

# **FAQs Regarding the Potential Sale of the Rock Ridge Ball Field**

Updated July 26, 2020

## **What caused the Executive Board to think about selling property?**

There were four main reasons:

1. Mandated upgrades to the dam: The state is enforcing compliance to adhere to new standards after Superstorm Sandy. Ours is one of the certain types of dams deemed “unacceptable” in the eyes of the state.
2. Limited funding: The club has always had an optional membership structure, so the Board never knows how much income we will have to pay our taxes, mortgage, and maintenance costs.
3. Increased expenses: With over \$32,000 in property taxes and added expenses to maintain our property without enough equipment or volunteers, our budget is clearly tight.
4. Dependency on Volunteer Efforts: Each year the club is forced to include fundraising as income in the yearly budget. This means that we expect members to fundraise not for items that people want or to improve on, but to pay bills.

## **Where did this ball field idea come from?**

At first, the Board was focused on obtaining grants and working with the town to gain funding to upgrade the dam. This naturally led into the discussion of the town implementing an special assessment to help funding, and we all agreed with the mayor and business administrator that special assessments are rarely received well by taxpayers. Our discussions moved into obtaining federal funding, which could take years. Finally we began discussing selling assets, and the town expressed interest in purchasing the ball field.

## **Right away I'm skeptical. What's the town's hidden agenda?**

Rock Ridge has always supported each current administration in a non-partisan manner, and Mayor Andes is no different. Our open communication led to our request for help with the dam, which in time led to the ball field acquisition project. This grew from collaborative discussions over the course of about a year.

**You can't trust the town. Don't you think they have other ideas?**

We have no reason to believe the town has any ulterior motives. In fact, the town will incur the added expenses of maintaining the field and grounds around the field, which is now in substantial disrepair and overgrown. The town also has the motivation to purchase and keep open space so that low income housing does not allocate land to development.

**Wait. You mean the town would NOT use their own money to buy the field?**

No. The town would use federal Open Space funding to purchase the field. This requires an formal appraisal of value, followed by a grant application, obtaining approval, and then approving the purchase through the town council. Finally, we as a membership would approve the sale.

**Who does the appraisal?**

Open Space funding requires the appraisal of an approved professional as this is a highly technical document and must include DEP and EPA information about the subject property. They assess value through the inclusion of comparable property in the area.

**What amount did the appraisal show?**

The official appraisal came back at \$290,000.

**That's good money for the club, but what if the town builds on the property?**

The town cannot build on that property, or sell it to a developer. Ever. By using federal Open Space funding, the property would be deed restricted to ensure that the land is always kept the way it is.

**Will the town install lights on the field?**

The town does not intend to install lighting. They know this is a big concern for local residents and they don't take this lightly.

**What if future administrations want to install lights on the field?**

We can ensure this won't happen by including language in the deed that restricts lighting from ever being installed by future administrations. Plus, as this land is considered wetlands, it would be very difficult to obtain any permits from the DEP for any lighting.

**Would the town improve the ball field and maintain it?**

Yes. The town will maintain the field and infield as they would with all other fields in town. This will improve the overall appearance as Rock Ridge has historically struggled with volunteer maintenance of the field and grounds there.

**Would the town improve the parking lot?**

Yes, but Open Space restrictions and wetlands provisions apply. This means that it may not be possible to pave the lot using asphalt. The town did mention they would seek to level the parking lot and place new crushed stone on top to make it more accessible for people and cars.

**If we sold the ball field and parking lot, would the town then own the property on the lake?**

No. The club still owns the entire perimeter around the lake, including the point.

**If the town buys the ball field, how will we stop people from coming onto our property to fish and to hike?**

As it is right now, the club cannot police that area thoroughly. We never could, so there will not be any difference if the town owns the property. We have, however, spoken at length about the town stepping up police patrols in this area. One other thing to understand is that Rock Ridge is unique in that we have not sold property on our lake. All other township lakes have private homes on lakefronts, thus limiting access by strangers or trespassers. Our lake is pristine in this regard, and looking from the beach we see only trees along the shoreline. But it's also easy for non-members to access the lake for fishing. It's up to us to manage this through volunteer enforcement.

**What will the town use the field for?**

The field will be used for softball or little league practices and games. This is no different than in the past. Last year we had a handful of girls softball games, plus a handful of practices for pee wee baseball/softball. These games were limited to

the months of June through August. The town is not looking to increase scheduling for the field.

**What about extra traffic? I'm worried about people from other towns speeding through our neighborhood.**

The township has no plans to utilize this field for any new sporting or recreational events, such as festivals or other gatherings. There is no electricity at this field or lighting, as we discussed, so it limits the use of the field to small athletic events. The town is extremely sensitive to neighborhood traffic as they will often get complaints. They do not intend to use the field any more than it is currently being used so there is no reason to believe we will see any substantial increase in traffic through our neighborhood after the sale of the ball field.

**What about dredging? If we sell the ball field we will lose the flat area to be able to dredge the lake.**

The cost of dredging the lake is very prohibitive, as are the permits required from the DEP. When you remove sediment and plant material from the bottom of a lake, that material must be tested for contaminants and that could be a major problem. This is why most lakes rely on hydroraking to remove plant material on or just below the surface- before it deteriorates and sinks to the bottom.

**Ok. Say we did approve the sale and we did get the \$290,000. What are we going to use it for?**

The Executive Board is going to ask for volunteers to join a committee to review current finances, forecast a new yearly budget, and review long-awaited capital improvements. Given the fact that we currently have nearly \$100k left on the mortgage on the clubhouse, our first option is to pay that off entirely. There are some questions about whether it is best to refinance with current rates so low, and if membership agrees, the Board may consider this option.

Below is a preliminary plan, which can always be adjusted:

- \$100k to pay off mortgage, saving us \$2036.91 per month (\$24,442 per year)
- \$100k placed into an interest-bearing savings account to be used for dam improvements (if and when the state forces us to)
- \$40k to be placed into savings account, earmarked for emergencies

- \$50k for capital improvements for clubhouse and grounds, such as:
  - repair/replace docks
  - upgrade tennis courts and basketball courts
  - repair/replace gutters on clubhouse
  - upgrade front room in clubhouse
  - complete deck around building as originally planned
- With the nearly \$25k in savings from paying off our mortgage, we would be able to do some regular maintenance each year, such as:
  - landscaping contractor for weekly maintenance
  - beach sand replenishment
  - hydro raking the algae in the lake (every two years)
  - painting and interior maintenance
  - grounds maintenance- trees/boat area
  - hardwood floor refinishing

**What if future administrations want to build on the ball field?**

They will not be able to. Open Space restrictions prevent this from happening. This will be reflected in the new deed. They will never be able to build on the property.

**Well, what if future administrations want to install lights on the field?**

Again, Open Space funding will restrict some types of projects, but just in case, we will include language in the deed to restrict lights from being installed- ever. This will be done before signing the final contract.

**When are we planning on an official vote on the ball field sale?**

The Executive Board will have a series of information sessions prior to any formal vote. At this time we are looking to move forward with the project until such a time that we receive a formal contract of sale. Then we will schedule a membership meeting and vote formally.

**What if I have more questions about this project?**

You can always submit your questions [on this form](#). We will share your questions with the town and share the answers with you.

*As always, we look forward to working together to make Rock Ridge the best it can be, now and in the future.*