

GUEST COMMENTARY

Support track and field reconstruction

By Cindy Heitmeyer

Littleton residents will have an opportunity at Town Meeting on Nov. 14 and at the polls on Nov. 19 to support the funding to make the reconstruction of our town's track and field athletic facility a reality.

While there are several compelling reasons to support this effort, I would like to highlight four: This is an athletic facility the Littleton community has enjoyed for over three decades, but is currently unsafe and unusable for competition; there have been three years of diligent and careful planning for this project; the scope and costs of the project are appropriate for our community; and the periodic maintenance expenses for the track have been concretely addressed through the fundraising efforts of the Littleton Track Organization (LTO).

The Littleton community has enjoyed and benefited from the track for over three decades. In 1979, a group of Littleton residents brought a proposal to Town Meeting to build Littleton's first, and only, track and field facility. Despite the difficult economic times then, residents overwhelmingly approved a debt exclusion to fund the original track construction. While this resource has served the community well for over three decades, the track has exceeded its expected life, and is not currently safe and usable for athletic competitions, training or recreation.

A reconstructed track facility would be used by many in our town – the boys' and girls' High School track and field teams (among the largest sports programs at LHS), physical education classes at Russell Street Elementary and the Middle School, Parks and Recreation programs; community events such as Relay for Life and residents of all ages for daily walking, jogging and running. In addition, a reconstructed track facility will promote the expanded use and addition of new programs for

Littleton residents to enjoy fitness and recreation opportunities. Supporting the reconstruction project will transform the track from its current state of being a safety liability back to an asset that is frequently used by town residents.

Three years of diligent and careful planning have occurred. Planning for this project has enjoyed the involvement, support and hard work of residents, the School Committee, the Board of Selectmen and the Permanent Municipal Building Committee. The two major phases of the planning were widely supported at Town Meeting – the feasibility study funding in 2009 and the design planning funding in 2010. Throughout this planning process, the Board of Selectmen, School Committee and all stakeholders have been informed and involved, and the LTO has kept the community informed through numerous meetings, presentations, articles, and its website, littletontrack.org.

In addition, other possible funding sources for the project, such as grants, donations and the use of CPA funds have been pursued. While these efforts have been able to address the important issue of maintenance, they have not been successful in obtaining funds for the track reconstruction.

The scope and costs of the project are appropriate for our community. Following the completion of the feasibility study, the LTO has consistently advocated for the lowest priced option that will provide the Town with a safe and usable track and field facility. The School Committee and Board of Selectmen have also supported this plan. The project is certainly appropriate and suitable for Littleton. The proposal is not for a new type of facility the town does not currently own, nor is it an extravagant facility. It is a straightforward proposal to return an athletic and recreational facility that the Town has enjoyed since 1979 to a safe and fully usable state. Town residents will be

asked to approve borrowing of \$735,000 for the track and field facility reconstruction. This would translate to a temporary tax increase for the average Littleton homeowner of \$18.25 per year for 15 years.

The scope of the facility being proposed is comparable to towns that are similar to Littleton in size and demographics. Of the 25 area schools in the Midland Wachusett League, Littleton is the only school that does not provide basic track and field facilities suitable for competitive use and training. This year's senior class will graduate without having a single home meet during their entire high school career, and without ever having the opportunity to train on a safe, quality facility.

Planning and funding for the periodic maintenance expenses for the track have been concretely addressed. Since the LTO began advocating for a reconstructed track and field facility, the most common concern heard from the community is about maintenance costs. Wisely, residents do not want to invest in a facility if there is not an adequate plan to maintain it and keep it in a safe and usable condition.

Because of these concerns, the LTO began the Littleton Road Race three years ago not only as a way to promote running and fitness, but also as a fundraiser to offset future maintenance costs of a reconstructed track. Thanks to the wonderful support from residents, both as participants and volunteers, the annual Littleton Road Race has proved to be a viable model to pay for the maintenance expenses for the life of the track.

This project is overdue, has been carefully planned, is appropriate in scope and has addressed future maintenance costs. I encourage Littleton residents to vote to support the track and field reconstruction both at Town Meeting and the election to provide our town a real and tangible asset that all residents can use and enjoy. —Cindy Heitmeyer, President, Littleton Track Organization

HOW TO SUBMIT

Letters should not exceed 400 words. Deadline is noon Monday for consideration for the same week's edition. Include name, address and daytime phone number (not for publication) **SEND LETTERS TO** littleton@wickedlocal.com **FAX to** 978-371-5711. **MAIL to** Littleton Independent P.O. Box 9191, Concord, MA 01742.

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