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Funds eyed for artificial turf: Wayland TM to consider using CPA monies for high school athletic field

By **Jack Cristofani**/ Daily News Correspondent
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WAYLAND -- The Finance Committee is reviewing the proposed articles for the Nov. 9 special Town Meeting, two of which involve the installation of a synthetic turf surface to the high school athletic field.

One of the articles is sponsored by the School Committee and the other by the Community Preservation Committee (CPC). Each details financing for the proposed \$1 million project, with \$300,000 coming from Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds and the remaining \$700,000 from private fund-raising.

However, one point of confusion during the Finance Committee discussion at its Sept. 18 meeting was the fact that at least one of the articles appeared to require the use of town funds at a point where the budget would have to be reworked.

"To fund anything this November would require reopening the budget which we just spent eight or nine months producing," said Finance Committee member Chris Riley. "And I for one have little desire to do that unless there is an absolute emergency on any one of the articles presented in November."

Riley said the only way town funds could be allocated for the project was to change the budget and all the hard work and effort put into it.

"I am very reticent to have to vote for any moneys that impact the operating budget that we voted as a town," Riley said. "We laid a number of people off and changed some of our departments and how they work. I think it would be unfair to them and I don't think it would be prudent for us to do that."

Another point of contention was which of the two articles would go forward.

"We often will have articles that are multiples," said Finance Committee Chairwoman Cherry Karlson, "so there is nothing unusual about having what is called a placeholder article."

Karlson attempted to clarify the situation by explaining that Article 1, sponsored by the School Committee, is a placeholder article, and that the article submitted and sponsored by the CPC is the one that should go ahead in the process.

"The meeting was not meant to be a debate," said Karlson. "There was a fair amount of discussion because for the fall Town Meeting the timeline is much shorter and tighter."

"For the field article, \$700,000 is money that has already been raised," she added, "but in order to spend CPA funds, the committee needs to go to town meeting and get the town's approval to allocate those funds."

A point of controversy that still lingers over the proposal involves the legality of the use of CPC funds for the project.

"When it first came to us and we looked at the statutes, there was some question whether or not this was an appropriate use of the fund," said CPC co-Chairman Steve Curtin, "and it appeared initially that there was some ambiguity in the way the legislation was created, but after significant discussion, the research and work from town counsel and additional legal team determined it was an appropriate application of the funds."

"There is precedent within the state -- Sudbury, Acton -- they have installed artificial turf and used CPA funds to do that," Curtin said.

Michael Patterson, formerly the chairman of the CPC, resigned from the committee in July after questioning the legality of using CPC money for artificial turf.

Meanwhile, the Board of Health has issued a memo recommending the independent services of an expert sports medicine physician to identify the potential health and safety risks of artificial turf.

While the Finance Committee hopes to get all the warrants prepared before Oct. 3, Karlson said a condensed timeline means the committee is not able to research and comment on all the articles.

"We put a disclaimer in the warrant to that effect, and we write up our recommendations, post them online and pass them out at Town Meeting," Karlson said.

The finalized warrants will be mailed to residents in mid-October in advance of the Nov. 9 special Town Meeting.

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