

In speaking to the DRI - Section 15 - Benefits and Detriments - (A), I wish to highlight that the development of this project AT THE PROPOSED LOCATION OF THE MVRHS CAMPUS IS ESSENTIAL AND ESPECIALLY APPROPRIATE IN VIEW OF THE AVAILABLE ALTERNATIVES ON THE ISLAND OF MARTHA'S VINEYARD.

As you know, our application team is a varied group serving different roles. Yet despite serving in different roles we share the same genuine positive regard for our children and a fierce commitment to their well-being. For those in our public that believe that what occurs outside on our athletics fields is not as important as what occurs in the classroom, we have this to say - this pandemic has crystallized that athletics for many of our children are “must haves” – not simply “nice to have”. The development of the track and field and the surrounding constellation of fields on the MVRHS campus is essential and especially appropriate given that this location serves as the central destination for our students, athletes, and the island-wide community.

The identity of our athletes as Vineyarders comes with preparing and performing on campus and is consistent with building school spirit, so supportive of athletes’ emotional health. Many improvements have already occurred in the building as led by staff and students to beautify the hallways of MVRHS and the recent re-branding of our high school, led by our MVRHS parents evidences the desire in our community to support the pride, enthusiasm, and engagement of our students.

It is imperative that the Martha’s Vineyard Regional High School provide education, recreational and athletic facilities within the confines of our existing campus. Locating our playing fields right outside our school doors, as most schools do, encourages our students to participate in our extra-curricular offerings.

We have heard from many caring coaches and volunteers who are dedicated to supporting our children’s extra-curricular needs. They have spoken about how our children’s health will greatly benefit from durable, consistent surfaces at the MVRHS campus. We have seen the over 1000 signatures of Islanders who support this project and support its location at the high school. We have heard from 5 of our Island towns, through select boards and town meetings approving the design of the track and synthetic turf infield on the MVRHS campus. To move these proposed facilities to different locations on the island would create challenges for our student athletes’ regarding their transportation and in extending their already long school day.

Over the course of these forums, the issue of student equity has been raised. Student equity is supported through the ease of access regarding the location of their athletic and extra-curricular activities on the MVRHS campus as many of our student athletes rely on school and public transportation to and from the high school. To add the burden of extra travel for many of our student athletes, away from resources such as our athletic trainer and facilities such as locker rooms – does not consider equity.

This has been a difficult journey. The lack of context and perspective from a loud segment of the opposition that doesn’t understand the need for this project as we have presented it – or doesn’t care to understand – detracts from so much good that this project offers. We are adamant about children’s health in regards to these playing fields. As stewards to the many children on our Island, we understand that this project, including its scope, materials, and location is a necessary one.

Thank you again to the Commissioners for your tremendous time, effort, and support that you have bestowed on our children through your review of this project.

Sincerely,
Richard M. Smith Ed.D.
MVPS