

AGAINST: Plastic field is a racial and social justice issue

Mathea Morais <matheamorais@gmail.com>

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To: Alex Elvin <elvin@mvcommission.org>; planningboard@oakbluffsma.gov <planningboard@oakbluffsma.gov>;

To Whom it May Concern:

I would like to go on record as being **against** the plastic turf field at the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School. After sitting through last year's graduation where member after member of the high school faculty and administration discussed the importance of Black Lives Matter and social racial justice, I am outraged to see the high school now pushing this idea forward in the way that they are. As someone who was asked by the Regional to come and speak to the community about racial and social justice issues and who organized marches alongside their faculty this summer, I am sickened to see that it was all an act of performative allyship and I am both furious and ashamed to have been part of it.

To be very clear, you cannot say you believe that Black Lives Matter and also move forward with this proposal.

The water contamination from the plastic turf will affect everyone on this island, but it will disproportionately affect the residents who do not have the money to mitigate the contamination. Which means our white and affluent community members will be less impacted than the majority of our island's low-income and Black and brown communities. Therefore, these are the members of our community who will become sick, who will lose family members, whose healthcare costs will become debt they cannot pay. These are the same 40%-50% of our families now on free and reduced lunch. What is the island commitment to those families for whom affording bottled water is not an option? Who will pay for their water and filtration in perpetuity? Importantly, these community members are also voiceless (and were not represented at the meeting last night) as many are non-English speaking, immigrants, and/or work so many jobs that getting involved in Vineyard politics is simply not an option. To put that plastic field in is very clearly saying that their lives do not matter.

Furthermore, when (and not if) this plastic field needs to be replaced, where will the old one go? Where do we throw out material like this? Most likely, it will get shipped off to some other country where Black and brown people live. Where people are already navigating the impacts of climate change and pollution and what it means to have their land turned into dumpsters for first world countries. And if we are unable - as it looks like we may be - to send our tons and tons of plastic turf trash overseas, where will we dispose of it on Martha's Vineyard? It certainly won't be near those same nice homes in Chilmark and Edgartown. It will be disposed of, again, where our poor, Black, and brown community members live and raise their families.

Didn't we all spend last summer talking about how, as white people we needed to look at our privilege and positions of power and think about how we use them in the world? (And I'm addressing this with the understanding that **all** of the members of the MV Commission as well as the School Committee are white.) Why does our ease of use and the impact on our budget matter more than the lives of people we are forcing to take on that cost?

The Regional's performative allyship towards Black Lives Matter is shameful and, to be honest, so very heartbreaking. Changing their stance on this synthetic field would be a moment for the administration, the coaches, the faculty to show that those were not just empty words said on graduation last summer. It would show that they understand what saying Black Lives Matter actually means. It doesn't just mean you are upset when a Black person is killed by police. It means you think about the way your actions - especially as white people in positions of power - are impacting the lives of Black and brown people **all the time** AND that when your choices have a negative impact on Black and brown lives - you change them.

This is a time when real action can be taken to show solidarity with the Black and brown communities of our island and those on the other side of the world as well. And since MVRHS has chosen not to take this opportunity, it is my hope that the Martha's Vineyard Commission will keep in mind these communities - none of whom, as I said, were represented in the call last night - when considering the right choice to take.

To be clear, deciding to put in this plastic turf is deciding that Black and brown lives on this island and Black and brown lives across the world do not matter. I know that many members of the Commission have publicly stated their belief in Black Lives Matter and I sincerely want to believe that those members are not only who they say they are, but are willing to take the actions necessary to live up to that declaration.

With hope,
Mathea Morais
Chilmark, MA

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Mathea Morais
She/Her/Hers
www.MatheaMorais.com
@MatheaMorais

"Another world is not only possible, she's on the way and, on a quiet day, if you listen very carefully you can hear her breathe." -Arundhati Roy