No Artificial Turf on Martha's Vineyard

Petition by Vineyarders for Grass Fields

To be delivered to **Matt D'Andrea, Superintendent, David Wallis, MV@Play, Robert Lionette, MVRHS Committee, Theresa Manning, MVRHS Committee, Peg Regan, Interim Principal MVRHS** and 6 other targets (click here to see more)

Artificial turf, regardless of the infill, is not as cost-effective nor as low-maintenance as it is marketed to be, poses serious health and environmental concerns, and is not the preferred playing surface for the majority of athletes. Please do not approve the installation of artificial turf fields at Martha's Vineyard Regional High School.

There are currently 722 signatures. NEW goal - We need 750 signatures!

PETITION BACKGROUND

On April 4, 2016, MV@Play and Gale Associates presented to the MVRHS school committee a $12-million proposal to build a centralized athletic facility on a 3.6-acre parcel of land on the MVRHS campus. Funding would initially come from private donors, but MVRHS, and all six Island towns, would be expected to pay for future upkeep. The plans, designed to be implemented in three phases, the first beginning as early as September 1, 2016, include the installation of four artificial turf playing fields: one inside the track, plus three others. The intent is to eventually host all soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, and football practices and games (from the youngest players through high school and adult leagues) there for decades to come. From financial, maintenance, health, environmental, and playability perspectives alike, natural grass is a far better choice.

Artificial turf fields are not as low-maintenance nor as cost-effective as their billion-dollar industry suggests. According to Gale Associates, installation costs for a new artificial turf field with GreenPlay infill costs $850,000, assumes a 14-year carpet life, and the only maintenance is grooming with a towed groomer 4-5 times per year. The limited warranty covers only 8 years, however, and can be voided for a multitude of common conditions/maintenance practices. The life cycle costs of natural grass fields, when compared to those of artificial turf, are essentially the same—assuming the artificial carpet lasts 6 extra years after warranty expiration, and the cost of replacement doesn't rise. Not mentioned: the

premature failure rate of artificial turf fields, the costs of replenishing the infill, whether we would switch to crumb rubber if the GreenPlay infill becomes moldy, the intensive maintenance costs and practices necessary to keep the carpet sanitary and safe—including sweeping up debris like trash and leaves, brushing to straighten fibers, deep raking to loosen infill, spraying disinfectant and anti-static chemicals, manual removal of gum (with a solvent, then hand-pried out of the fibers), cleaning of spilled drinks, vomit, spit, sweat, blood, and animal droppings (dog, goose, etc.), and repairing loose seams to avoid liability issues. Given the exorbitant costs and many complications associated with artificial turf fields, it would be highly irresponsible for MVRHS to assume financial responsibility for their upkeep.

Forbes. “Buyers’ Remorse Surfacing over Artificial Turf Fields.” October 23, 2014. http://www.forbes.com/sites/mikeozanian/2014/10/22/buyers-remorse-surfacing-over-artificial-turf-fields/#7203e2c321ff

City Limits. “NYC’s Fake Grass Gamble: A $300 Million Mistake?” August 24, 2010. Winner of the 2010 Sigma Delta Chi Award for Investigative Reporting. http://www.spjvideo.org/sdx/sdx10/mag-inv-reporting-r.pdf

Red Hen Turf. “The Dirt on Turf: What You Need to Know About Synthetic Turf and Natural Grass for Athletic Fields.” http://redhenturf.com/pdfs/TheTruthAboutArtificialTurf.pdf

Artificial turf fields are not safe. According to Mount Sinai Hospital Children’s Environmental Health Center, “All components of an artificial turf field (fiber blades, infill, backing, colorants, sealants, antimicrobials, and flame retardants) contain potential chemicals of concern and can leach from the product.” They urge extra caution when the site is in close proximity to a water source potentially contaminated by chemical leaching, as MVRHS is (directly above the Island’s sole source aquifer). Further, the antimicrobials and fungicides required to routinely sanitize the fields “not only increase the likelihood of chemical exposures, they may pose health risks for children chronically exposed to them.” Although

the newly proposed infill is labeled “organic,” such terms are not regulated in the turf industry, nor are manufacturers required to list all chemicals. Risk of joint injuries, turf burns, “turf toe,” and heat-related complications are proven to be more likely on artificial turf, and it is a fertile breeding ground for harmful bacteria including those that cause antibiotic-resistant infections such as MRSA. Artificial turf also denies our children hours of time that would otherwise have been spent on grass and dirt, the immunological and psychological benefits of which are well documented.

Mount Sinai Hospital Children’s Environmental Health Center. “Artificial Turf: A Health-Based Consumer Guide.” February 2016. http://media.wix.com/ugd/fd0a19_f5aa0824698341499b4228ebabf90cb5.pdf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “MRSA and the Workplace.” August 27, 2015. http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/mrsa/ (Note: the artificial turf proposed for MVRHS would likely qualify for all five C’s of the MRSA risk factors.)

Most athletes dislike playing on artificial turf. From professional athletes down to the youth level, the majority of players regard artificial turf as a second-tier playing surface. This strong preference is based on increased post-game recovery time, risk of injury, and heat stroke on artificial turf, as well as a fundamental preference for playing the sport on grass. These issues led a group of international soccer players to file a lawsuit against FIFA for forcing them to play the 2015 Women’s World Cup on artificial turf.

Lawsuit against FIFA and the Canadian Soccer Association regarding the use of artificial turf at the Women’s 2015 World Cup. http://equalizersoccer.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/141001_2_Application-Sec-24-Schedule-A.pdf

Change.org. “FIFA: The World Cup Should Be Played on Natural Grass.” https://www.coworker.org/petitions/fifa-the-world-cup-should-be-played-on-natural-grass (Note: more than 70 national team players from 17 countries signed this petition.)

BMC Sports Science, Medicine, and Rehabilitation. “The Perceptions of Professional Soccer Players on the Risk of Injury from Competition and Training on Natural Grass and 3rd Generation Artificial Turf.” March 2014. http://bmcsportsscimedrehabil.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/2052-1847-6-11

Artificial turf is bad for the environment. On an island striving to be more forward-thinking and environmentally conscious—banning plastic bags, creating vegetable gardens at every school—to install acres of plastic carpet seems at odds with our collective values. To carbon offset the 10-year impact of one artificial turf field, 1,861 trees would have to be planted. In contrast, total greenhouse gas emissions for natural turf are actually negative, thanks to natural grass carbon sequestration. From the manufacturing of carpet and infill, to installation, maintenance, and replacement, artificial turf uses more resources and has more negative environmental impacts than natural grass sod.

Athena Institute. “Estimating the Required Global Warming Offsets to Achieve a Carbon Neutral Synthetic Field Turf System Installation.” 2006. www.athenasmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/UCC_project_ATHENA_technical_paper.pdf

Safely maintained grass fields are feasible. Proponents of artificial turf point to the Island’s pre-existing, admittedly neglected grass fields as proof of grass not being durable enough to withstand significant use—but high usage takes a toll on artificial turf as well. The ability to rehabilitate a natural grass field is a major advantage. Resodding high-wear areas can be done easily and cheaply. Further, investing in irrigation, drainage, and even SubAir systems (and possibly a nursery, maintained by the MVRHS horticulture vocational program), and researching best practices used by local experts such as those at the Vineyard Golf Club, the nation’s first organically maintained golf course, will go a long way toward providing truly safe, sustainable, natural grass playing fields. Will we need to be mindful about how we use the fields, and will there be imperfections and challenges? Sure, but there is value in that, too.

Forbes. “Failure Rate of Artificial Turf Fields Unknown by Public.” November 2, 2014.

http://www.forbes.com/sites/mikeozanian/2014/11/02/failure-rate-of-artificial-turf-fields-unknown-by-public/#4fcd279737d8

SportsField Management Magazine. “Back to the Basics.” January 28, 2016. http://www.sportsfieldmanagementmagazine.com/maintenance/back-to-the-basics/

Vineyard Golf Club. “Press & Awards.” May 6, 2016. http://www.vineyardgolf.com/press-awards

CURRENT PETITION SIGNERS

- 722. **Frankie Drogin** from West Tisbury, MA signed this petition on Jul 13, 2016.