

[Home](#) > [News & Opinion](#) > [Opinion & Letters](#)

 [E-mail](#)  [Graphic](#)  [Popular](#)

Editorial: CPA should not pay for football fields

Wednesday, November 29, 2006

The Community Preservation Act was designed for local flexibility. Communities can set the level of the property tax surcharge that provides the local share of CPA funding and choose which exemptions to offer. Applications for CPA funding are considered by a local committee established by local bylaw. All spending must be approved by a town meeting or city council vote, and there is no state entity charged with signing off on those expenditures.

Because local decisions are rarely unanimous, especially when it comes to spending large amounts of public funds, it's no surprise some actions have sparked controversy. And since no state body rules on local actions, it's no surprise some CPA controversies are finding their way into the courts. One case that will be closely watched stems from a citizens' challenge to Wayland's decision to use \$300,000 in CPA money to pay for artificial turf to be put on the high school football field.

While at least 10 percent of the money raised must go to each of the act's three purposes -- open space protection, historical preservation and affordable housing -- the other 70 percent can be allocated to the expansion of recreational opportunities or to whichever of the three prime purposes are a priority for the community.

By design, there are some things CPA funds cannot be used for. It can't be used to purchase fire equipment, hire police, build a senior center or subsidize the school budget. The CPA was designed to help communities fund projects of lasting value that typically get shortchanged in the annual budget tug-of-war.

To prevent CPA funds being used to subsidize other parts of the budget indirectly, the law prohibits funds from being used for maintenance. Towns can't use CPA money to pay the DPW worker who mows the athletic fields, for instance. The act's goal is to expand recreation, not replace funding from other sources in the recreation budget.

This is where things get a little murky. The Wayland Boosters Club and other supporters of the football field project argue that the field will be "preserved" and available for greater use if it's rebuilt with artificial turf. Town counsel said the project was consistent with the CPA, and the local Community Preservation Committee and Town Meeting agreed.

A group of citizens begs to differ, and we think they have a case. The CPA was intended to expand community recreation opportunities, not subsidize high school football teams. When the CPA is used as a backdoor means of funding projects outside its mission, it becomes just another pot of money subject to raids by whatever local interests can pack Town Meeting.





The state Department of Revenue, which advises cities and towns on the CPA, has said it doesn't consider replacing existing grass fields with turf to be a legitimate use, but DOR doesn't intervene in local decisions. That's why, unless the plaintiffs settle, it will be up to a court to provide guidance.

This issue goes beyond Wayland. Newton has a similar controversy brewing over a proposed artificial turf field and other communities have already approved such expenditures. Providing high school football teams with fields worthy of the NFL has become a big business, and most suburban boosters want to outfit their team with nothing but the best.

That's fine, but they shouldn't raid the CPA to pay for it. Voters agreed to raise their taxes, and the state Legislature to match those funds, on the understanding that it would be used for historic preservation, affordable housing, open space protection and the acquisition and development of new recreation facilities. Spending CPA money on school sports violates that understanding and shortchanges the purposes for which this law was intended.

 [E-mail](#)  [Graphic](#)  [Popular](#)

Related articles

-  [Editorial: Prom safety and sanity](#)
-  [Editorial: Kennedy's constituents](#)
-  [Editorial: Why should agencies give cash to town?](#)
-  [Editorial: Expelling junk food from schools](#)

Herald Interactive Tools

-  [Related articles](#)
-  [E-mail article to a friend](#)
-  [Graphic version](#)
-  [Search site](#)
-  [Sign up for home delivery](#)

 [Editorial: Iraq no longer an 'emergency'](#)

Today's most read articles Updated 8:03 AM ET

1. [65 and still sizzling](#)(1113)
2. [Police log from Wednesday, November 29, 2006](#)(641)
3. [Crack trafficking suspect held on \\$250K](#)(480)
4. [Canada trip ends in stolen car, deportation](#)(399)
5. [Marathon run ends at 26](#)(389)

Search the site



Enterprise-level broadband service provided by
Expedient: America's Largest All-Ethernet Network



Wireless broadband service
 provided by **Towerstream**

[[contact us](#)] :: [[print advertising](#)] :: [[online advertising](#)] :: [[Browser Upgrade](#)] :: [[Jobs](#)]

Order Home Delivery Online: [Weekly papers](#) [Daily papers](#) or call **1.800.982.4023**

© Copyright of GateHouse Media and Herald Interactive, Inc.

No portion of townonline.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. [Privacy Commitment](#)
 bh.heraldinteractive.com: www.metrowestdailynews.com: 0.033365:Wed, 29 Nov 2006 13:30:44 GMT