

Oak Bluffs Planning Board

From: Cathlin Baker <revcathlinbaker@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 24, 2019 3:15 PM
To: Oak Bluffs Planning Board; morrison@mvcommission.org
Subject: MVRHS Playing Fields

Dear Island Neighbors,

As an Island resident, parent of two school-aged children, cancer survivor and minister in the United Church of Christ, I have been closely following the debate about a synthetic turf field(s) at the high school.

I am so grateful to those of you in leadership positions with the Oak Bluffs Planning Board and the Martha's Vineyard Commission because I know you contribute a great deal of time and energy to the future of our Island. In addition to giving of your time so generously, I know you are also asked to weigh in on decisions that can be controversial. I know there are times I'd rather stick my head in the sand than have to experience conflict with my neighbor, or fellow parents on the sidelines of a playing field. It takes courage to lead.

At this point in time, I feel like it is important to share my personal opinion regarding the playing fields at the high school. My concern is primarily environmental, but also fiscal. I believe grass fields are the best choice for our children and for the Island.

One of the great moral issues of our time is the environmental crisis of climate change. As a minister, I have a moral responsibility to speak for the voiceless. This often manifests itself in prioritizing the needs of the poor, but I also recognize that the earth is crying in so many ways, and we do not hear her voice. Stewardship of the earth is fundamental to my faith and my ministry at the First Congregational Church of West Tisbury.

In my local church, our congregation prioritizes the importance of educating ourselves about the realities of climate change, global warming, and rising sea levels. We work hard to change our behaviors that impact the environment, exploring our own personal and household practices in relationship to carbon footprint, carbon sequestration, energy conservation and waste reduction. We share our concerns from the pulpit. We teach and lead through a well-organized and active Green Team, which recently sponsored a series of workshops at the West Tisbury Library. We encourage our children by modeling best practices. It's the least we can do for our children, who bear the brunt of so many ill-informed decisions by adults, often fed by the twin sins of expediency and greed.

Here on the Island of Martha's Vineyard we are intimately aware of our fragile eco-system. Sources of fresh drinking water must be protected. The MVRHS playing fields are in a Zone II Wellhead Protection area, which means the land in that area contributes water to public water supply groundwater sources. The aquifer's water supply is replenished when precipitation or stormwater percolates through the soil and reaches the water table. I have seen my daughter come home from off-island soccer games with turf particles and plastic grass in her hair and down her socks. Now we are learning that these plastic grass fibers might contain PFAS chemicals, the same chemicals that have contaminated wells near the airport. I am concerned about the detritus we would see from a two-acre synthetic playing field and how it might impact our athletes and our public water supply.

Within our schools, we are educating our children to be good stewards of the environment, putting the burden of leadership on them as they seek to banish single use straws and water bottles, and maintain school gardens. Now is the time for the adults in our community to bear some responsibility and be courageous enough to say no to plastic and synthetic materials and be leaders for our children.

Not only are grass fields the right choice environmentally, they are the right choice financially. The MVRHS physical plant has so many pressing needs, currently estimated at \$100 million, and synthetic fields are more expensive to install, plus they need to be replaced and disposed of every 7-12 years. In recent years, community members and school leaders have collaborated in creating and maintaining grass fields at our lower schools. They have shown us how our grass fields in disrepair can be transformed, becoming both sturdy and safe.

As we ponder a decision about our playing fields that will have a long-term impact on our Island, I cannot help but draw upon Iroquois wisdom: "In every deliberation, we must consider the impact on the seventh generation... even if it requires having skin as thick as the bark of a pine." Thinking ahead about seven generations is around 140 years from now. The case for synthetic fields, requiring regular replacement and disposal, to me, fails in the face of this wisdom. I hope others who have concerns will take a moment to don "skin as thick as the bark of a pine" and speak now.

With deep gratitude and respect,

Rev. Cathlin Baker

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