

TO: Oak Bluffs Planning Board
Martha's Vineyard Commission

FROM: Jana and Richard Bertkau
12 Coffins Field Road
West Tisbury, MA

RE: Plastic Turf Playing Fields

DATE: February 18, 2020

We write today to object to the proposed installation of plastic turf playing fields at Martha's Vineyard High School.

We are residents of West Tisbury and are members of the Green Team of the First Congregational Church of West Tisbury. The Green Team works from a moral imperative to raise awareness about environmental issues, support local climate initiatives and reduce the island's waste stream. We retired here about four years ago largely because we were drawn to the beauty of the island and the emphasis on conservation that many island organizations and residents hold so dear.

At the 2019 Annual Meeting of West Tisbury, we were so proud to see our young students from Plastic Free MV present a resolution to ban the sale of certain plastic bottles in the town. This proposal was met with amazing 100 percent support.

Shortly after, the plastic field topic arose, and we were amazed to see such a divided opinion regarding the fields.

You have already read and heard about the dangers of these fields from a health aspect, cancer risks, and injury risks. We are writing today regarding the disposal or recycling of the plastic fields.

The turf companies claim that these fields can be repurposed and safely disposed of. I cannot find any non-turf industry documentation to support that claim. In the Atlantic magazine of December 2019, there is an article "The Dangerous Pileup of Artificial Turf."

The article draws its conclusions from Fair Warning which is a nonprofit that focuses on public health, safety and environmental news, and related topics of government and business accountability. Here are some points from this article.

- Each field has an 8-10 year average life span.
- At the end of the decade, at least 750 fields will be replaced annually in the U.S. The average field contains approximately 40,000 pounds of plastic carpet. This means that as much as 30 million pounds of plastic waste could require disposal every year.

- There are no state or federal regulations regarding disposal or recycling of these materials
- Recycling is difficult to do as it requires separation of plastic grass from infill. This separation is complicated because of the mix of chemicals and materials that carpets are made of and treated with, as well as their sheer size.
- Most of the removed plastic fields are sent to landfills, ravines, deserts, woods and empty lots.

So our point is – How can our Town of West Tisbury, as well as Chilmark and Aquinnah, (and hopefully Edgartown, Tisbury and Oak Bluffs in 2020) vote to ban plastic bottles - asking small business owners to change their business models for the greater good of reducing the island's plastic consumption – and then vote to install these plastic fields?

We are an island that wants to be a leader in responsible land management and environmental stewardship. Installing plastic fields is an embarrassment and negates all that we stand for.

Sincerely,
Jana and Richard Bertkau
12 Coffins Field Road
West Tisbury