

February 18, 2021

Good evening. Thank you to the Commission for setting aside this time for us to present.

My name is Dardy Slavin and I am a founding member of The Field Fund. I grew up in Chilmark and graduated from the regional high school where I was a minnesinger, played field hockey for Lisa and ran track for Joe. I went on to play field hockey in college and was an assistant coach at the collegiate level for 3 years. I have 2 boys and I coach soccer and ice hockey. I have also been a chiropractor on the island for 15 years. I tell you all this so you know I am coming from a strong sports background. I get how important sports are and I understand the desire of the sports community to upgrade the high school facilities. I had the pleasure of running track when it was a grass track around the football field so I get it.

It is fair to say that we all agree that something must be done to address the state of the fields and campus at the high school. They're antiquated and were neglected for decades so it's no surprise that the outdated facilities have failed us!

In fact, that is why, in 2017, Mollie Doyle, Rebekah Thomson, and I founded The Field Fund – to expedite and fund the installation of a new track and infield at the high school, followed by the rebuilding and improved maintenance of all the fields there – in coordination with master planning for the school building itself. But when months of negotiations with the administration got nowhere, we turned our focus to the other island fields. Since then we have worked to offer a non-toxic, data-driven, regenerative, fiscally responsible approach to grass field maintenance. We have invested over \$600,000 into island fields – with almost entirely local labor – including a full rebuild of the Oak Bluffs School fields and ongoing maintenance for elementary school and town fields. We've been recognized at the Massachusetts State House twice for our work.

We are not trying to make the fields look like Fenway! We want safe surfaces that respect our environment. And we want the fields accessible and affordable to all. We had a weed problem at Oak Bluffs last year. They were ugly, but the surface was smooth and playable. We used one round of organic herbicide, but focused on improving the grass root system so that it will eventually beat out the weeds. Our maintenance is dictated by field usage – the more fields are used, the more we invest in them. And we have encouraged our partner schools and towns to leave their fields open regardless of the weather – and say YES to usage requests – knowing that we will up the maintenance accordingly.

Of course, high school fields need more maintenance. But, as our turf grass consultant Jerad Minnick will tell you, this means more impactful aeration, more over-seeding with quality seed, more divot-filling, not dumping thousands of extra pounds of fertilizer or water on them.

At the last hearing, we heard folks say that this is not about plastic or grass. But it is. If we were just here to discuss an improved campus with grass fields, there would be no debate – just lots of goodwill!

While the push to install a plastic field feels like a uniquely Vineyard debate, it isn't. The arguments used to justify a plastic field here are the same ones used at schools across the country. They are a marketing machine and have successfully promoted a message that grass cannot support high usage, is expensive and requires tons of water and toxic fertilizers and herbicides. The vision of the Synthetic Turf Council, the industry trade group, is "To improve the world through synthetic turf".

We want to share some of our research from the last five years. We have organized it in relation to the Commission's Benefits and Detriments checklist, the criteria used to evaluate projects. As members of the public, we are grateful for the Commission's research and advocacy. We hope that those same fact-based, environmentally-focused principles will inform your deliberations on this application.

Will the probable benefit from the proposed development exceed the probable detriment?

For this presentation, we are focusing on the plastic field and its detriments – as well as the benefits of grass, respectively. We are also concerned about master planning and incremental development, funding, potential lawsuits, game field orientation, light pollution, long term costs, acres of additional impervious surfaces, but we will leave those topics for others to address.

(a) development at the proposed location is or is not essential or especially appropriate in view of the available alternatives;

- The installation of a plastic field at the high school is NOT essential or appropriate given our small population, the number of fields at the high school, and the number of school and town playing fields across the island.
- We urge everyone to read Richard Bennett's letters which highlight how usage numbers have been inflated to try to justify a plastic field. As we heard in the staff presentation, an objective look at usage shows that there are plenty of fields to support island use.

- Grass, when well cared for, can take it. And the high school fields can too – with a commitment to a thoughtful grass field rebuild and maintenance program. Could soil science be woven into the school’s horticulture program as one commissioner already asked? Absolutely! This was one of the things The Field Fund proposed back in 2017.
- Is a plastic field especially appropriate? No! Which is why all of these organizations have felt compelled to voice their concerns. At the moment the island community is rallying to reduce our carbon footprint, our plastic consumption, and our solid waste burden, use green construction materials and prioritize climate action, the installation of a plastic field is antithetical to the direction the island is heading.
- On the flip side, a grass campus will be in keeping with these priorities and the island’s rural character, while offering a smaller carbon footprint and carbon sequestration.

(b) development in the manner proposed will have a more favorable or adverse impact on the environment in comparison to alternative manners of development;

- Plastic fields contribute to global warming in every phase of their lifecycle – from their production, to shipping, to off-gassing and elevated temperatures while in use, to off-gassing as the plastic fibers break down over time – something Sarah-Jeanne Royer will explain in more detail.
- There is legitimate concern from the community about plastic pollution as the plastic field breaks down with age and wear. The proposed filtration system may catch some of the shedding fibers, but anyone who has spent time on plastic fields off-island knows the reality is much messier. The plastic “grass” fibers migrate off the field with the wind and rain and make their way into our ecosystem.
- We are striving to reduce our solid waste burden, but a plastic field means committing to buying 2.5 acres of plastic carpet waste every 8-10 years in perpetuity. As Amanda Farber will testify, although they’ve been manufactured for decades, there is little evidence of a responsible end of life solution for the thousands upon thousands of plastic fields piling up.
- In contrast, agronomist Jack Higgins will speak to how a healthy root system and improved soil microbiology not only support high use fields and absorb all the nitrogen, they also enable fields to serve as a carbon sink and have a natural cooling effect.

(c) the proposed development will favorably or adversely affect other persons and property, and if so, whether, because of circumstances peculiar to the location, the effect is likely to be greater;

- The site is within two critical watersheds – one containing the shellfish hatchery – and within a Zone II Wellhead Protection Area. As well engineered as the field may or may not be, it is negligent to assume that no plastic pollution or leaching will occur.
- It's a failure of the regulatory system that manufacturers are not obligated to disclose the chemicals and possible contaminants used in product manufacturing. Because of that, consumers spend thousands of dollars in testing to try to reverse discover which known and unknown contaminants may or may not be present. In this case the Commission review process has cost close to \$20,000 to test products while third-party consultants draw conclusions as to what impacts they may or may not have on our athletes and our ecosystem.
- The products currently proposed for the Vineyard are new. BrockFill and IronTurf only came on the market within the last few years. We have no idea how these products hold up or perform over time – or what injury and concussion rates are like on them. They haven't been around long enough to know. But we know of examples like Quinnipiac University which had to switch to tire crumb after its "natural" infilled field failed to meet performance standards.
- The plastic field industry's record is troubling. Tire crumb, *which has been used as infill for decades*, is now known to contain dozens of toxins including one that has caused the decimation of the Coho salmon population in Puget Sound. What happens when we discover that the field does in fact leach, the plastic fibers migrate off the field, or that the micron filter clogs during storms, that the woven technology isn't so durable after all, that Brockfill freezes, or that injury rates for these new products are actually worse than predicted? We will have bought into this million-dollar system, and we'll be stuck with it.
- The school insists that chemical applications won't be needed, but they are standard industry practice. If we choose to not use chemicals in order to protect our waters, we risk an unsanitary surface for our athletes and a potentially voided warranty.
- As the Vineyard's Emergency Wildfire Coalition highlighted in their letter, flammability of these products poses a threat to first responders, as well as to the high school and neighboring facilities. The proposed field, adjacent to woodlands abutting the State Forest, composed of a foam shock pad and plastic carpet, and infilled with a pine product, MUST pose a toxic fire hazard. If for some reason it doesn't, those products would HAVE to be coated in flame retardants – which the island community deserves to be aware of.
- Professional soccer and football athletes have made their preference for grass – for both safety and playability – overwhelmingly clear and Amy Griffin, a former National Team Player and one of the most respected and successful soccer coaches in the country, will speak to this shortly. I'm going to pause to play 2

minutes of Dr. Greg Guyton, orthopedic surgeon to Ravens, testifying about high injury rates on plastic.

(e) the proposed development will favorably or adversely affect the provision of municipal services and the burden on taxpayers;

- The high school has not released any information on the conditions of funding and has been misleading on long-term costs. It seems inappropriate for the school leadership to withhold that information from the public and the lack of transparency makes it impossible to accurately assess taxpayer burden.
- The installation of a plastic field is an example of the razor and blades model. The razor itself is one thing, but it's the blades that add up! Once the plastic field is installed, the public is committed to the expense of maintaining public health standards and possible liability, not to mention being on the hook – \$500,000 or more in island dollars every time the carpet needs replacement!
- It is also problematic that you are being asked to review Phase One in isolation which will leave the campus down one field and with a failed old track.

(g) the proposed development will aid or interfere with the ability of the municipality to achieve the objectives set forth in the municipal general plan

- This application seems to conflict with a number of points in the Town of Oak Bluffs master plan including pedestrian safety navigating the heavily trafficked corridor, but we defer to the Town of Oak Bluffs and others to speak to these issues.

(h) the proposed development will further contravene regional land development objectives and policies.

- Dukes County is listed as one of the fastest-warming counties in the nation – we've already crossed the 2° Celsius threshold. The Commission's Climate Action Task Force is truly critical.
- The task force reports for the island predict a range of climate impacts incompatible with a plastic field – more frequent and intense storms with higher rainfall, rising temperatures, and increased risk of wildfires.
- The Commission's Hazard Mitigation Plan identified wildfire as one of the most significant overall hazards, prompting the Commission to form its own Wildfire Committee.
- They're also creating a roadmap to eliminate greenhouse gas emission by 2040, in line with the Climate Crisis Resolution adopted last year, and the proposed 100% Renewable warrant article for town meetings, already adopted in two towns. The Commission's new, drafted DRI Energy Policy encourages applicants to reduce or eliminate the consumption of fossil fuels associated with their

proposals.

- The Island Plan offers a host of guidelines on development relevant to this project, including prioritizing community character, green building, recreation in nature, natural character and reducing our solid waste burden.
- The task force is working with the Woodwell Climate Research Center on how the island can preserve open space and island character, while looking at land uses that could increase carbon sequestration over time. Carbon capture happens in soil, not pavement or plastic surfaces.
- Grass is aligned with all these goals from an adaptation and mitigation standpoint – it's regenerative, can be maintained with an electric fleet, provides a natural cooling effect and fire break, and preserves rural character. And if the high school opts for an all-grass campus, the Field Fund would be happy to lend our expertise.

Now on to our experts!

Research scientist Sarah Jane Royer

Former US soccer player and coach Amy Griffin

Safe Healthy Playing Fields Board member, Amanda Farber

Agronomist Jack Higgins

Natural Grass Advisory Group founder and The Field Fund's turf grass consultant Jerad Minnick