

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2013 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 896 (Delegate Waldstreicher, *et al.*)
Environmental Matters

Project Open Space - Use of Funds - Artificial Turf Surfaces

This bill prohibits the use of State and local Program Open Space (POS) funds to build new or replace existing athletic fields with artificial or synthetic turf surfaces.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2013.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. Overall funding for POS is not affected.

Local Effect: Because local governments are prohibited from using local POS funds to build new or replace existing athletic fields with artificial or synthetic turf surfaces, local jurisdictions may incur additional recreation-related costs. Although the effect cannot be reliably estimated, the impact on some local governments may be significant.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: POS, established in 1969 and administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), provides funds for State and local acquisition and development of public outdoor recreational sites, facilities, and open space. The State share focuses on the acquisition of land for natural resource conservation with the inclusion of low-impact recreational activities where appropriate. The local jurisdiction's share is used primarily for the acquisition and development of high-impact recreational sites and facilities. As of February 20, 2013, the State share had preserved 316,949 acres and the local share had preserved 45,365 acres.

DNR advises that to date, 38 local projects involving artificial turf (in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties and Baltimore City) have been completed with or approved for POS funding. Although DNR does not track costs for artificial turf separately from other project costs (such as parking, lighting, buildings, and bleachers), DNR estimates that POS funds typically cover an estimated \$600,000 per artificial turf field.

Concern has been raised as to whether the use of POS funds for artificial turf fields is appropriate. Proponents of artificial turf indicate that the turf stands up to rain and heavy wear, thus reducing maintenance costs. Proponents also argue that artificial turf reduces the need for pesticides and fertilizer and that the rubber cushion prevents injuries to athletes. Opponents contend, however, that artificial turf is bad for the environment because it reduces the amount of natural vegetation and the rubber pellets release chemicals into the air and water.

According to DNR, while natural grass fields have historically been and will continue to be used for athletic fields, certain natural grass fields are incapable of adequately meeting public demand. Natural grass fields that do not receive adequate time to rest and grow develop bald patches, ruts, and compaction problems. Artificial surface fields, on the other hand, allow for almost constant play. Accordingly, DNR advises that a single artificial surface field may well provide the same use capacity as several natural grass facilities.

Local Fiscal Effect: Because local governments are prohibited from using local POS funds for building or replacing athletic fields with artificial or synthetic turf surfaces, they may incur additional costs to move forward with such projects. Counties with plans to install artificial turf fields may be required to delay or abandon such plans unless alternative funding sources are identified.

Small Business Effect: The extent to which small businesses are involved with the sale and/or installation of artificial or synthetic turf and/or the maintenance of natural grass athletic fields through contracts with local governments is unknown. In addition, the extent to which artificial or synthetic turf projects would move forward with local funds or be canceled altogether cannot be predicted. Accordingly, the bill's potential impact on small businesses cannot be reliably estimated. However, *for illustrative purposes*, based on Maryland data from the U.S. Census Bureau's *2010 County Business Patterns*, 466 small businesses provide specialty trade contracting (including artificial turf installation) and 1,839 small businesses provide landscaping services.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 1035 of 2012, a similar bill, was withdrawn. HB 328 of 2008, a similar bill, received an unfavorable report from the House Environmental Matters Committee.

Cross File: SB 877 (Senator Manno) - Budget and Taxation.

Information Source(s): Kent, Montgomery, and Worcester counties; Department of Natural Resources; Maryland State Department of Education; U.S. Census Bureau; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 27, 2013
ncs/lgc

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