

Oak Bluffs Planning Board

From: Cynthia Doyle <cdoylema@me.com>
Sent: Monday, October 28, 2019 12:33 PM
To: Oak Bluffs Planning Board
Subject: The high school's artificial turf playing field proposal

To the members of the Oak Bluffs Planning Board,

I'm writing as Emma Bena's grandmother (Emma and her classmates at the West Tisbury School have been leaders of the Straw Free MV and Plastic Free MV efforts on the Island), as Mollie Doyle's mother (Mollie is co-founder of The Field Fund, Inc), and as community member invested in the welfare of the Island's youth (YMCA of MV, Youth Task Force, Island Wide Youth Collaborative, MVYouth, and a number of MV Public School projects).

I am very concerned about the MVRHS School Committee and Superintendent Matt D'Andrea's obsessive and seemingly irrational pursuit of plastic fields – for both environmental and fiscal reasons.

From a plastic pollution point of view, the Island has recently voted to ban the use of plastic bags and plastic straws in an effort to reduce plastic consumption locally. How can we justify installing a 2-acre field, with each carpet containing the equivalent to 46 million plastic straws or 3.2 million plastic bags? Additionally, all of the Island schools now have water filling stations, which has dramatically lowered the need and use of plastics. And, as you well know, this year Plastic Free MV, a group of 5th grade students, won bans on single use plastic bottles in three towns (West Tisbury, Chilmark and Aquinnah) and are now going to try to get the ban passed in the Island's other three. So, why, when the Island's school children are working so hard to limit and ban plastic, would the school committee be so fanatically for it? It seems completely out of sync.

And then there is the toxicity issue, which makes the Leadership's pursuit of plastic even more confounding. On October 9, The Boston Globe published a damning article, "Toxic chemicals are found in blades of artificial turf", which revealed that per- and polyfluoroalkyl chemicals (PFAS) called "forever chemicals" because they never fully degrade, were found in plastic turf. These chemicals have been linked to cancer and a range of other diseases and the run-off from these fields could contaminate water supplies over our invaluable Zone II Wellhead Protection Area. Shaw Industries and ACT Global (two of the manufacturers MVRHS is looking to use) indicated that their companies do use PFAS.

Of course, much like cigarette industry, the Synthetic Turf Council and its purveyors such as Huntress Associates, say they take these findings seriously while wasting no time casting doubt on them and then pivoting to suggest we use other products with different chemicals? Surely they know as we all do that there are only tests available for 36 out of the 4,000+ PFAS chemicals. In this day and age, given what we know about companies that use chemicals in their processing (from vaping to turf), it is hard to watch our educational leadership ignore the recent independent scientific findings and say that the carpets they are considering will be "completely safe".

To pile on to these disturbing facts is the fact that Synthetic Turf Council could not provide the name of any facility currently able to recycle or repurpose turf in the U.S. And the plant that Huntress told MVRHS was under construction and expected to be fully operational by 2019 does not exist!

The decision to use plastic – particularly 2 acres of it that will need regular replacing every 8-10 years in perpetuity – with toxic chemicals and no ability to recycle it will affect this generation and generations to come.

Our kids know this. Why doesn't our educational leadership? I must stress how truly alarming it is to see our 'educators' ignoring science. Do we really want to support this precedent and risk our children's health and the health of the Island's aquifer?

And then there is the financial aspect of this project. What are the other capital expenses on the Martha's Vineyard Public School's horizon? It's no secret the high school is facing a \$100,000,000 renovation/rebuild. The design of the high school renovation project hasn't even begun and the siting of the new building determined. This is not what thoughtful planning looks like.

And of course there is also the widely publicized poor state of the Island's elementary schools. The numbers for the costs of critical deferred maintenance problems in Tisbury are in the millions. So why is the leadership suggesting that the community invest in a spectacularly over the top 11 million field plan – costing who knows how much in long term operating costs – when there is such obvious critical need elsewhere? Where is the school going to get this extra money? Why is the school leadership not upholding their mandate to protect our Island's youth by taking seriously their fiscal responsibility for the Island's schools?

Meanwhile, The Field Fund has demonstrated around the island the cost of properly maintaining grass fields is not astronomical and can support high use. They are also showing these fields do not use excessive amounts of water or nitrogen load. In fact, well-maintained grass fields not only filter runoff and cool the athlete, but also serve as carbon sinks, sequestering carbon and cooling our planet!

As has been well-documented, The Field Fund installed two playing fields at the OB Elementary School for less than \$200,000 (and this includes a new non-potable well with state of the art water efficient irrigation!) and they estimate they will spend \$10,000-\$15,000 a year on maintenance. The estimate Chris Huntress, the landscape architect hired to design and oversee the installation of one 2-acre plastic field, has submitted are more than \$1 million. This price does not include maintenance and replacement costs (plastic fields have to be replaced every 8-10 years), which run from \$20,000 a year in maintenance and about \$500,000 in replacement. So how can the MVRHS leadership justify these extraordinary extra expenses, especially given how relatively small our population is and how many fields we have? Particularly when there are sorely needed capital improvements on all the school buildings around the Island and so many educational programs that need support? What do we give up to get it? Is this kind of extra expenditure really helping our youth who are going to inherit this financial and environmental burden for generations to come?

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that since I moved here in 2001 I have dedicated much of my time and resources to helping Island youth. Over the years, I've been impressed by the community's commitment to the environment and the idea that we are custodians of this very special place. I am always conscious of how our decisions will not just affect those today, but those in twenty or thirty years. This pursuit of plastic is not forward thinking. Grass – a climate mitigation tool – is a proven and future forward-looking solution. It sequesters carbon and cools the earth whereas plastic fields heat and pollute the planet.

This island is isn't ours. We are stewards of something we need to protect. And it is unconscionable to pass down environmental destruction and debt. May the facts, your conscience, and your wisdom guide your decision. Please hold the school accountable for the values they proclaim to have.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this project.

Cindy Doyle