

MVC Meeting Testimony - MVRHS Phase One Athletic Complex
Rebecca Nutton, MVRHS Varsity Field Hockey Coach
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Hello, thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. My name is Rebecca Nutton, and I am the current Varsity Field Hockey Coach for the high school. I am also a parent of two young boys and an early education teacher at an Island Preschool. My husband teaches maritime studies at the high school and coaches the sailing team and volunteer coaches the field hockey teams. I am speaking tonight on behalf of my family and the entire field hockey team, with their full support. We **strongly support** the plans for Phase 1, especially the installation of the field turf stadium. As an island coach, parent and educator, I feel it is integral and desperately needed; appropriately designed and considered every step of the way, and responsibly funded.

I have been a lifelong athlete, and have played and coached the sport of field hockey for nearly 20 years, including playing at and coaching at the NCAA Division 1 level, and coaching and playing in England for 9 years before moving to the island in 2017. In 2019 I began coaching at MV. I love this sport and I have a great appreciation for the importance of athletics to developing teenagers and young adults. In my personal experience, field hockey has been the thread that guided me in my path of life thus far, and I know the same can be said for all young athletes: playing a sport has a huge impact on the direction of their lives. Coming together, finally, this fall as a team, after the shock of the pandemic and quarantine and remote school... it was more apparent than ever how important sport is to our youth. It's positive impact needs no further discussion tonight- what I want to point out now is that if sport participation is a life experience that has the possibility to benefit so many of our island youth & families, then it must be invested in as a necessity. At the moment, we are failing our students and our families in this regard. This plan will begin to make up for that.

I would like to speak on the unique viewpoint that I have on this matter, as a coach of Field Hockey. Our sport is played around the world, by both sexes, from youth clubs through to adult leagues, mainly on astro turf, or synthetic grass turf. In the current Martha's Vineyard competitive fall schedule, about 70% of our opponents have synthetic turf as their home surface. All MIAA post-season play, tournaments, championships are hosted on synthetic turf fields. All of our mainland opponents have easy access to clubs and off-season teams which utilize this surface primarily. After 20 years of playing and coaching this sport, mostly on turf, the difference is unbelievable. The stark difference in opportunities for players who have learned, practiced & competed on this surface, vs those who have only had occasional opportunities to use it, is dramatic. There is a long list of skills and tactics which I cannot even begin to teach, let alone coach to success, on our current surface alone.

You've seen images of our current fields and athletic facilities, maybe you've walked them yourselves or watched games in person. It goes without saying that despite all

our best efforts, the current setting, as is, does not do our children any service. Our field hinders the learning of finer stick skills, smoother passing series, and a style of play which mirrors our opponents.

Simply put, when playing an away game on a surface which we do not have regular access to, we are at a disadvantage before the game even starts. Our girls are uncomplaining, hard-working student athletes who are proud of their school and their team. It is heartbreaking to travel with them to play league competitors whose facilities, when you step foot on them, send a very different message. I do not use this as an excuse for any lack of success, but I do know that I as a coach, and we as a school, could provide a much improved learning experience to our students, all of them, if we had access to synthetic turf and updated facilities. The ceiling would be raised for what they could achieve, and their prospects and possibilities would grow exponentially. I do not exaggerate this statement.

If the objection to phase one is that “things are different on this island”, or “that’s not the way it’s always been done”, then ask yourself what past you are trying to hold on to and why. If we are not earnestly listening and investing in our schools’ needs, then we are hampering the growth of island youth and limiting their opportunities beyond their school years. It is beyond time for this project to succeed. I hope you find it telling that the teachers, coaches, administration, school board, and so many parents are behind this plan and pleading for it to be allowed to go ahead. Please listen to the educators, coaches, guardians of our youth: let their voices matter.

If the objection to this argument for phase one is financial, then please refer to the public record of FACTS surrounding these plans: The construction of phase one will not impact the taxpayers as the high school has conditioned it to be built with donations. The problem of how to fund the future replacement turf is resolved to be paid with donations. The president of Tencotti has put aside the cost of the recycling of the old turf carpet, when that day comes. The maintenance costs fit within the school’s operating budget. The question of the impact this project will have on the school’s chances to be accepted into the Massachusetts School Building Assistance program, MSBA, is speculative and not founded on any specific evidence. This weak speculation alone is not enough to halt the project. Consider that: the MV Ice Rink, the Sharks field, The Skate park, the YMCA, the Oak Bluffs School fields: all were renovated or built with donations and donations continue to supplement the maintenance of those facilities. Veteran’s Park, Chilmark School fields, Edgartown School, West Tisbury.. all supplemented with donations. The Hospital, the Museum. Our community comes through for our youth and our families time and time again, please allow them to do the same with this one.

If the objection to this argument is environmental, then I ask you if you are also examining and restructuring your own lives for ways to be more green, before sacrificing the needs of so many island youth. If you feel very strongly about this issue, then please direct your energy to any number of initiatives to make MV more green,

clean and sustainable. I also feel passionate about positive environmental change, yet I don't let it cancel out my understanding of the many long term ecological and educational benefits that installing the turf field will have over its lifetime. Generations of student athletes will be handed a chance at better opportunities in their education, their physical and mental health, and their sense of self.

I know that the work of the commission and the concern of the public is well-intended and this process is important: you want to ensure the wellbeing of our entire island community with each aspect of this plan. I appreciate your efforts and I thank you. Please, focus on how much is to be gained from approving this project. On account of the countless young people who will GREATLY benefit from this investment over many years to come. There are families who are not even aware yet of the importance of this project. There are working parents who can't tune in or don't know how to speak up: who don't know what is on the line here. There are children the age of my sons, 6 and 3, and younger, who stand to benefit from this project in the coming years when they grow into their high school careers and want to participate in sports. I am thinking tonight of them, the whole generation of island youth, as I speak on behalf of the field hockey team (45 players and their families, 3 coaches) when I say please, approve this project so that our students can know that we, their extended community, stand behind them and want them to succeed in every way.

Thank you for your time.