

Oak Bluffs Planning Board

From: Chris Murphy <cmurphy007@comcast.net>
Sent: Sunday, February 16, 2020 12:20 PM
To: Oak Bluffs Planning Board
Subject: Support for MVRHS Track and Field Project
Attachments: Synthetic Turf Editors FINAL.docx

Dear Mr. Hopkins and Members of the Planning Board,

I have attached my Letter to the Editor of MV Times published last spring in support of this project and addressing misinformation that was circulating to town residents in advance of town voting on the issue.

I continue to support this project and the Huntress Associates proposal, particularly as it will be privately funded and will use the 4th generation products and recycling efforts I identified in my letter.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Christine Murphy, Aquinnah

Turf Dispute: Let's Decide Using FACTS

I am a full-time resident of Aquinnah, grandmother of two school-aged boys, and professional researcher. This last role is most pertinent to my comments here. For more than 30 years I have conducted, analyzed and evaluated research on a variety of topics in health, education and human services for public and private funding sources.

When I read the email asking me to *Vote NO* to using E & D funds and sending a proposal for a synthetic turf field for MVRHS to the Martha's Vineyard Commission, alarm bells went off. In my experience, when language is employed that plays into peoples' fears and biases, it is often because credible information to support a cause is lacking. So I educated myself by reading original research studies, along with the EPA Status Report. This information can be found on Pub Med and Google Scholar. I am not informed enough to address the financial, historical or political issues in this debate, so I leave those up to others.

I am aware that passions run high on this issue and have no doubt that opponents are well intentioned. They want to be assured of the health and safety of student athletes and of the environmental impact. We all do. At the same time, residents deserve complete and accurate information to inform their decision.

Much of the information circulated by the opponent group is outdated, misleading, or inaccurate. Words like, *toxic plastic fields, plastic fibers, unsafe, patently false, lead, increased injury, etc.*, play into biases people often have to things that are natural versus artificial. Not everything natural is safe. Numerous plants that grow naturally will poison you. Not everything that is artificial is unsafe. If you have apparel that has polar fleece, rubber, Lycra, spandex or acrylic, or upholstered furniture and carpet in your home, you are living with some of the same petroleum-based materials found in some types of synthetic turf. These substances are ubiquitous in our daily lives, but in such small amounts that they cause no harm, even in combination.

It is also important to distinguish between 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generation synthetic turf. Today's products have come a long way since Astro turf. Many companies now offer 8-10 different options for infill, including organic options with combinations of cork, coconut, and olive pits, to name a few. The turf backing contains materials commonly used in carpet backing, and turf fiber can be nylon, NOT plastic. Many of these also mitigate the heat problem of earlier products, can be lead free, and can recycle water runoff. There are now an assortment of technologies and processes for recycling/reusing synthetic turf to avoid dependency on landfills.

According to the EPA, there are more than 12,000 synthetic turf fields currently in use and several thousand more are being added each year. Four of the six schools in the Cape & Islands League have synthetic turf fields, including Falmouth. The consultant's report for the single synthetic turf field at MVRHS contains recommendations based on health and safety concerns and the latest innovations in product materials. I did not see ANY of the materials that are of most concern, such as tire crumb rubber or crumb rubber.

Claims such as increased injury, negative climate effects, toxicity, cancer, etc., have little or no scientific support. Much of the information cited is out of date or concerned primarily with tire crumb or other crumb rubber infill, rather than the organic options and fiber materials in 3rd generation products. Eighty-eight studies were reviewed by the EPA in the first phase of their ongoing comprehensive multi-method study to address safety and environmental impact. In the conclusion of their review they state,

no significant human risks have been identified. This conclusion was supported in my own review of 22 published studies.

In addition, a more focused research review conducted by an epidemiologist for American Soccer Analysis, included 10 injury studies for soccer and additional studies for football. Findings indicated no increase in injuries due to synthetic turf. While some athletes may have a *preference* for grass over turf, current available evidence does not support the likelihood of increased turf injury.

It is not scientifically accurate to say that the school superintendent's claim of safety is patently false. To disparage the educators and board members who so diligently reviewed information, as well as the report from a very reputable consultant group, seems unfair.

Students want to compete athletically. Their safety and wellbeing are uppermost priorities for all of us. Should not the most up-to-date, most accurate evidence be used to make such a consequential decision? Does Aquinnah really want to be the town that refuses to listen to science and blocks the process from proceeding further? What example does this set for our children?

There are no guarantees that Voting **YES** and sending the issue to the Martha's Vineyard Commission will result in a synthetic turf playing field. What do we have to lose by continuing the dialogue and having all the questions and concerns fully addressed using the most complete and reliable information?

Christine Murphy, PhD RN