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**To:** Residents of Reading  
Board of Selectmen  
School Committee  
Recreation Committee  
Town and School staff

**From:** John Halsey, Chairman Board of Selectmen  
Robert W. LeLacheur, Jr. CFA, Town Manager

**Date:** June 11, 2016

**RE:** Birch Meadow field lighting project

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At a Special Town Meeting in April 2015, Town Meeting authorized \$1 million for field lighting at the Birch Meadow complex as Phase I of an expected two-phase \$2.5 million Birch Meadow field improvement project. Phase I was planned to light five different areas of the complex, including three previously unlit areas (softball fields, Morton Field, and a little league field) and two fields with older inefficient lighting (men's softball field and the RMHS Turf II field).

On Tuesday June 7<sup>th</sup> the Town opened bids on the Birch Meadow field lighting project. Town staff spent the next two days ensuring that all public procurement laws had been followed, and conducted a careful financial analysis of the project. The winning bid, and a close second bid, each suggested a total project cost of Phase I closer to \$1.4 million.

Today Chairman John Halsey and Town Manager Bob LeLacheur announce the cancellation of the remainder of the Birch Meadow Phase I project. About \$100,000 of costs for test borings and other field preparation work have been spent, and those results are available and useful when this project returns for future consideration. The remaining \$900,000 authorized by Town Meeting will not be spent.

Chairman Halsey expressed sincere disappointment at the news: "For many years the recreation community has worked tirelessly to assist the local government in field maintenance and improvements, and the users of the Birch Meadow complex have been looking forward to expanded hours of field usage from the lighting project, especially for the youth in the community. On a personal note, I believe it is imperative for all of us to provide recreational, scouting and other positive opportunities to our young people to help them learn to make good life choices."

Under procurement laws, the town could have proceeded with a portion of the work authorized by Town Meeting, and lit the three unlit areas for less than the \$1 million authorized. However Halsey added that "it is important to respect the relationship between the elected executive (Selectmen) and legislative (Town Meeting) branches of Town government. Town Meeting did not approve funds to only do a portion of the job. We should stop the project and honor that relationship. Together we will figure out the best path forward on behalf of the entire community."

Town Manager LeLacheur agreed, noting that ‘the respect of Town Meeting is of paramount importance to conduct the business of government in the open and transparent manner that we operate’.

LeLacheur added, “In the past two months the town has received preliminary unexpected significant negative financial information concerning litigation on the past High School construction project. In light of this news, which must remain confidential until the litigation is settled, I would not in good conscious recommend that Town Meeting approve such an expenditure on what should be viewed as a ‘nice to have’ recreational improvement. As the community is aware, we face challenges in providing the basic public safety, public education, human/elder and other services that our friends and neighbors in Reading rely on. While lighting the Birch Meadow complex would provide a direct benefit to many in town, Reading still maintains a wealth of recreational opportunities that are the envy of most other communities. Once we are financially confident that we can perform our basic services and responsibilities to the community at a level they expect, I look forward to further discussion on the Birch Meadow complex project.”

For any comments or questions, please rely on the following contacts:

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