

Cindy Doyle's 3.4.21 Martha's Vineyard Commission Testimony

Good evening. My name is Cindy Doyle.

I have supported organizations that serve Island youth for more than 20 years. This includes the Y, the Y's expansion to help the Ice Arena, Community Services' Island Wide Youth Collaborative and early childhood education programs, Vineyard House, and Island Grown Schools. I helped found The Youth Task Force, am on the Board of MV Youth, and have funded many studies to help the high school and Island schools evaluate their current programs and make plans to address gaps. So I am well aware there is a need to support the Island's youth.

There's no question the high school needs a new track and my comments below in no way diminish the necessity for improved facilities for our athletes and children. In fact, I was so convinced of this need that it was my family's foundation that, in 2017, offered to loan the entire cost of The Field Fund's project to install a track and grass infield as a way to guarantee that it would be constructed by the summer of 2018 and guarantee its maintenance.

This said, I am completely opposed to the high school's current proposal.

Like many, I have measured this project against environmental costs, financial costs, safety and planning. As many have already pointed out, when you look through these lenses, the project does not hold up. This is why nearly every environmental organization on the Island is opposed to this project. This is why legitimate climate scientists and doctors around the country and world oppose plastic fields. This is why professional athletes prefer natural grass and even the high school soccer coach says, "Grass is king." And this is why Town finance committee members are concerned.

I actually was not surprised to hear from Ritchie Smith that the school has raised no money and I expect they will have a hard time doing so. First, because who would want to be associated with this controversy? And, second, because from a donor's point of view, this project would be a terrible investment.

When I evaluate any project that I'm considering funding, the first thing I look for is something that will motivate and bring about positive, equitable

change. With this project there is no vision. There is no master plan for the campus, no plan for the school, no holistic vision to embrace. It will continue to stress an already strained system, saddling taxpayers for decades to come and it has divided our community.

From my experience funding youth and mental health projects for children, I know that telling children they need certain products to succeed is detrimental to their long-term well-being. And wouldn't these student athletes be better served by money going toward programs that expand their current world view, rather than narrowing all their needs down to one plastic field?

What about the arts? What about basic educational needs and programs? The school leadership says the school is in great academic shape. But that is NOT true. Our high school is in trouble. It is avidly pursuing a project that exacerbates climate change, plastic pollution and ignores local zoning. What kind of example is this? From the time and energy the school's leadership has devoted to this project it seems they think this plastic field and stadium are the ticket for getting out of trouble. They are not.

When evaluating a project, I also look at the culture around the project. Who is involved? Who is supporting it? What voices are being ignored, left out? Is the project being driven by community will and need? From a bird's eye view, the Island is heading in one direction -- mitigating climate change and limiting plastic pollution -- and the high school in another.

Additionally, as the mother of a disabled child who has participated in the Special Olympics, I find it appalling that there would be an appeal this field would benefit her community. Because of the chemicals, heat and higher injury risk, I would never put my child on a plastic field.

I also measure a project against the applicant's values. Does it reflect its stated mission? Look at the high school's website. I see none of the high school's Core Values that promote critical thinking in this application.

Finally, I look at a project in terms of what chances it has of being considered a success. Ten years from now, when our Island and planet will feel even more climate change pressure, will we applaud a choice for a 2.5-acre plastic field that needs to be replaced? Tonight we've heard from several people that the PFAS levels are ok. Others say the PFAS levels will be toxic.

When we look at this project, we have to remember we are dealing with a product made by a petrochemical company. In my day, there was a similar debate about cigarettes and lead. We also thought plastic was a great invention. Now we know better. How many times do we have to make the mistake of trusting large chemical companies? Do we really believe these manufacturers have the Vineyard's best interests at heart? Horsley Witten even acknowledges in their written testimony that, "PFAS testing, precursor analyses, and the related regulatory standards for risk assessment are part of an evolving science."

Do we want to be guinea pigs for this science?

In ten years, I think we will celebrate the choice to stick with grass.