

## Mollie Doyle Letter

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To: Lucy Morrison <morrison@mvcommission.org>; Oak Bluffs Planning Board <planningboard@oakbluffsma.gov>; Alex Elvin <elvin@mvcommission.org>

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To the Martha's Vineyard Commission and Oak Bluffs Planning Board,

First, thank you all for putting so much time and thought into the review of the MVRHS' proposal for Phase 1 of it's sports complex. I know it has been fraught for all.

Second, I want to tell you why I stepped into this debate and have become more and more convinced approving the installation of a plastic field would be one of the most reckless decisions the MVC could make.

When I reached out to Matt D'Andrea in 2017 asking him about the track project, I thought the pursuit of a plastic field was driven by money. It turns out I was right, but not in the way I first understood it. Initially, my understanding was the school had a decaying track, wrecked grass infield and no money to fix the problem. A group was offering a solution: a free new track with a "maintenance free" plastic infield. Of course, as we have all learned, the maintenance free part is not true nor has it ever been.

As the mother of one of the Plastic Free MV children who has helped to ban straws and bottles, my ears perked up. Why would an educational organization choose plastic over plants if plants were possible? Particularly when all of the island schools, environmental organizations, planning boards, energy committees and MVC are talking about how to arrest petroleum dependence, limit plastic pollution and mitigate climate change. Even our US President Joseph Biden, to address the climate crisis, has recently announced that we as a country are going to cut our emissions in the next decade by 50%.

So because I am a journalist and a writer, I did some outreach, interviewing Matthew Stackpole who runs the all grass park system in Washington, D.C., Chip Osborne who is responsible for Springfield's grass, Jeff Carlson who ran the country's first organic golf course here, and Jerad Minnick who, as you all know, has built grass fields around the world for professional teams, cities, parks' departments and schools. I asked them all, "Is grass possible?" The same answer came back that the MVC heard from Ben Polimer on April 15th, which was essentially, "Yes, but to succeed, grass needs regular maintenance."

I did more digging. What was the MVRHS budget to maintain their fields? In 2017, ZERO dollars. How many years had the fields been neglected? So many no one remembers when there was a budget for the fields. How outdated were their field designs? Actually, there were no field designs. In fact, the football and soccer game field is sloped! When players run in one direction they run downhill, uphill the other. When I talked to former athletes, the administration, MVRHS athletes, coaches and current athletes all told me that the fields were never designed -- just installed willy nilly -- nor were they ever maintained. Dardy Slavin told me the field hockey field looks as bad as it does now when she played 25 years ago. When I asked Matt D'Andrea about who was responsible for the fields' upkeep, I was told there wasn't really a person. Just anybody who could mow. And that generous parents who had the time and expertise would occasionally come and fix the irrigation or put down some fertilizer.

I thought, "Ok, yes, the MVRHS needs a new track, but it also needs a budget for field maintenance. Good maintenance seems like an easy problem to solve."

So I called Rebekah Thomson and Dardy Slavin, who had expressed their concerns about the plastic fields and said, "Let's just offer another solution to their problem: offer grass fields with maintenance." And this is how and why The Field Fund was created: to offer financial help with the Island's fields.

And, as you well know, we did. We offered a new track with a new grass infield, state of the art irrigation and a better well pump, which would have cost in the neighborhood of 2 million dollars and be delivered by the fall of 2018. As you know, we also proposed to support their field maintenance system and endow a greenskeeping position. The MVRHS School Committee voted to accept our offer and then, a few months later, for reasons still unexplained, decided they couldn't or wouldn't take it.

This has led to an honestly dreadful past few years. Let's just say that in terms of deplorable behavior, the Zoom bombing the MVC experienced was the tip of the iceberg. And this behavior was not just fueled by local leadership, but bolstered by an entire industry that sees Martha's Vineyard as the ultimate feather in their cap. They see the headlines already: "A rabidly environmental community embraces plastic." That is what they are hoping for. That is why Laura Green has been paid to weigh in. That is why the conversation feels so pressured. It's powered by 2.7 billion dollars.

But The Field Fund has persisted. Why? Especially when there is such a vocal and powerful group against grass? Well, because locally, that group is actually relatively small. As I'm sure you noticed during the hearings, the group only includes a few members of the MVRHS School Committee, The Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, coaches, parents and athletes. The fact it has been an entirely one-sided conversation coming from the MVRHS is a red flag. There is not unanimous support for this project -- far from it -- but dissenting voices are not welcome. Why haven't we heard from the High School's Art Department? Theater Department? Science Department? Or even athletes against the project? I refer you back to the Zoom bombing. Who wants to step into the fray and be physically threatened, bullied and relentlessly gossiped about and stalked on social media? It's happened to me and can say from personal experience in this particular debate it is truly awful. And, at times, almost unbearable.

What kept The Field Fund and I going are two things:

1. The facts. When you step back and look, the facts are overwhelmingly in favor of grass.
2. We are not alone in our belief in these facts about grass. So many trusted Martha's Vineyard environmental organizations (all have been named many times so no need to repeat here) agree. As did so many community leaders -- from Vineyard finance committee leaders to respected business owners to coaches. And then there were the many grass experts, scientists and lawyers who heard about our debate and reached out to us, telling us, "YES, PFAS contamination, turf disposal, athlete heat exposure and microplastics are real issues. We know the damage they can and will cause." By the way, just ask Wayland, MA about what it is like to have Town-wide PFAS water contamination. They cannot drink their water, shower in it or give it to their animals. It is not an exaggeration to say that Wayland residents are freaking out -- particularly because it will affect their very high property values. As has been laid out by The Field Fund and others in their testimony, there are so many reasons why a plastic field would be detrimental to our Island - financially, environmentally and most of all, from a climate change perspective.

But for me there is another reason I stay in the discussion:

I loathe poor planning. As someone who has edited more than 200 books and written 7, I can say that a book project without a thorough thoughtful plan is not a project, it's an idea. And that is all this MVRHS

proposal is.

They have an unfunded idea for a very expensive project with one field, facing the wrong direction, made out of unproven materials, a grass field (with an archaic use of a crown in its design) and a track. Even the maintenance plan for the new fields has been described by the MVC expert Ben Polimer as “generic.” The plan for the rest of the campus is sketched out at best. So how is this proposed project going to solve what is and has been a maintenance issue for decades? It isn't. Yes, they will get a new track, which we desperately need, but the rest feels like irresponsible spending in light of the broader challenges the school faces. And given the MVRHS' historical maintenance track record, they will not take care of it.

To make matters worse, the MVRHS has just been rejected by the Massachusetts School Building Association for the SIXTH TIME. Why? Because they have failed to get all six towns on board. A project of that scope requires true buy-in, something that this sports complex project is undermining. By proceeding with the sports complex (essentially the landscaping) first, they are limiting the possibilities for the much more significant and important building project. Why are athletics being prioritized at the cost of the building that houses the education of ALL of our Island high school students? It makes no sense and underlines the fact there is an unhealthy school culture and misguided priorities.

And this is where you, the MVC and OB Planning Boards, come in. And thank goodness you are here. Through your oversight process, projects are meant to improve. Please push back and ask for a real plan that considers the whole campus and the planet. Ask for a plan that has a vision and is visionary. With the MVC's Climate Task Force and governance from both the MVC and the OB Planning Board, you have an incredible opportunity to push for something people beyond our shores can see and point to. You can choose to support our largest educational institution investing in a petroleum product that contributes to climate change at every phase of its lifespan and in perpetuity or you can encourage them to be leaders in thoughtful design, green building and organic grass maintenance. It's up to you.

Sincerely,

Mollie Doyle