

Ayer Shirley Regional School District Athletic Fields Project



Town Of Shirley Debt Exclusion Ballot Election September 28, 2019 8:00AM - 8:00PM

Shirley Town Hall, 7 Keady Way, Shirley

Absentee ballots are available until September 27 at 12:00 noon and must be returned to the Town Hall by 8:00PM September 28.
Approval via simple majority required for the project to begin.

This project seeks to create a field complex that compliments the modern high school that was completed in 2015, all while maintaining the campus feel of keeping students on site for practices and events. The project addresses the critical need for additional practice and competition space that is currently lacking. Elements have been selected for their flexibility and longevity, ensuring students now in elementary school will benefit from this project as they progress through the Ayer Shirley Regional School District.

<https://www.facebook.com/ASRHSAthleticFields>

<https://www.asrsd.org/additional-links/asrhs-field-project/>

Athlete Amenities

- Multi-Sport Synthetic Turf Field (1)
- Reshaped & Repaved Running Track
- Rejuvenated Softball Field
- Rejuvenated Baseball Field
- Baseball & Softball Dugouts
- Baseball & Softball Backstops / Fencing
- Scoreboards



Fan Amenities

- On Site Bathroom Facilities
- Raised Grandstand
- Baseball & Softball Bleachers
- Concession Stand
- Scoreboards
- ADA Compliancy

Ayer Shirley Regional School District Athletic Fields Project - Frequently Asked Questions

What are the main drivers for renovating the athletic fields?

Age, growth, and safety. The fields we have now were built in 1964 and have had only minor upgrades since. Since regionalization in 2011, our high school population has grown from 307 students to 400 and we've added two more soccer teams and a JV football team. Our bleachers are not ADA compliant, and there are no restrooms near the field. There are obstacles close to the field of play that need to be removed to improve player safety. Lastly, we do not have enough field space to offload hours of use, which would allow the facilities team to rest and rejuvenate the grass fields.

What are voting on at the September 28, 2019 ballot election? Didn't Shirley already vote no?

The vote on September 28, 2019 is to approve Shirley's portion of the funding for the project. The project itself was approved on October 6, 2018, and Ayer approved funding in December 2018. District legal counsel has advised that only Shirley needs to revote funding approval. While Shirley did not approve the funding December 11, 2018 the overall project is still valid and the Shirley Board of Selectman have allowed a second opportunity to have the project funded via this vote.

What is the reduced scope of the project?

Expanding the lower playing field and relocating the softball field to that area has been eliminated. The bleacher capacity has been reduced from 500 to 400 seats, which also bring the required number of bathroom facilities down. The press box has been relocated so it no longer requires an expensive elevator or ramp system to provide handicap access. Remaining in the project are the synthetic turf multisport field, 8 lane synthetic running track, handicap accessible bleachers, rejuvenated baseball and softball fields, a multipurpose building (restrooms, concessions, bathrooms), lights, fencing, and scoreboards.

How much will the project cost? What is the impact to Shirley's taxpayers?

The reduced project is budgeted for \$7.0 million, which represents a conservative magnitude of cost estimate (all elements have been estimated at their maximum 2020 cost). Financial pledges and the use of ASRSD stabilization funds have lowered the taxpayer burden to \$6.2 million, maximum. Shirley's portion is 42%, or \$2.6 million dollars. The Town of Shirley has estimated the average taxpayer impact to be \$101.80 per year, for a house valued at \$309,307. This taxpayer impact estimate is reflective of the full amount of the project—any cost savings or fundraising will reduce the borrowing amount.

Why is no borrowing amount listed on the debt exclusion ballot?

Massachusetts General Law prescribes what information can and cannot be included on debt exclusion ballots. The ballots you will vote with on September 28, 2019 contain the same wording as the December 11, 2018 ballot. From MGL, "Override and capital expenditure exclusion questions must also include the total amount of additional taxing authority being requested and the fiscal year in which it will be used. This information is NOT INCLUDED IN DEBT EXCLUSION QUESTIONS. Any additional information about the requested amount, the services and programs to be funded by the requested amount, and the impact the vote will have on those services CANNOT BE INCLUDED in the question or on the ballot. That type of information should be provided in the course of a balanced, comprehensive, public information effort."

Have their been any donations? What are the plans for continued fundraising?

There have been pledges totaling \$500,000 to date. These will not come to fruition until the Shirley's financing portion is approved on We will continue to fundraise via corporate and private donations to lower the taxpayer burden and defray ongoing maintenance costs.

What happens if there are cost overruns?

The \$7 million dollar cost represents the maximum cost for each element, in 2020 dollars. There is also a contingency amount included in the overall cost, to provide a first buffer for unexpected conditions. If elements come in at a higher cost than estimated, the design committee will need to make changes or reductions to stay on budget. Borrowing or expending more than the approved amount is not permissible under the law.

Who chose the elements of the reduced scope plan? Are there other alternatives?

After the failed 2018 debt exclusion ballot, district administration reviewed the initial plan and determined the elements still required. At this time, there are no other alternatives. Should the funding vote fail on September 28, the School Committee will need to meet to vote on the next steps. There is no guarantee an alternative design would be less expensive or would meet the identified needs.

Why can't this project be done in stages?

The committee felt that doing the project all at once would reduce costs and solve all identified needs. There was also concern voters would become fatigued approving multiple projects, and all of the critical elements would not be addressed. Lastly there was concern that multiple projects over many years would have a detrimental impact on campus facilities, sports, and community events.

Why synthetic turf on the stadium field? Do other local high schools have synthetic turf fields?

The synthetic turf field was chosen by the subcommittee for a number of reasons, including the ability to provide a consistent playing surface with less maintenance and no rest periods, the ability to withstand increased hours of use and ease overuse of other natural turf fields, the ability to withstand extreme weather such as droughts (which lead to watering restrictions or outright bans) or heavy rains (muddy field conditions or cancellation / relocation of games), and savings of 1 million gallons of water. Our natural turf fields will be allocated periods of rest to regrow and provide a high quality playing surface. Schools in the area with synthetic turf fields include Littleton, Lunenburg, Nashoba Tech, North Middlesex, Oakmont, Acton-Boxboro, Gardner, Nashoba Reg., Leominster, and Westford.

If savings are found through cost reductions or donations, how do they impact a taxpayer?

As noted previously, the Town of Shirley's taxpayers are responsible for 42% of the project's borrowing. If any savings are found, either through cost reduction or further donations, Shirley taxpayers will see 42% of those savings. Savings not only impact the amount of money borrowed, they also impact the amount of interest paid over the life of the loan.

What are the impacts if the concession stand is eliminated?

It has been tradition at the Ayer Shirley Regional High School that grade level classes, Student Council, National Honor Society, and other student groups are responsible for supplying and managing the concession stand during events. The revenues from the concession stand stay with the group managing the concession stand, not the district itself, and are used to pay for things like class shirts, trips, prom, and yearbooks. Should the concession stand be eliminated, these groups would need to raise funds by other means.

Not having a concession stand would have a detrimental impact to the overall rentability of the main stadium by outside groups, which are funds the district does keep. Lacking a concession stand would also negatively impact the ability of the district to host large meets or tournaments, which feature ticket sales the district is able to keep to offset athletic program and field maintenance costs.

Why do we need a press box? Why was it added in the reduced scope project?

The press box serves the PA announcer and scoreboard controller to view the field of play from a high level. It also serves as a location for coaches from both teams to observe the field of play away from the sidelines. Many teams make use of the press box to film game action for film review, advance scouting, or to generate recruiting tapes for students interesting in playing sports in college.

The inclusion of a press box in the renovation project has been since the beginning of the project. Originally designed to be between the main stadium and baseball field, it was moved to a new location in the reduced scope plan. The original location would have required an expensive outdoor elevator or a switchback ramp system. Moving the press box to the Page Hilltop side of the field removes the requirement for an elevator or ramp system, as access from the parking lot can meet accessibility requirements.

What if we only resurface the track?

Simply resurfacing the track does not allow for the expanded width needed to play soccer on a high school regulation field within the confines of the track. If we can't move hours of use from our other fields, we cannot provide those fields the ability to rest and rejuvenate. Resurfacing only does not allow the jumping pits to be moved from the sides of the grass field to the ends.

Could we use existing town fields for baseball and softball?

Conversations with Ayer and Shirley recreation groups about use of the town fields for baseball and softball did not provide any viable long term solutions. The fields on town properties are not of ideal dimensions and are used by a multitude of other town sports. There are currently no plans to adjust these dimensions or add additional fields that ASRSD could utilize. In Ayer, Pirone Park has time restrictions so that all town-sponsored recreation groups can start their activities on time. In Shirley, the fields are not maintained by the town and therefore ASRSD would need to pay rent to the groups managing the fields. Using fields in either town would require ASRSD to provide busing for practices and games, which would incur additional cost to the athletic program.

What happens if the funding vote fails again?

School Committee and district administration have spent the last three years advocating for the need to update the athletic facilities at the high school. These deficiencies do not go away should the funding fail to be approved. School Committee and district administration will work together to determine which deficiencies will be corrected and how to fund those renovations. Funding sources could include another debt exclusion, capital stabilization funds, excess and deficiency funds, the operating budget, or a combination of those sources.

I have other questions or concerns prior to the vote on September 28, 2019. Who can I contact?

For questions regarding the project, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mary Malone, 978-772-8600 x1507 or mmalone@asrdsd.org

For questions regarding tax impact or the election in Shirley, Town Administrator Mike McGovern at 978-425-2600 x200.