

Plastic Field Turf

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To: Oak Bluffs Planning Board <planningboard@oakbluffsma.gov>

To whom it may concern, for this is very concerning-

As an '87 Martha's Vineyard Regional High School graduate who ran Track & Field and played Basketball all four years as well as Football freshman year, I am baffled by the mere consideration of a plastic turf field for the High School, or anywhere on the island for that matter. Much of my family has lived on the island year-round for generations including my mom, and I frequently return from NYC where I now live, to create, show, and sell paintings. What attracts people to the island is its natural, not artificial character which seems to be in keeping with an environmentally conscious community. To me this issue is not debatable. Those who support a plastic turf field are either unaware of the already widespread polluting effects of plastic around the globe, or are entrenched in the pollution-for-profit business of plastic itself.

While in New York I have also earned a certification for small business energy efficiency/auditing, taken a course in solar energy and have done quite a bit more independent research on plastic, the alarming findings of which have lead to a lifestyle of reducing plastic within my everyday habits as a consumer. REDUCE, REDUCE, REDUCE is the most effective mantra. I strongly encourage you to refer to this Ecowatch website page for 22 facts about plastic pollution:

<https://www.ecowatch.com/22-facts-about-plastic-pollution-and-10-things-we-can-do-about-it-1881885971.html>

In the MVRHS Press Release, the list of Phase 1 elements contains a very misleading line:

"● One multi-purpose synthetic and recyclable turf field from sustainable sources"

There are no such things as "sustainable sources" for the creation of plastic, regardless of whether it's recycled. Perhaps the biggest misconception about plastic is that it is infinitely recyclable. Not only is plastic made from fossil fuels, not biodegradable and containing toxic petrochemicals, but it can only be recycled a maximum of TWICE before its polymers weaken to be down-cycled into a non-recyclable product. Then there it remains for hundreds/thousands of years, releasing greenhouse gasses while breaking into smaller bits and spreading everywhere. Less than 9% ever does get recycled anyway, and in the last 10 years more NEW (not recycled) plastic has been produced than had been produced in the entire 20th century. Since its invention we have been adding exponentially more and more plastic to the planet every year, including the billions of tons in the ocean where it ends up inside the bellies of sea life and water fowl on a macro level, as well as in sea salt and plankton on a micro level. These levels have only spiked during the COVID19 pandemic due to the increase in sanitizer, deliveries, packaged foods, wipes, polyester masks, etc. Knowing all of the above would make the choice of a plastic turf field a nihilistic one, even if it were somehow 100% shed-proof (which it is not, as you will see below), because you'd be monetarily feeding the demand for more plastic while adding to a growing problem which as ocean-loving Vineyarders we should instead be making every effort to reverse.

Among the student comments expressed in favor of plastic turf on the oakbluffsma.gov site page are two main concerns:

- 1) Injuries.
- 2) The embarrassment of how off-island students judge the poor condition of our home field.

These are understandable concerns, both of which can be resolved with a well maintained natural grass field. Studies show that concussions actually increase, not decrease on artificial turf fields, as is cited in the Heallo article linked at the bottom of this page which you may already have read. As for impressing off-island competitors, it goes without saying that the beauty and function of a naturally plush field is something of which to be proud. By installing a plastic turf field you'd only be keeping up with the off-island Joneses by matching the Joneses level of plastic pollution.

In New York City I've played softball in multiple leagues on both brand-new artificial turf and actual grass fields. Nothing compares to a well maintained natural grass field such as those in Central Park, in terms of cushioning, aesthetics and the environment. Conversely, artificial turf fields actually shed their plastic blades of grass which spread everywhere as plastic pollution. Illustrated in this attached close-up photo of my red socks after a game on "woven" artificial turf is how those plastic blades cling to our clothing (please see attachment if it doesn't appear in body of email):



Yes, all those tiny "grass" blades are plastic. Now multiply those by however many legs on however many players a day for however many years. Going unnoticed, the blades get tracked wherever we go, come home with us, tossed into the laundry and washed down the drain in the washer, accompanying what is already the leading source of widespread micro plastic pollution in the ocean: Polyester & acrylic microfibers shedding from our synthetic fabrics. It's bad enough I have to deal with this problem while playing a sport I enjoy on artificial turf in the city. Is this how Martha's Vineyard wants to emulate a city?

The letter from Huntress Associates addresses the toxicity of PFAS and PFOS in the manufacturing process, but the level of toxicity or lack thereof doesn't change the fact that the turf is made of PLASTIC! That's like the argument for pipelines saving fossil fuels by transporting them through a pipe instead of with trucks running on fossil fuels. It misses the point entirely. The point is to reduce the necessity for extracting those fossil fuels in the first place, rendering a pipeline moot. Render the turf field moot!

There are 3 pandemics we are facing right now: COVID19, Racism, and Plastic pollution (the solid-state residual of fossil fuel pollution). So you have a choice- be a part of the plastic pollution solution or continue to be part of the plastic pollution problem.

I'll conclude with another analogy: You know everyone at the party likes chocolate chip cookies, but not everyone likes nuts in them so you bake an entire batch of chocolate chip cookies without nuts so everyone can enjoy them. At the high school, you know everyone will enjoy a thick, well maintained natural grass field, but not everyone will enjoy a plastic turf field. The plastic turf field is nuts.

Thank you for choosing natural grass instead of plastic.

Gregory Coutinho
Class of 1987



22 Facts About Plastic Pollution (And 10 Things We Can Do About It) - EcoWatch

Here are 22 Preposterous Facts About Plastic Pollution: In the Los Angeles area alone, 10 metric tons of plastic fragments—like grocery bags, straws and soda bottles—are carried into the Pacific Ocean every day. Over the last ten years we have produced more plastic than during the whole of the last century.

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<https://www.healio.com/orthopedics/sports-medicine/news/online/%7B095e875c-8c2c-4f31-8340-b0aaf576a4ce%7D/high-school-football-concussion-risk-greater-for-young-athletes-and-on-turf?fbclid=IwAR31G1t71umvALiExut1nd9wzxM-WnMRo-h77BjpxmYWoS7YOD05Sa42qNI>



High school football concussion risk greater for young athletes and on turf

BOSTON — Concussion risk in high school football is greater for younger players and on practices on turf-based surfaces, according to a study presented at the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine Annual Meeting. The epidemiological study examined high school football concussion data

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