearns Road parcel has 4 existing multi-purpose fields ready for immediate use.

Moving the existing 2 multi-purpose fields can be accomplished within this time frame. The playground and baseball diamond will be the 1st priority to move to the new site.

Total cost of ownership of this parcel is less than developing raw land with no improvements.

When you consider a per acre value of \$9000 (a base price used by the Amherst Land Trust when evaluating the acquisition of land for conservation purposes) you have a raw land value for the 57 acres of \$513,000 plus the value of the four playing fields. There is no parcel of land in Amherst on which you can construct four full size playing fields for \$108,000. The Brewster land has the lowest total cost of ownership compared to any other relevant or potential parcel in town.

Maintenance costs/allocations will be phased from Cemetery to Stearns Road.

Development costs will be funded by field user fees, capital user fees, grants, donations.

Flooding in the spring months of the Stearns Road parcel has no more of a negative impact than flooding of Cemetery or Souhegan High School athletic fields. Flooding occurs and recedes in a matter of days. Exception occurs when Amherst experiences major flooding as in 2006.

Future development of parcel will be planned and phased in over time as funds are available from grants, capital user fees, donations.

Stearns Road parcel has a protected river front whereby a portion of it can be enjoyed by fishing, picnicking, canoeing, and kayaking. The other parts of the parcel can be used for gardening, cross country skiing, walking or observing wildlife.

Cost to purchase with 15 Year Bond—\$.04 per thousand.

The land is highly suitable for future development as playing fields and a passive recreation facility at a very low cost. The suitability of the Stearns Road land for field development and recreation use means that the cost to purchase and develop one playing field on the Brewster site is approximately half of the cost of just the development of one field on the Bean Property. Please take into consideration the total cost of ownership when evaluating this land for a responsible town acquisition to satisfy an immediate playing field need.

Sincerely,
Amherst Recreation Commission
Addie Hutchison, Chair *Manny Almeida*
Bob Heaton, Vice Chair *Dan Gravel*
Kim Parrett *Wendy Rannenberg*
Dana Redmond

CON:

Haste Makes Waste

The rush, rush approach to buying Brewster's land for more sports fields (Article 24) risks wasting significant taxpayer money. That land is not going to skip town some dark night. The ARC should take the time to do the proper planning, figure out all the costs, identify where the funding will come from, consider the neighborhood, and only then put it on the ballot.

Voters deserve to know the WHOLE long-term cost beforehand and need confidence this is the BEST price for the land.

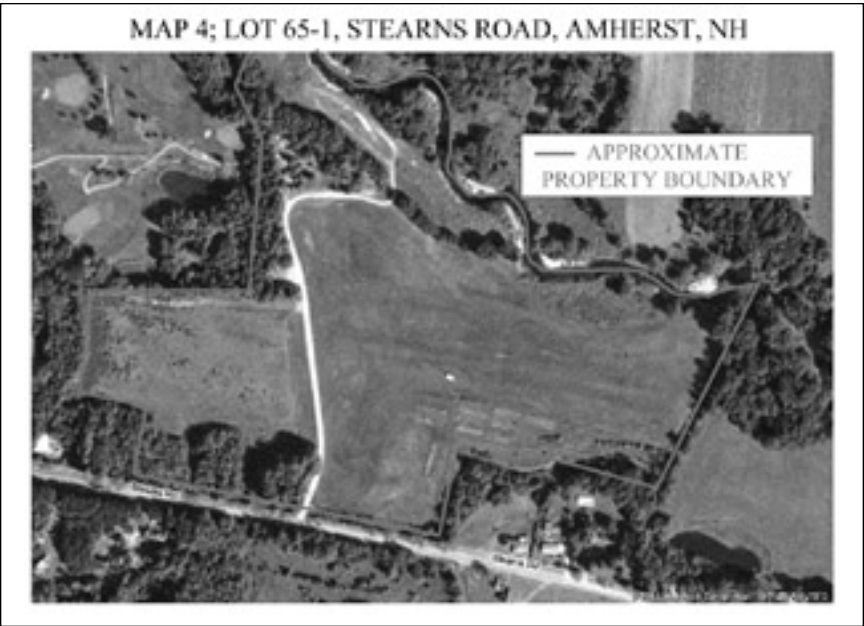
Board of Selectmen.
Only a minority of the Board of Selectmen supported this warrant article. This is a red flag.

Excessive price.
Where did the \$625,000 number come from? Is that the asking price? Who pays the asking price these days? The town's assessed valuation, done in 2006/7 at the peak, was \$342,500. That was for a single house lot plus open land in the flood plain suitable for agriculture. Given the plunge in real estate values in the past few years and the fact this property was in foreclosure last year, one would naturally expect the Town's representatives to have negotiated a price well under half the proposed price. Did they even read the zoning and think about it in the context of this land? Sure, playing fields might be the highest value use of that property – but there is only one potential customer for that use, namely the Town.

Fields may need work.
Those clamoring for us to purchase Brewster's property claim the fields are in good condition and need no further work. We have heard there are knowledgeable people who believe this is not so and the fields will need significant work to bring them up to the standards of other fields in town. Unfortunately, voters cannot form their own opinions at this late date because the land is covered with snow. We should have an independent, unbiased opinion on those fields before we spend \$625,000.

What is the plan? What is the layout?
In order to determine the condition of the fields, we have to know where the fields are. Has anyone seen a plot plan of the proposed fields? We have heard mention of a baseball diamond, presumably with backstop. Where will it be? Where will the parking be? What about playground equipment? Are there plans for fencing to keep balls out of the moat and the river? Will the fields need irrigation? Will there be a building to hold irrigation equipment and/or sports equipment?

The land floods.
This land on the Souhegan has some unusual characteristics that will require the services of a Professional Engineer to answer these usage questions. Even fences and playground equipment need to take into account floodwater flows. Some of the flood restrictions are imposed by federal law. Others are practical: if a baseball backstop is subject to significant water flows and if the wire mesh gets clogged with debris, the backstop will likely get mangled. An analysis of water flows can be technically challenging since the water flow paths change with flood elevation. For small floods, most of the Brewster property experiences slow-moving water. For large floods, it is a very different story.



What do we need?
Weren't the Bean Fields meant to replace the Cemetery Fields? Now we have a proposal for the Brewster land to provide four fields to replace two at Cemetery Fields. How many times over do we need to replace the Cemetery Fields?

Priorities!
Most households in town have limited money supply and governments at all levels are talking about taking more of it. Are these fields more important than dealing with our road deterioration? Are they more important than other household expenses?
We urge voters to put the brakes on this land purchase by voting NO on article 24. We respectfully request the Selectmen and ARC do their homework, hold some hearings and bring forward a real plan at a better price for a vote in March, 2011.

Peter de Bruyn Kops
Amherst

Vote for Dwight Brew, School District's Loss Can Be Town's Gain

To the editor:

I am very pleased to see that Dwight Brew has decided to run for Selectman and I strongly encourage all Amherst residents to go to the polls on March 9 and cast a vote for him. As Chair of the Amherst School District Ways & Means Committee, I have worked with Dwight for the past two years on the ASD budget. The result has been fiscally responsible budgets which meet the high educational expectations that Amherst citizens have come to expect. One of the primary reasons for our success has been the excellent collaboration between the School Board and Ways & Means and Dwight Brew deserves much of the credit for this. He has provided a high level of budgeting expertise and as liaison to Ways & Means has created a cooperative environment where the best possible results can be achieved. It's unfortunate we will not be able to work with Dwight on the next ASD budget but the School District's loss can be the Town's gain. I am confident Dwight will be a great asset to the Board of Selectmen on matters of budgeting or any other issues that come before the Board. Please vote for Dwight Brew on March 9.

Mark Vincent
Amherst

Avoid Foreclosure Through Mediation Program

To the editor:

Recently, members of the Senate Commerce, Labor and Consumer Protection Committee, on which I sit, were briefed on an interesting program offered by the state's judicial branch to help New Hampshire citizens facing possible foreclosure on their homes.

The program is called the Foreclosure Mediation Program and is a voluntary program to assist borrowers and lenders in having a facilitated discussion about whether it might be possible to restructure the loan and avoid foreclosure for the benefit of both the borrower and the lender.

This facilitated discussion helps both sides determine whether or not they can agree upon modification terms to avoid foreclosure. A successful agreement could allow a borrower to remain in his or her home with a more manageable loan, which in turn means lenders would not own fore-closed properties that remain vacant and drive down property values.

There is no cost to the borrowers or lenders for this grant-funded program. Information on the Foreclosure Mediation Program is available from the judicial branch's web site at www.courts.state.nh.us/adrp/foreclosure/index.htm. For those without Internet access, the program's contact person is Lynda Troy at 271-6418, extension 341.

Senator Peter Bragdon
NH State Senate - District 11

No New Spending

To the editor:

All government spending must stop now, including state and local. Federal debt will hit a hair raising 14 trillion dollars next year, a burden of 47 thousand dollars per every US citizen. The president now says that he's open to taxing citizens making less than 250 thousand dollars annually, clearly a broken campaign promise. The federal government allowed no cost of living adjustment for Social Security recipients, many of whom pay property taxes in Amherst. Neither should there be any cost of living increase for state or town employees. Health care costs to those of us in the private sector continue to increase, with higher deductibles, increased co-pays, prescriptions, etc. Unemployment is still hovering at 10 percent. The state expects more layoffs and budget cuts, and the costs will be passed on to the towns, who are already hurting statewide.

More than five times as many people responded to the Amherst Citizens Association poll than attend the average town meeting. Please refer to the January 26th edition of the Citizen. Thank God Amherst is an SB 2 town. Clearly, not everyone can attend meetings, but everyone has an opinion. The consensus is no new spending, no new taxes, and lets get a spending cap.

I hope Amherst town officials will be more receptive to the people than Washington DC has been.

Ann Conceison
Amherst

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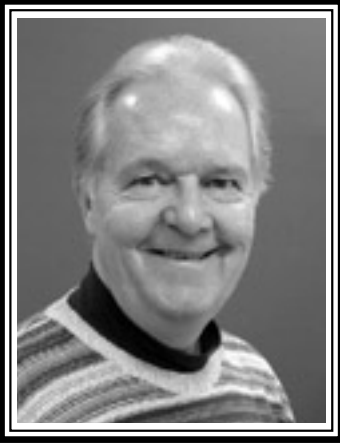
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Amherst Planning Board
Amherst Town Police Union Negotiator & Rep.
Youth Sports Coach & Advisor – 10 Years
Milford Rotary Club – 29 Years
Milford Economic Development Advisory Committee
Milford Tax Increment Finance Board
Souhegan Nursing Association*
Milford Board of Selectmen*
Wilton Board of Selectmen*
Milford Planning Board*
Wilton Planning Board*
Wilton ZBA*
Member Numerous Civic Groups

*Former board member

Local Businessman – 40 Years

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More Letters and Commentary on Pages 6 and 7

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