

December 22, 2020

Back in the early 1990's the big news on the island was that the Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society trustees needed to a new building to replace the old one (now the Grange Hall). The society and the fair especially had outgrown the site. The Woods' family was willing to make the current Panhandle site available. Many in the Agricultural Society wanted to erect a metal building for the new hall.

I joined some like-minded folk in developing a campaign to bring a New England wooden barn to the site, Eventually, with support from the Ag Society, our group found a classic cow barn in New Hampshire, labeled each piece in place, dismantled it, and then transported the giant tinker toy pieces to the Panhandle site. Many Vineyarders joined in the rebirthing of the barn that houses our annual Agricultural Fair. It was a wise choice made citizens and the Agricultural Society trustees and members - one that fits the character of the island and will for years to come.

I tell this story now because in 2020-21 we face the closure of a critical debate - artificial turf vs. grass fields. Plastic turf is the metal building. We've all read about the cost, the necessity to redo the toxic surface every 8-10 years. We understand that we would be putting plastic into our soil that could have unknown, long-term effects. We know this surface is questionable in its safety for those who use it as well. Grass proponents are in favor of the wooden barn – the classic. We've seen the remarkable improvement in our local fields in the time since the Field Fund has taken over their care. In fact, when I drove to see the soccer fields in the fall, I was shocked to see lush, green grass. Gone were the patches of bare dirt. Now it is a soft, even cushion. I learned this change is due to consistent care and regular cutting.

Our world is changing rapidly and there are many things we don't fully understand. Does fire retardant sprayed on runways at an airport affect the drinking water in nearby wells? Do preservatives and hormones in our food affect our bodies, our health? Do the components of "artificial turf" surfaces migrate into the ground and ultimately contaminate whole areas? How do injuries received on these surfaces heal?

From my experience, I vote for grass. I don't want a metal building, one that will rust and need to be replaced. I choose wood and grass. I want my grandson to skin his knee on grass, not plastic.

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