

Betsy Dripps

57 Middle Road

Chilmark, MA 02535

January 24, 2017

Martha's Vineyard Commission

P.O. Box 1447

Oak Bluffs, MA 02557

Dear Martha's Vineyard Commission:

I am writing to you to express my feelings about installing an Athletic Complex at the high school using synthetic turf fields. I have coached athletes of all ages for my whole life. More specifically I have coached high school girls' lacrosse for 38 years, 21 of those years on Martha's Vineyard. I was the first person to introduce lacrosse to the island when I moved here from Philadelphia 22 years ago. I have also coached both field hockey and girls' soccer at our high school. I have had the opportunity to work with some amazing athletes, many who have gone on to play in college. Every year except for 3 seasons, I think, my teams have gone on to compete in the state tournament. No one is more passionate about sports than I am as a player, a Mom, a Grand Mom, a teacher and a coach. And no one cares more about our athletes here on the Vineyard than I do. From a coaching standpoint I have always looked after the safety and wellbeing of all the athletes I have worked with in all sports and of all ages. I have been very upset to have been told by the turf supporters that I don't know what I am talking about, I haven't done my homework and I don't care about the athletes, just because I do not support the proposed project. So I want to share my thoughts with all of you.

Synthetic turf of any kind is a dangerous surface to play on. Synthetic fields are especially hard on knees. I have been told this by players, coaches and umpires who play on them. Turf surfaces do not give with athletes as they plant their cleats or turf shoes and try to change direction. Girls in particular have many more torn ACLs on turf. This applies to all field athletes playing football, soccer, field hockey or lacrosse. Every sport that I have coached for the past 38 years has been played on a natural grass field. All our field sports are meant to be played on real grass not synthetic turf. We have turned out some outstanding athletes here at the high school and in no way have they been at a disadvantage playing on our grass fields here on the Vineyard. I have taken two Martha's Vineyard High School girls' lacrosse teams to play in England. All five prep schools that we played in England had beautiful grass fields. There were no turf fields of any kind at any of those schools. Many of their players played on the All England lacrosse team. They were the best of the best playing on grass at their schools. Other common injuries of all ages are turf burn which occurs when a player falls on the turf. Those abrasions

can easily get infected. Many field players also get black toe caused by jamming one's toes as your cleats make a sudden stop on the turf to change direction. Then, there is the real health hazard of breathing in the turf particles and chemicals off the surface. In addition, I witnessed how hot a turf field can get when my daughter played in an NCAA Lacrosse championship at Lehigh University. The temperature on the field at game time was over 100 degrees. Players had to be cooled down with buckets of cold water when they came off the field in order to prevent heat exhaustion. I have always been all about injury prevention and healthy athletes. Surely we need to pay attention to what is safest and best for our athletes of all ages.

You, the commission, of course are mainly looking at what this proposed plan will do for our environment here on the Vineyard. I am part of an Environmental Educators Group who are working to teach our children about how to take care of our environment. We all cherish the natural beauty of the Vineyard and share this love with our students. Our school children are so lucky to be surrounded by nature and to have so many environmental educators who are helping them to understand our world. We need to practice what we preach and take care of our land, our clean water, our animal habitats, our ponds, trees and plants, farmlands and beaches. The proposal for turf fields calls for tearing up green grass, putting down plastic and letting that leach into our water supply. How can that be what is best for our athletes, our children and all of us who live here?

Concerning what the proposed plan would do for a regional impact on our island, I have a few thoughts on that. Do we really want a big athletic complex for the whole island at the high school? I feel that those fields belong to the high school athletes and could also be used for the middle school athletes. The elementary school athletes are really fine to play their sports at their own elementary school fields where parents and siblings can enjoy watching their kids play. Those young athletes are safe and comfortable playing in their own school yard that is familiar to them. Let's not forget that sports are supposed to be fun especially at the younger levels. Those little mini kickers especially don't need to be rolling around on turf fields, breathing in synthetic particles and getting scrapes on their little knees that can easily get infected. There is nothing wrong with green grass stains and mud stains on those cute little uniforms! Come on!

Lastly, having lined my lacrosse fields at the high school every year for 21 years, I know those fields well. They need help. They need a talented field maintenance staff who can seed, roll, aerate and line all our playing fields at the high school and oversee them all year long. Certainly there are many excellent landscapers, golf course experts and horticulturalists on our island who could offer us advice and help us find the right people to get the job done correctly. That way we can provide our all our athletes with what is best and safest for them.

Please know that I speak from the heart and really do care!

Sincerely,

Betsy Dripps