

Pony Express Farm Conservation and Recreation Reuse

Frequently Asked Questions

What can you tell us about the Pony Express Farm? The Pony Express Farm is 128 acres in area, has an address of 24 Candlewood Road, and runs along Chebacco, Essex and Candlewood Roads. It has been used for many years as a horse farm, for producing hay, and for playing polo. Its features and amenities include: a large polo field with adjoining parking and pond/well for irrigation; two stables; paddocks; open fields, woods, and trails; and wetlands along the western bank of the Castle Neck River.

Who will buy the property and for what purpose? The property is being purchased by the Town of Ipswich, the Essex County Greenbelt Association, and the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife for conservation and recreation purposes. The Town will convert the polo field into four full-sized multi-purpose athletic fields, and has the option to build an additional two fields in the future. Greenbelt will sell a portion of the northern side of the property where there is an existing house and stable. The remainder of the property will be permanently protected as open space for passive recreation, natural resource protection, and agriculture by Essex County Greenbelt and MA Fisheries and Wildlife.

What is the purchase price for the property and who pays what? The purchase price for the Pony Express Farm is \$4.05 million, and the funding is coming from three sources:

Town Open Space Bond	\$2.15 million
Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife	\$.5 million
Greenbelt (through fundraising and private sale)	\$1.40 million

What does the Town get for its contribution? The Town will own the 30 +/- acre portion of the property that contains the polo field, the access drive into the property, a parking area, and a pond and well used for irrigating the fields. Besides obtaining the use of four, high quality athletic fields, residents of Ipswich will gain access to the remainder of the property for passive recreation and enjoyment. We are fortunate to have Essex County Greenbelt and the MA Division of Fisheries as partners who are committed to protecting the abundant natural resources on this property in perpetuity.

How were the purchase prices for each partner calculated?

An appraisal of the property has been completed and each partner is contributing funds consistent with the appraised value of the property that they will own. The Pony Express Farm land is varied, and its financial value varies accordingly. Most of the land that the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife will own is riverfront wetland and subsequently has a relatively low financial value. The soils on the land that will be retained by Greenbelt are mostly clay and thus have limited septic capacity, reducing its developability and subsequently its financial value. The portion of the property the Town will purchase has good soils and minimal wetlands, and contains a high quality polo field, structures, and other amenities. As such, it has substantially higher financial value than the land being purchased by Greenbelt and Fisheries and Wildlife.

Will additional funds be needed to develop the athletic fields? The warrant for the January 24th Special Town Meeting requests an appropriation from the Open Space Bond not to exceed \$2.377 million. The acquisition cost for the Town's portion of the property is \$2.15 million. The \$227,000 has been added to cover potential costs associated with making the property ready for athletic field use. Costs will include expanding the existing gravel parking lot, and field soil amendments, and may include costs for in-ground irrigation. The \$227,000 is a conservative estimate; the actual improvement costs could well be lower. If so, the balance of the appropriation would not be spent.

How will this project affect my property taxes? An appropriation of \$2,377,000 from the Open Space Bond would add an estimated \$34.66 to the tax bill in FY19 for a house with an assessed value of \$450,000. The cost will decline annually after FY19 for the 20 year life of the bond.

What impact will the planned reuse of the property have on traffic in the neighborhood? A traffic study to gauge the impact to the neighborhood is underway. Preliminary results indicate that the impact will be relatively modest, and less impactful than certain other allowable uses on the property, such as a single family house subdivision.

Does this property contain water resources that could address the Town's need for additional water supply? The likelihood that the property could be used for public water purposes is remote. However, because the Town has limited options for creating additional water sources, we plan to evaluate the property for potential feasibility after acquisition, just to be sure. In the unlikely event that a suitable potential water supply is found, the Town would need to determine whether the cost of utilizing that source is worth the potential benefit.

Do we really need more athletic fields? Yes, absolutely. The Town has been actively looking for land on which to create athletic fields since 2006, after the Athletic Field Study Committee (appointed by the Board of Selectmen) surveyed user groups and analyzed existing fields and concluded that demand for athletic field time far exceeded the capacity of existing Town athletic fields. And with the loss of the Raymond soccer fields a couple of years ago, the need has become even greater.

How does the Pony Express Farm compare to other properties evaluated by the Town as potential sites for athletic fields? The Athletic Field Study Committee has long ranked the Pony Express Farm as the best site in town for developing new athletic fields, and has made acquisition its highest priority, in significant part because the polo field can be reconfigured as four full-sized multi-purpose athletic fields for a fraction of the cost of developing new fields. The Town will also gain the ability to create two additional fields on the property in the future. The opportunity to provide four and eventually six new athletic fields on a property at the projected cost is very unlikely to come again.

What will happen if Town Meeting votes 'No'? Essex County Greenbelt has negotiated an agreement with the owners that gives Greenbelt, Fisheries and Wildlife, and the Town until January 31, 2017 to raise or appropriate the money needed to purchase the property. The Town's participation is an essential component of the acquisition. If Town Meeting fails to appropriate the funds, the owners will be free to sell or develop the property as they choose.