

Questions to the Finance Committee regarding concerns about MVRHS sports facilities

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 2 attachments (2 MB)

XtremeTurf-Maintenance-Guidelines-2020-highlighted.pdf; Act Global Eight Year Standard Warranty.pdf;

6-9-20

To the Tisbury Finance Advisory Committee,

I am writing as a seasonal resident and home-owner of 11 years, with concerns about a proposed synturf field at MVRHS.

Like many seasonal residents I try to follow MV events during my off-island time. The MVRHS debate on synturf has been of specific interest to me. My questions to you below are based on a decade of activism and community education regarding the largely undisclosed downsides of synturf. I have attached and highlighted two documents specific to cost related to maintenance and warranty. At bottom is the most recent outline I have found of the master plan cost breakout. While this letter addresses specifically the financial implications of choosing a synturf field I have also included as an addendum a cursory review the list of synturf's remaining and irrefutable problems: heat, toxicity, injury, disposal and liability.

Accordingly I am requesting that the Finance Committee include MVRHS' proposal to build out the athletic facilities at the MVRHS campus on an upcoming meeting agenda. Because this is a regional project, a similar letter to this one is being sent out to the other five Finance Committees by concerned taxpayers in their towns.

As you may be aware, the athletic campus project is currently an Active DRI at the Martha's Vineyard Commission and also under review by the Oak Bluffs Planning Board. **Given the MVRHS' financial situation – with projections for additional shortfalls next year – it is shocking that the school committee continues to advance this project.**

Phase One of Huntress Associates' plan includes a new, relocated track, synthetic infield, grandstands for 1000 people, stadium lighting, and a 3,100 sq ft field house. Because it is categorized as a privately funded capital project, there has been no realistic cost planning regarding the lifetime costs associated with the build out. However, effective Day Two, it appears MVRHS will assume full financial responsibility for all costs associated with the project – including operating, maintenance, and replacement costs; and liability.

It is important to note that this is only Phase One of a multi-phase project, intended to be a sprawling athletic complex serving high school athletics, as well as youth and adult leagues, summer camps and other sporting events. In short, it seems the MVRHS committee is assuming

financial responsibility for the upkeep of expanded facilities designed to host athletic events, which, according to the Huntress proposal, means approximately 40% of the “proposed athletic field use” (see page 14 and 15 of the HAI-MVRHS-Report-013119) will not be related to the high school.

I hope the Finance Committee will take a close look at the proposed project, particularly in light of the current economic crisis and tough choices MVRHS has to make. Here are some basic questions, which should serve as a starting point for this decision:

- Is this project financially viable? According to the application, the entire athletic campus (not including the enlarged field house) is projected to cost \$11,343,164 to construct. And according to Finance Director Mark Friedman’s calculations (see attached), it will cost \$16.9 million over 20 years. Again, these calculations do not include the enlarged field house. Where is the money coming from?
- The Superintendent has repeatedly promised the public that the installation will be privately funded. Is there a financial guarantee? If so, what is it? Does it include both Phase I and Phase II? Are there conditions attached to the donation? The terms of the deal should be transparent.
- Assuming the installation costs are indeed privately funded, what impacts will this have on the school’s future MSBA requests where projects are approved based on demonstrable need? Does the Finance Committee think that taxpayers will be prepared to shoulder 100% of the MVRHS building renovation/rebuild costs estimated at over \$100 million?
- Please request MVRHS’ long-term financial plan for the complex’s operation and maintenance (including replacement). Given that synthetic turf is a perpetual system, where is the financial plan showing that the school will have the funds to replace the carpet, shock pad, and infill as needed to ensure that it is safe for the generations of students who will have to recreate on this field? There are plenty of examples of unsafe failed fields still in use due to a lack of replacement funding. And there are plenty of schools now burdened with the choice of replacing an unsafe, failed field for \$500,000+ or paying their teachers.
- Will MVRHS absorb all additional costs associated with this project including maintenance of the field house (and its 15+ toilets), the synthetic field, the periodic synthetic field replacement costs, and the eventual wastewater tie-in? If so, are all six towns prepared to absorb their share of these additional costs in perpetuity? Or will they be passed along to athletes in the form of higher registration fees, usage fees, and/or potentially a pay to play model? If the latter, this approach would exacerbate financial disparities in the midst of an economic downturn.
- According to the maintenance guidelines included in the MVRHS application, daily, weekly, and monthly maintenance of the synthetic field is required to maintain the field’s safety and to maintain its warranty. What are the actual costs for the specified maintenance? Who will perform it? Will they be subcontracted or salaried? What is the quote from the certified, off island contractors who perform technical aspects of the maintenance? Please see the attached 2020 maintenance guidelines from Act Global, the carpet brand MVRHS is planning to use. (*Note: highlights are ours, not Act Global’s.*)
- A Finance Committee review of the warranties for each constituent part of the synthetic field might be prudent. Typically a single warranty does NOT cover all aspects of the field’s sub-grade infrastructure, irrigation, shock pad, carpet, and infill. Instead there are separate warranties and warranty voiding conditions for each element (some of which could

contravene each other). For example, please see attached warranty information from Act Global.

- Will the school's current insurance policy cover this project? What will the incremental costs be? Please review the policy that covers this.
- Hurricanes (or tornadoes as we saw last summer) can be catastrophic to a synthetic field. If large quantities of infill are lost and/or the carpet is ruined, are replenishment and replacement costs covered in the school's insurance policy? If not, MVRHS could be looking significant costs following any major storm event. Where will these funds come from or will the school's game field sit unsafe/unusable until funding is somehow secured?
- MVRHS has already received two legal warnings from a law firm with expertise in toxic exposure (currently representing Martha's Vineyard Airport Commission in their lawsuit over PFAS contamination). The warnings relate specifically to environmental and human health impacts related to chemicals found in plastic fields. Who will be liable should a lawsuit be filed against MVRHS?
- Why is the MVRHS leadership focusing on fundraising for this particular effort when there is so much critical need throughout the school?

In light of all the financial uncertainty surrounding this ambitious project, in the midst of a global pandemic and economic recession no less, I sincerely hope the Finance Committee will do its due diligence before this project advances further.

Please review the attachments as well as the addendum below. I would be glad to provide extensive peer-reviewed, published resources backing up my statements.

Thank you for considering my views.

Kind regards,

Diana Conway

Vineyard Haven seasonal resident

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ADDENDUM: Additional synturf drawbacks

Our coalition of activists has collaborated with multiple researchers and reporters across the US and Europe to help document the tremendous downsides of synturf. These problems have been prominently featured in multiple European news sources as well as The Atlantic, Salon, Forbes, the

Boston Globe, the Washington Post, NBC, CBS, NPR, and dozens of papers from Canada to Japan to Darien, Connecticut to San Diego.

- Heat: Synturf's soaring temperatures, frequently 50+ degrees above ambient temperatures, are documented to cause EHS, exertional heat stroke. This has led to a range of harms from heat distress to collapse, hospitalization and death. Accordingly the field becomes unusable during high-demand summer months. That means additional pressure on grass fields, the loss of rental income, heat-island effect visible from space, and the generation of super-heated toxic runoff.
- Toxicity: Installing synturf means users and the environment are subject to toxic exposure in unstudied, undisclosed combination, often in high heat, with close, chronic, intentional contact. Human exposure and absorption occurs by ingestion, inhalation and dermal uptake, without disclosure or consent. The greatest exposure and harm are to the youngest users who are closest to the surface and most vulnerable to its impacts.
 - The industry conceded in formal testimony almost five years ago that "Yes our product contains lead." Since then we have repeatedly cited this statement in hearings at which industry reps were also testifying. Not once was it even addressed in their statements. There has been no retraction or amendment-- no claim that new or different infills or carpet-manufacturers have a lead-free product.
 - Another indicator of the industry's dubious claims are its resort to environmental consultants known as "rented white coats." Synturf's go-to consultants have been called out by an Pulitzer-winning investigative non-profit which reported that it "belongs to a breed of scientific consulting firms that defends the products of its corporate clients beyond credulity, even exhaustively studied substances whose dangers are not in doubt, such as asbestos, lead and arsenic. [Their] scientists rarely acknowledge that a chemical poses a serious public health risk."
 - Finally, the industry and its members repeatedly claim their product is "proven" safe by scores of studies. Those studies prove no such thing. Rather they identify alarming toxic content, the confounding factors of multiple toxins across various products, and call for more research and longitudinal studies --because of how long it takes for injury to manifest. Needless to say there are no such studies going on. And as any middle-school science student should be able to recognize, the absence of proof of harm is not proof of absence of harm.
- Injury: The NFL maintains among the best fields in the US—grass and synturf. In an effort to understand and reduce injuries the league spent significant funds on two studies of all 1,600+ players, each lasting four years and consisting of high-caliber, standardized observation and reporting, in a union setting. The studies revealed that synturf causes twice the foot and ankle injury rate of grass. The orthopedic surgeon for the Baltimore Ravens has testified to this two years running before the Maryland state legislature. Since its publication of results neither the NFL itself nor any of the study designers or researchers have amended or qualified those findings. Injuries are also shown to be significantly higher on synturf for knees, turf-toe, and impact-injuries such as concussion or joint injury due to surface hardness. An NFL Players Association survey revealed that almost 85% of its members believe synturf will end their careers sooner than grass. A recent MLS study was cited by industry's leading spokesman, the CEO of the Synthetic Turf Council. He claimed it showed no difference in lower-extremity injuries between the surfaces. Within literally five minutes of this statement before a legislative committee, the medical expert working with us called him out for misrepresenting the data. His response was to decline further

conversation, accuse the expert of being 'rude' and demand that we send him the study – cited by him-- so he could review it. These are the kinds of behavior I have seen for then 10+ years I've been involved in this issue.

- Disposal: Industry claims of “recyclability” are specious. Its claims of actual recycling are even more so. Each used synturf generates up to 250 tons of toxic mixed-plastic waste. There are not enough batting cages or paintball ranges in the US to accommodate the estimated 1,200 US fields coming out per year. The industry’s claims that it is financially beneficial to send that volume of waste to Malaysia for “recycling” ---into whatever—is belied by the mountains of piled, dumped synturf across the US and Europe. I can supply aerial photos from across the US. Even Europe with its more stringent environmental laws cannot find a solution for used synturf: “The Turf Mountain,” Netherlands Zembla report with English subtitles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5o3J7uy4Tk>
- Liability: I believe the entire Island has seen the letters from Mr. Ferraro advising MVRHS and other decision makers of the significant legal issues and costs to which synturf will expose them. Among the issues frequently raised are failure of due diligence and violation fiduciary duty. This concerns is exacerbated in cases involving tax dollars, as it is for children, to who a higher duty of care is owed.

MVRHS
Track Project Financial Review
Overall Master Plan

1 SYNTHETIC TURF FIELD	Construction	10 Years Maintenance	Mid-Life Renovation	10 More Years Maintenance	20 Year Cost
1 General Conditions	\$ 305,000				\$ 305,000
2 400m Track & Field (<i>Synthetic</i>)	\$ 2,683,700	\$ 75,000	\$ 541,750	\$ 75,000	\$ 3,375,450
3 Stadium Field House	\$ 1,200,000				\$ 1,200,000
4 Multi-Purpose Field #1	\$ 250,000	\$ 254,237	\$ 150,000	\$ 254,237	\$ 908,474
5 Multi-Purpose Field #2	\$ 425,000	\$ 254,237	\$ 150,000	\$ 254,237	\$ 1,083,474
6 Multi-Purpose Field #3	\$ 250,000	\$ 254,237	\$ 150,000	\$ 254,237	\$ 908,474
7 Multi-Purpose Field #4	\$ 250,000	\$ 254,237	\$ 150,000	\$ 254,237	\$ 908,474
8 Multi-Purpose Field #5	\$ 250,000	\$ 254,237	\$ 150,000	\$ 254,237	\$ 908,474
9 JV Baseball**	\$ 550,000	\$ 254,237		\$ 254,237	\$ 1,058,474
10 Varsity Softball**	\$ 380,000	\$ 254,237		\$ 254,237	\$ 888,474
11 JV Softball**	\$ 250,000	\$ 254,237		\$ 254,237	\$ 758,474
12 Site Improvements	\$ 870,600				\$ 870,600
13 SUBTOTAL:	\$ 7,664,300	\$ 2,108,896	\$ 1,291,750	\$ 2,108,896	\$ 13,173,842
14 Island Contingency (25%)	\$ 1,916,075				\$ 1,916,075
15 Design & Engineering (8%)	\$ 613,144				\$ 613,144
16 Const Contingency (15%)	\$ 1,149,645				\$ 1,149,645
17 Total Costs	\$ 11,343,164	\$ 2,108,896	\$ 1,291,750	\$ 2,108,896	\$ 16,852,706