

June 18, 2020

To: Adam Turner, Executive Director Martha's Vineyard Commission
From: Mark McCarthy, ATC, CAA
Athletic Director, MVRHS

Dear Mr. Turner,

Below please find the letter I presented to the MVRHS School Committee dated February 4, 2019. This letter represents many of my reasons for requesting the synthetic surface within the track oval and they have not changed, thus my reasoning for submitting this to you. Please accept this letter as a letter of support for the MVRHS Track and Field project submitted to your board dated June 18, 2020.

Sincerely,

Mark McCarthy, ATC, CAA

*School Committee Meeting
February 4, 2019*

My name is Mark McCarthy, I am the current athletic director at the high school and have been since 2009, previously I was the AD/athletic trainer here from 1988-90. For the record, I am a certified athletic administrator and a certified athletic trainer. I have been in the field of athletics my entire career as an athletic trainer and athletic administrator. I have been on the sidelines at the youth, high school, college and professional levels managing and treating athletic injuries. I created, implemented and was the director of the Connecticut Children's Medical Center's Sports Concussion program, Connecticut's premier concussion management program, in addition I started the Connecticut Concussion Task Force.

I am here today speaking because to date I have been mostly listening working with anyone willing to help. I have been listening to all sides of this debate. I have listened to our students and coaches who have overwhelmingly supported the idea of the implementation of a synthetic turf field. I have been reading peer reviewed research articles regarding the safety records of both synthetic and grass surfaces. I, like Superintendent D'Andrea, have many articles that helped me make this

request. It is sad to admit that this process started with MV@Play 4 years ago who volunteered and made a commitment to offer fixing our track and fields. The Field Fund then petitioned the school committee to create a grass field complex and pay for the work, equipment and upkeep but those talks broke down and today we sit, and nothing has changed. An entire class has missed out on the opportunity to play on quality fields and an entire track season of home meets was lost. Because nothing had been resolved to replace the track, solely over this debate, the high school chose to appropriate \$135,000.00 to resurface the track to give us a 2-3 year band-aid, that band-aid will breakdown within the next two years.

WE have let our student athletes down. The track has surpassed its useful life, our fields haven't changed much in the past decade and longer. We have done what maintenance we can do within the allowable budgets but to do what is needed on an annual basis takes a lot, and I mean a lot of money, and that hasn't been available because of tight budgets. In 2008-09 the middle third of the stadium field was re-sodded because of overuse. Today, you can see that we can't keep up. Our stadium field is supposed to be the prize of our campus and it's not. It is an average field with worn surfaces from overuse. We only play games on that field. We use that field, at most, 190 hours per year, well below any industry standard and it is still over used. These are the facts and why we are here today.

Here are my reasons for supporting my request for a synthetic turf field.

- 1. They are safe. Having done Peer reviewed literature searches on injury rates between grass and turf there has not been shown a significant rate of injury difference between the two. What was highlighted was that the grass field comparison was done at the D1 college settings where grass fields are better maintained than high school fields.*
- 2. Concussion rates may decrease. Implementing the recommended Brock Pad underneath the surface may decrease the incidence of concussion. With studies showing that 20% of concussions come from contact with the ground and that there is a potential decrease of these concussions by 50%. We have to do this. MVRHS has reported to the State during mandated State reporting of head injuries an average of 24 concussions per year over the past few years, that would mean 5 concussions were as a result of ground impact. If we can decrease that number by 50%, we would have had 2.5 fewer*

concussions, I vote for that. I've sat in a totally dark room trying to assess the month old concussion of a 16 y/o female athlete who was wearing sunglasses because she was so photophobic she couldn't handle the lights in a room. I've had to try to help 17 y/o lacrosse player, who after 4 years, was still having 24/7 daily headaches from his concussion. I am requesting this for the possibility of your child never getting a concussion, and the best part, you'll never know it, because they never got hurt after their fall to the turf.

- 3. The United States has a culture of inactive children. Kids need to play. They need a safe place to play. Our schools should be that place. The high school should be that place. How can the high school close its doors to our youth and force them to go somewhere else? On an island where there are limited places to go. And what if those places close their doors because they can't afford to keep their fields maintained because of over use? Then there will be no where to go. In the late 60's and early 70's my father recognized this when he and the town of Oak Bluffs built the Niantic Park basketball court. They didn't say only OB kids could play, they allowed everyone, year-round kids and summer kids play. It was so successful a book has been written about it, about how the island was inclusive not exclusive. We can not close our campus. We should be doing just the opposite; we should be opening up the campus. Having a field that can take on the extra use will only help the rest of the other fields on the island by decreasing their demand.*
- 4. Chris Huntress was hired by you to make a recommendation for what the school and community should do. He has looked at all the data. He has interviewed all involved and listened to everyone's concerns and has tried to answer them. I have walked the fields with him. He knows the facts and has reported studies to back up those facts. His firm is recommending that the surface inside the track be a synthetic surface field that will be not only safer for our kids but is safe for surrounding environment. Who would I be to go against the advice of the expert you hired?*
- 5. Weather dependency. Soccer, football and lacrosse all can be played in almost any weather condition. A common concern of all of the athletic directors I work with, as well as myself, is damage done to a grass field when playing in the rain. Playing on a rain soaked field increases the risk of damage to the field that you may not be able to recover from, both for the remainder of that season and then into the next. In addition, when we cancel*

a game due to rain, it affects the student athletes academic schedule and their potential for injury.

- 6. Lastly, although I could go on, with the program we will put in place we have answered the question about where this surface will go after it's lifespan, it will be entirely recycled, insuring that not one part of the surface will end up in a land fill after our use.*

So, for the safety, health and well being of our student athletes and the entire youth of the Vineyard, give them what they want, a safe and reliable synthetic surface field inside the track oval. We are in the starting blocks, we are in the set position, we are now just waiting for you to fire the starters gun, and then we'll be off moving forward with a plan to better our playing fields, both synthetic and grass. Our kids have waited way too long.

Thank you.