

TO: Oak Bluffs Planning Board
Martha's Vineyard Commission
FROM: Brock Callen
SUBJECT: MVRHS Athletic Facilities
DATE: 11 February 2020

Unquestionably, the issues surrounding synthetic athletic field surfaces are complex with each having its proponents and opponents. I respect that reality and don't automatically assume that there are people who are right and people who are wrong. As someone who places environmental responsibility near the top of the list of important things in life, conventional wisdom would suggest that my position on the proposed installation of a single synthetic infield for a new track would primarily be dictated by that admission. But that's not the case. My concern is that the overall conversation has been distilled to a single priority, when there are "big picture" considerations that have been given lip service but little else.

My first concern is that the school district has shown an extraordinary inability over a long period of time to properly maintain the assets they have, whether it be through preventive maintenance, upgrading or replacement. Over the years Superintendents and School Boards have all succumbed to what has become the default explanation; "There isn't money in the budget." or "There isn't room in the budget." I would suspect that if they looked at the financial aspects of education as a business and paid close attention to what the District's real balance sheet looked like, they might realize that the assets category needs greater support; actually funding depreciation, as it appears they don't. How in good conscience can we as an Island approve an expenditure of the proposed magnitude given this historical reality? Another macro concern, given recent discussions about replacing the current facility, is the absence of a master plan (not an athletic fields master plan) driven by an intermediate and long term study of the Island's projected grade nine through twelve populations; not to mention an actual campus design that sets forth the placement of buildings, fields and parking, each carefully considered in the context of the surrounding area, e.g. the Community Services campus, the YMCA, the Barnes Swartz Rink, not to mention the abutting residential neighborhoods.

But, alas, the environmental issue. The classic arguments against the installation of synthetic turf have all been made and deserve to be given careful consideration, as science supports them. The recently published research that discloses the existence of PFAS (fluorine based compounds that never go away) in both the backing and blades of synthetic surfaces concerns me greatly. I would respectfully ask that you consider the potential impact of what I estimate to be close to 90,000 square feet of synthetic surface that science has confirmed contains PFAS placed in proximity to at least two of the Oak Bluffs Water District wells.

In conclusion, my concern with PFAS is personal. My son's family home with three children growing up in it is one of those houses across from the airport that has been found to have a PFAS contaminated well. That in all likelihood will never change, nor will the risks to human and animal health, nor will the impact it has on property value.

Thank you so much for your time and careful scrutiny of the far reaching impacts of the proposal before you. I appreciate it.