

MVRHS Athletic Fields Comment

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

Dear Members of the MV Commission and Oak Bluffs Planning Board,

For the many well-considered reasons presented by The Field Fund, and with respect for the extensive common-sense observations by community members putting environmental conservation and holistic health first: Please deny the MVRHS Proposal before you which would install synthetic playing fields. This plan's synthetic turf is not necessary, and it has too much potential to do harm to our environment and community.

Furthermore, as was pointed to in the Environmental Performance Review of the Proposed Athletic Field Improvements at MVRHS by Horsley Witten Group, there are significant opportunities for students to learn and work with natural grass field development and maintenance. Any taxpayer-funded expense of this magnitude must leverage costs for greatest benefits to all stakeholders, including students, whether involved in sports or not. Though paid through the MVC, the HW Review appeared as scientific and independent as can be, yet many of its long list of recommendations for upgrading the Huntress Proposal can and should also be built in to a natural fields design.

We don't need another inch of plastic outdoor carpeting on this island for any use. Not only would the proposal being considered have costly, wasteful, excessive consumption as a major issue, it is simply unnecessary and inappropriate for use on athletic fields here on Martha's Vineyard. I think we want better for our students, for our community and for our environment: specifically, please deny the current proposal so we can get on to planning and work for a set of improvements that are healthier, more sustainable, and potentially regenerative if well-designed.

I hope those who would fund the Huntress design will be happy to fund a similar amount of improvements made through a new plan that uses no synthetic turf. Looking 20 and 30 years ahead, natural fields will easily provide better returns on investment when considered comprehensively as our community is fortunate to have help to do from The Field Fund and the MVC's own request for review by Horsely Witten Group. I hope the Superintendent's Office and MVRHS Leadership on this proposal can make a quick direction change and get clear about meeting 21st century needs at our largest and most central Martha's Vineyard school in regenerative ways that best respect nature and reduce extractive, consumptive practices while meeting the needs and demands for athletic facilities. The idea of a competing plan does not seem to have been allowed any traction as so much energy has been spent arguing for this very expensive proposal with synthetic turf.

Let's know our students and ourselves as leaders across the spectrum that grass fields play a part in. They grow when the sun hits them, versus degrading. The grass itself will provide much of its own fertilizer if well-managed, and, as noted, management practices can be created as student learning and community benefit events. And even without these benefits, renovation to state-of-the-art, environmentally sound and carefully designed natural grass surfaces appears less expensive in dollar amounts by the first decade of use. Students are likely to find grass a source of pride in greater numbers than those who will live in fear that they are disadvantaged for the lack of artificial turf. That latter number will dwindle as healthy pride thrives, anyhow. And if we are told the sun won't degrade the next generation of synthetic turf, we can be sure there is another level of toxicity to be concerned over: here on the island we love and/or wherever synthetic turf is produced.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,
Rex Jarrell