

HB 328

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2008 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 328 (Delegate Ali)
Environmental Matters

Program Open Space - Use of Funds - Artificial Turf Surfaces

This bill prohibits the use of State and local Program Open Space funds to replace existing natural grass athletic fields with artificial turf surfaces.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2008.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. Overall funding for POS would not be affected.

Local Effect: Because local governments would be prohibited from using local POS funds for replacing existing natural grass athletic fields with artificial turf surfaces, local jurisdictions could incur additional recreation-related costs. Although the statewide effect cannot be reliably estimated, the impact on some local governments could be significant.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: POS, established in 1969 and administered by the Department of Natural Resources, provides funds for State and local acquisition and development of public outdoor recreational sites, facilities, and open space. Generally, funding for POS is equally divided between the State and local governments. The State's share of funds under POS focuses on the acquisition of land for natural resource conservation with the inclusion of low-impact recreational activities where appropriate. Up to 25% of the

State's share may be used for capital improvements on land owned by the State for DNR's use if the improvements are approved in the State budget and compatible with any master plan developed for the land and the natural features of the land. The local share of POS funds, which is allocated based on a complex formula, is used primarily for the acquisition and development of high-impact recreational sites and facilities.

Background: DNR advises that to date, 13 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 \$525,000 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 would be prohibited from using local POS funds for replacing existing natural grass athletic fields with artificial turf surfaces, local jurisdictions could incur additional costs to move forward with such projects. For example, the Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission advises that its six-year Capital Improvement Program includes three artificial turf fields in Montgomery County and one artificial turf field in Prince George's County. M-NCPPC advises that costs are estimated at \$1 million per field, and that POS funds cover 75% of the cost. Using M-NCPPC's estimate, which is higher than the estimated project cost reported by DNR, M-NCPPC expenditures would increase by an estimated \$3 million to cover the entire cost of those four projects.

Baltimore County indicates that the bill could force the county to delay or abandon the county's plan to install eight artificial turf fields at various sites in the next two years, 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 turf and/or the maintenance of natural grass athletic fields through contracts with local governments is unknown. In addition, the extent to which artificial 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 informational purposes, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's *2005 County Business Patterns*, approximately 97% of the 557 Maryland establishments that provide specialty trade contracting (including artificial turf installation) and the 1,852 Maryland establishments that provide landscaping services were small businesses.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Department of Planning, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, U.S. Census Bureau, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Carroll County, Department of Legislative Services

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