

Town of Ulysses Potential Land Donation FAQ

Updated March 24, 2025

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Who is offering to donate land to the Town of Ulysses?

Marvin and Allison Pritts, residents at 5150 Cold Springs Road (Tax Parcel 12.-4-18.3) and 5230 Cold Springs Road (Tax Parcel 12.-4-19.2) approached the Town expressing interest in donating land for recreational purposes.

2. How much land is being offered for donation?

The donation involves 15.234 acres of land, which would be subdivided from parts of two existing parcels located on Cold Springs Road. Most of the donation would come from Tax Parcel 12.-4-18.3 and a small piece would come from Tax Parcel 12.-4-19.2.

3. Where is the land located?

The land is located on Cold Springs Road. The majority of the proposed donation is in the Town's Agricultural/Rural Zone, with the proposed flagpole to Cold Springs Road predominantly in the Town's Residential Zone.

4. How is the land currently used?

The land being offered has historically been leased out for farming, most recently used to cultivate corn. The proposed donation does not include any forested lands or waterways/wetlands/creeks or buildings.

5. Are there restrictions on how the land can be used?

According to the donation documents, extensive lighting (such as stadium lights) would be prohibited per the donors' wishes. Lighting for safety reasons would be allowable, but outdoor activities would be intended for dawn to dusk use.

The land would need to be only used for public recreation purposes. If the Town decided in the future, for example, to use for other non-recreation purposes, the donated land would have to be returned to the donor or the donor's estate. This means the land could not be used for other purposes, such as selling it for housing development or commercial use or other Town purposes (such as a highway department storage facility).

6. What does the Comprehensive Plan say about parks?

The first priority listed under “Community Services” in the current Comprehensive Plan is “Maintain and expand unique park and recreation facilities for the continued use and enjoyment of residents and visitors to the Town.” (Page 193, https://townofulyssesny.gov/_cms/docs/2009-Comp-Plan--Adopted.pdf)

Addressing the insufficient park and recreation facilities in the Town of Ulysses was an important concern of residents in the development of the current comprehensive plan.

Parks have a demonstrated value to the public. Recreation is recognized as one of the best investments a community can make in the health and well-being of the public. It is proven to help improve physical and mental health and strengthen communities.

Currently, neither the Village nor Town own a park or recreational space that could provide a variety of recreational or community uses.

Insufficient recreational facilities have been an issue in Ulysses dating back at least the 1990s, when Supervisor Doug Austic and the Town Board put together a committee to explore the issue of finding and buying land.

Parks serve residents of all ages, and the limited outside facilities at the Trumansburg Central School mean many adults and youth in our community are traveling to other municipal parks and private facilities to engage in recreational activities.

7. What is historically significant about this donation?

If accepted by the Town, this donation would create the opportunity to develop the first publicly owned recreational park in the Town of Ulysses' 230+ year history since its founding in 1794.

8. How can the public provide input on this potential donation and learn more information?

The public can provide feedback by emailing clerk@townofulyssesny.gov, following updates at the Town [website](#) or at:

- Regular Town Board meetings (Typically 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month, 7pm)
- Planning Board meetings (Typically, 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of the month, 7pm)
- Board of Zoning Appeals meetings (Typically 3rd Wednesdays of the month, 7pm)

9. How close would the park be to Town residents?

The land is approximately:

- 2 miles from the Village of Trumansburg by road
- 1.8 miles from the Jacksonville Hamlet

- 1.3 miles from the Waterburg Hamlet
- 0.8 miles from the Village of Trumansburg if connected by trail by New York State Parks

10. What are the potential connections to other community assets?

The land is approximately 300 yards from a former rail line owned by New York State. This state land connects directly with the Trumansburg Central School District property within the Village of Trumansburg.

The Town has already begun feasibility conversations with New York State Parks officials about possible trail connectivity, as well as private landowners along the full length of the trail. The Town has spoken directly to private landowners along the full length of the potential trail. While no action on the trail would be taken unless the land donation is accepted, the conversations with these landowners have been positive and they have all expressed interest in working with the Town to create a pathway for the trail.

The Black Diamond Trail, which extends for many miles in the Town of Ulysses, was successfully developed using a similar approach.

11. What are the identified benefits of accepting this donation?

- Creating the opportunity for the Town to work with the community to develop its first publicly owned recreation park
- Addressing a documented need from the 2009 Town Comprehensive Plan
- Providing accessible outdoor facilities for residents of all ages
- Contributing to a healthier environment
- Helping alleviate overcrowding in the facilities at the Trumansburg Central School District
- Serving as an investment in the future of Ulysses for generations to come

12. How does this proposal address concerns raised during the previous park referendum?

The donation addresses previous concerns by:

- Not requiring public money for land purchase
- Having access to existing public water lines with no anticipated impact on private wells
- Being located in both Residential and Agricultural zones near denser housing areas and closer to two hamlets and the Village of Trumansburg
- Having minimal slope (0-2%)
- Allows a public planning process for development to occur before incurring any significant cost

- Using fundraising rather than tax increases for development costs
- Limiting lighting to safety purposes only (no stadium lights; no lit outside activities)

LEGAL AND PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

13. Is the Town legally allowed to accept land donations?

Yes. According to NY State Town Law § 64(8), town boards "may take by gift, grant, bequest or devise and hold real and personal property absolutely or in trust for parks or gardens... or for any public use, upon such terms or conditions as may be prescribed by the grantor or donor and accepted by said town."

14. Is this donation subject to permissive referendum (i.e. a public vote)?

No, a donation to the Town is not subject to a permissive referendum.

The Town's actions are only subject to permissive referendum if a provision of law expressly requires it. NY State Town Law § 64 (8) contains no permissive referendum requirement, and so donations of this type cannot legally be subject to referendum. (i.e. The Town cannot legally put something to a public vote unless the New York State Town Law allows it.)

15. What is the timeline for the potential donation acceptance?

View past meetings on [Youtube](#)

- February 11, 2025: Initial public presentation; Town Board passed a resolution expressing initial interest in the proposed donation and directed the Town Supervisor and the Town Planner to prepare a draft initial Full Environmental Assessment Form (FEAF) as required by the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).
- February 25, 2025: Town Board declared its intent of serve as lead agency and adopted a draft FEAF form. These documents were distributed to interested agencies (Town Planning Board, Town Board of Zoning Appeals, Town Planning and Code Department, and Tompkins County Department of Planning and Sustainability).
- March/April 2025: Environmental review with input from the Town Board of Zoning Appeals, the Town Planning Board, Tompkins County Department of Planning and Sustainability and the public. Public comments collected by the Town Clerk for review by each Ulysses Town boards and members of the public. The interested agencies have 30 days from notification to challenge the Town Board's interest in serving as lead agency.
- Spring 2025: Potential SEQRA review completion, public hearing(s), and acceptance of donation

- Spring 2025 - Onwards: Subdivision process through Board of Zoning Appeals and Planning Board (if accepted for donation by the Town Board)
- Fall 2025 – Onwards: Public engagement and planning process on potential future uses.

16. What has happened in the process so far?

- Late 2023: The Pritts family approached the Town about the potential donation
- July 2024: Town Board authorized preparation of a land survey
- Late 2024: The land survey was completed
- February 11, 2025: Public presentation of the proposed donation
- February 25, 2025: Town Board passed a resolution expressing interest and authorized the preparation of an initial draft full environmental assessment form (FEAF)
- March 4, 2025: Town Planning Board began discussions on the draft FEAF and passed a resolution in support of the Town Board serving as lead agency.

PROPERTY INFORMATION, DEVELOPMENT and FINANCIAL INFORMATION

17. What is the current condition of the land?

The land is primarily a field with minimal grade (0-2% slope).

18. Why does the property need to be subdivided?

Subdivisions are a legal process governed by New York State, and land donations must be individual parcels. If the subdivision is approved, the existing leach field for the adjacent house will need to be relocated. Tompkins County Whole Health has already consulted on this process and agreed it could be done by the Town's Department of Public Works employees. The estimated cost is \$4,159.50 and it would be a one-time project without any ongoing expenses.

19. How would the Town determine what recreational facilities to develop?

The Town would partner with a consultant to engage the public, collect feedback, and develop designs. Parks in New York State take a variety of forms and future plans would be based on community interest and financial capacity to development and maintain any property improvements. All future development plans would also be subject to the State Environmental Quality Review Act.

20. What would it cost to maintain the undeveloped land?

Initial cost estimates include:

- Insurance: No additional cost while vacant; \$1,000/year once opened as a public park based on current 2025 insurance policy.
- Water: No cost until a water hook-up is installed.
- Mowing: \$250-350 per mowing, 1-3 times per year while vacant
- Total estimated annual maintenance: Less than \$2,000/year for insurance, mowing, and basic maintenance

21. Would this donation increase taxes for residents?

To maintain the land in its current form would have a negligible impact on the Town’s existing budget and could be maintained with the existing staff in the Department of Public Works (estimates by the Highway Superintendent are \$2000/year to maintain, including labor and insurance.)

The ability to undertake additional development projects would be conditional upon first working with the public to determine needs and types of uses and then developing a phasing strategy for implementation. Because of the minimal carrying costs on maintaining the property and the fact that the acquisition would be a donation, this would allow the Town to thoughtfully manage development as funds could be raised without creating a burden on the tax base. This sustainable approach would reduce the impact on the taxpayer while still providing the opportunity to create a high-quality public park. This is the exact model that has been successfully used in Newfield and Enfield in the last several years without negatively impacting their tax base.

22. Would a park in this location harm private wells?

The parcel being offered for donation is located along Cold Springs Road, which has access to public water. In the future, the park could connect to the public water supply to provide water if necessary, so there is no expectation that private wells would be impacted by any future development.

BENEFITS AND COMMUNITY IMPACT QUESTIONS

23. Do local governments often own parks and recreation spaces?

Yes, recreational space is commonly owned by towns and villages, and youth and adults commonly use properties that are not affiliated with a school district.

Currently in our area, publicly accessible recreational spaces are owned and managed by the Town of Ithaca, the Town of Newfield, the Village of Dryden, the Town of Dryden, the Village of Groton, the Town of Lansing (Myers Park), as well as the Town Barn ball fields and

the Town ball fields), the Town of Enfield, the Hector Fire Department, and the City of Ithaca. (Among many others in the wider region.)

24. Why can't we just use the Trumansburg Central school fields? They're beautiful!

They are beautiful, and the Town is grateful to the Trumansburg Central School District (TCSD) for sharing their space with us. The issue, however, is that demand significantly exceeds availability. Additionally, approximately 1/3 of the students who live in Ulysses go to the Ithaca City School District.

On any given weeknight in the spring and fall, the TCSD fields are full of youth playing a variety of sports, using less space than they need and sharing space to the best of their ability.

Once the Town took over managing the Trumansburg/Ulysses Recreation Department in 2019 and recreational demands and registrations increased post-COVID pandemic, it became very clear to the Town that there was a shortage of space. Priority is correctly given to district-sponsored activities and then the Town's Recreation Director competes for remaining space with other community-based recreation programs to reserve fields and indoor space. TCSD prioritizes youth programming over adult programming in the scheduling of activities. Scarcity of space results in different programs not having the space or times they need or sharing space in order to get practice time.

Additional recreational space is not meant to replace the TCSD facilities but rather complement them.

25. Show me the numbers: where is all of this "demand" coming from?

In 2019, the Town took over administration of recreation for both the Village of Trumansburg and the Town of Ulysses. For many decades, the Village operated a successful, but significantly smaller program.

The Trumansburg/Ulysses Recreation Program, run by the Town of Ulysses, provides high-quality recreational opportunities for both youth and adults. It is overseen and guided by the Trumansburg/Ulysses Youth Commission that is comprised of representatives of the Village, Town, and TCSD and is supported by the Tompkins County Youth Services.

School sports are not provided until youth reach 7th grade. All programming (beyond Physical Education classes) for children 6th grade and below is provided by the Trumansburg/Ulysses Recreation Department and private sports organizations.

The intended purpose of the Town programming was not to replace successful volunteer organizations currently operating but expand opportunities for youth and adults in our rural

community. Programs provided by the Town are intended to support and complement existing programs being offered, to collectively expand the range of opportunities within our community.

After being restricted in its ability to provide programming in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic, participation in programming has steadily increased each year.

The highest registration numbers occur in the spring and fall and require use of outdoor facilities.

In 2021, 376 people participated in programming by the Trumansburg/Ulysses Recreation Program.

In 2022, 541 people participated in programming by the Trumansburg/Ulysses Recreation Program.

In 2023, 725 individuals participated in programming by the Trumansburg/Ulysses Recreation Program, resulting in 1,927 program registrations. (i.e. some people participate in more than one activity through the department.)

In 2024, 694 individuals participated in programming by the Trumansburg/Ulysses Recreation Program, resulting in 1,984 program registrations. (i.e., some people participate in more than one activity through the department.)

Currently all programming of the Trumansburg/Ulysses Recreation Program for both adults and children is based at the TCSD campus. TCSD has been a generous partner in supporting community recreation as a whole, but the demand for space exceeds availability.

District activities are given priority over Town-run activities, so youth and non-school programs are not allowed to operate on the campus until after 5 pm. Fields must be rested, and other needs of TCSD (such as events and construction) limit the use of facilities. This can often lead to practices going well into the evening on school nights. If the Town owned its own facilities and the community planning phase identified recreation fields as a desired use, programming could be offered earlier in the day, providing greater flexibility to the public and reducing excessive stress on the TCSD fields.

Additionally, Ulysses has a robust homeschooling community who do not have access to any publicly owned spaces during the day. Town-owned recreation spaces could be utilized by adults, homeschooled youth, and children younger than school-age during the periods the TCSD campus is closed to the public (i.e., while school is in session).

During the school day, there is not a free playground for children to use, beyond the wonderful Little Houses on Main Street in the Village of Trumansburg. The TCSD playground

is closed to the public during school hours and the playground at Taughannock State Park requires paid admission (\$10/visit or the purchase of an annual pass). This may be something the community identifies as desirable in the development phase.

26. Do other Towns ever buy land first and then successfully work with their communities to develop them in an economic and sustainable way?

Yes, the Town of Newfield purchased farmland in 2006 to develop the future Newfield Community Park when they had the opportunity to do so but understood---as we understand in Ulysses---that they would not immediately have the money to proceed with development. Newfield voters approved the purchase at a special election.

A group of volunteers in Newfield organized to fundraise for their park in 2016 and worked with the Town of Newfield to secure a financial allocation by the New York State Legislature for a 50/50 matching grant. Using private funds raised and volunteer time, Newfield, as a rural community, has come together to provide fields for their Town-owned fields and reduce overuse on the Newfield Central School District facilities. It has been a community-wide effort and they will be able to do this without passing the development cost burden on to the tax payer. You can learn all about this initiative [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

Parks in Dryden, Ithaca, Lansing and beyond have also used significant volunteer labor and private donations to make their parks successful and functional.

Donated park lands significantly reduce the risk to the municipality and allow for community planning and financial planning that specifically meet the goals and needs of the community without significant financial investment.

This document reflects the best information available as of March 24, 2025, and may be updated periodically as additional information is available. Please send questions or public comments to clerk@townofulyssesny.gov.