

MVC: MVRHS Field Project Comments

Good evening Commissioners.

My name is Doug Ruskin. I am representing myself here tonight, not any of the entities with which I am affiliated.

I want to state categorically that I am opposed to the Artificial Turf field included in this project on grounds that have been much better articulated by the expert testimony you already have and will receive. My comments tonight are from a different perspective. I am NOT opposed to upgrading the athletic fields, which are clearly in need of significant improvement. But I have real financial questions & concerns.

The High School came to the towns in the spring of 2019 for approval of funds to “design an athletic track and synthetic infield”. They did so by requesting approval of the use of a portion of Excess & Deficiency funds – the equivalent of a town’s “Free Cash”. Through a quirk in Mass General Law, that approval did not require a formal Town Meeting vote, as the request did not alter the assessment to the towns. And so, it was approved by affirmative vote of only 2 towns – West Tisbury & Aquinnah; Chilmark voted it down. All three down-island towns chose, through the action of just 11 selectpersons not putting the question on a Town Meeting Warrant, to tacitly “approve” the use of funds - with no discussion by the taxpayers.

What may not have been obvious to many at the time was that due to the school’s plan to privately fund the project, it would not come back to the towns for any further review prior to construction. To my regret I did not properly register that issue myself. And so your review is our only chance to get the answers that have been sought but not received. The core financial question here is: what is the long-term financial impact of this large, complex project to the towns? Until a number of questions in that regard are properly addressed and discussed at town level, I believe this body must deny or carefully condition the project, or at least delay it.

As you may know, 2 meetings of multiple towns’ Finance Committees were convened to gather long-term cost information last summer. Representatives of the high school were invited but refused to attend either, using the Commission and OB Planning Board reviews as the excuse. So we are left with only the figures in the project proposal.

Using those figures, it looks like the artificial field costs less than a third of natural grass to maintain - \$7500 vs. \$25,000 annually. But – and still using their figures – the \$500,000 replacement cost at 8-10 years for the artificial field cannot be ignored. Dividing \$500,000 by ten we get \$50,000 per year. With that + \$7500, the maintenance cost for artificial turf is more than double that of natural grass - \$57,500 vs. \$25,000. In addition I

have seen no projected operational or maintenance costs for any of the related infrastructure. So I see the presentation is flawed at best, disingenuous at worst – and, for me makes all of the presentation’s costs suspect.

Finally there is the question of history. The fields - indeed the entire high school infrastructure - is in dire need of upgrades due to an egregious lack of preventive maintenance over many years. What assurance do we have that the future will be different?

All of the questions above beg detailed answers: The taxpayers deserve to know what they are in for financially over the coming years. I ask that you carefully consider the financial impact – as carefully as you look at everything else being questioned about this project.

Thank you for listening.

Doug Ruskin

West Tisbury

Presented at MVC public hearing, 2/18/21