

**How to Work with Municipalities to Pass Open Space Bonds**  
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Recent Data on Conservation Ballot Measures

- I. Despite the challenging economy, in 2008 voters made it clear that they want to increase spending on preserving open space, even at the cost of higher taxes. This is great news for land conservation!
  - a) Nationally, over the course of 2008, voters approved 91 conservation measures totaling over \$8.4 billion in new public funding for land conservation – a single year record!
  - b) On election day, voters approved 63 of the 89 conservation finance measures (71%) across the country. The 71% approval rate for 2008 exceeded the 66% approval rate for 2007.
  - c) The record year peaked on November 4<sup>th</sup> when Minnesota voters passed the single largest conservation measure in history – passage of Minnesota’s \$5.5 billion Clean Water, Land and Legacy constitutional amendment
  
- II. One of the clear lessons from 2008, and other years, is that local conservation ballot measures are highly effective
  - a) Nationally, of the approximate 128 conservation measures voted on over the course of 2008- only 4 were state-wide measures (Rhode Island, Ohio, Minnesota and Colorado)
  - b) In New England, you had about 33 conservation measures voted on over the course of 2008 – with only 1 of those being a state-wide measure (Rhode Island). 25 of the 33 measures passed – 24 being local measures representing over \$50 million in approved local open space funds and 1 being a state-wide measure (Rhode Island) representing \$2.5 million in approved open space funds.
  - c) In Rhode Island, Cranston passed a \$6 million bond for the protection of open space, watersheds, habitat, parks and recreational areas, Scituate passed a \$5 million open space bond, Middletown passed a \$2 million bond for the preservation of open space, Glocester passed a \$500,000 bond for open space and watershed protection, and the State passed a \$2.5 million bond for farmland and natural area preservation. That is a total of \$16,000,000 approved in Rhode Island for open space but only \$2.5 million of that being at the state-wide level.

- d) Since 2004, while Rhode Island voters have approved about \$27.5 million in State bonds for land conservation, municipalities have collectively approved over \$65 million in municipal funding for open space.
- e) **Take home message: If you are considering ways to generate more money for land conservation in your area, you should consider trying to get a local open space measure before voters.**

III. Reasons why local conservation measures, like open space bonds, are particularly effective

- a) People are especially connected to their local open space areas
- b) People want to make sure any approved conservation money goes to projects in their area – this is not always certain when a state-wide open space bond is approved
- c) People tend to better know those who are advocating for the passage of a local open space measure
- d) Etc.

Lessons Learned from Recent Municipal Open Space Bond Campaigns in Rhode Island

- I. In 2007, the Aquidneck Land Trust actively worked with the Town of Portsmouth to help it pass a \$4 million Open Space and Recreational Development Bond and then in 2008 the Aquidneck Land Trust actively worked with the Town of Middletown to help it pass a \$2 million Open Space Bond.

II. Lessons learned from the Portsmouth and Middletown open space bond campaigns

- a) Making the case to the town council to approve putting an open space bond before the voters
  - 1. Provide detailed fact sheet to the town council in support of an open space bond
    - a. Details on how open space is popular with local and State voters
    - b. Carefully controlled information on remaining open spaces to be conserved in town
    - c. Information on cost of community services and other economic benefits of open space
    - d. Information on importance of conservation values (biodiversity, water resources, local farm fresh products, scenic vistas and the charm and uniqueness of your town, healthy fun outdoor recreation opportunities, etc.)
    - e. Etc.
  - 2. Get the support of appropriate town committees and groups
  - 3. Get supporters out the night the council is to decide on whether to put an open space bond measure before the community

4. Ask the council that voters be given the opportunity and right to decide for themselves on such an important matter as an open space bond
- b) Be careful that the resolution memorializing the General Assembly to enact authorizing legislation for the open space bond, as well as the draft act itself, are carefully and specifically crafted so as to avoid a later situation where monies supposedly approved for open space acquisition could be siphoned off for other projects only tangentially related to open space (putting in a paved parking area at a park, etc.)
- c) Public education campaign
  1. Brochures (should make clear economic arguments in favor of open space, etc.)
  2. Letters to the editor
  3. Spot on local radio show
  4. Speak to local organizations and groups
  5. Take out ads in local papers
  6. Fun signs out in the community
  7. Make sure town council members are fully literate on the importance of the bond so that they can intelligently speak with their constituents
  8. Face to face presence at town dump and/or other local hot spots
  9. Etc.
- d) Challengers/detractors and how to handle
- e) Days after the vote (publicly thank those who helped, monitor and help with the wise and strategic spending of the approved money, demonstrate to voters that you did a good job with their approved dollars so as to lay a foundation for the next open space bond, etc.)

### III. Roy Najecki's presentation on the 2008 Gloucester open space bond