

Mount Greylock Regional School District School Committee

Location: Zoom Remote Meeting

Date: December 14, 2020

Time: 5-6 pm Join Zoom Meeting

Special Open Session/Phase II Turf Forum

Agenda

- I. Call to order
- II. Mission: At Mount Greylock Regional School District, our mission is to create a community of learners working together in a safe and challenging learning environment that encourages restorative based processes, respect, inclusive diversity, courtesy, integrity, and responsibility through the high expectations and cooperation resulting in life-long learning and personal growth.
- III. Public Comment regarding Artificial Turf Field
- IV. Motion to adjourn

Called to order at 5pm

Present: Christina, Julia, Michelle, Carrie, Curtis, Steve, Jose

Also present: Jake, numerous members of the community

**1: Dave Armet: For:**

Hello my name is Dave Armet. I am a physical therapist with almost 30 years of experience evaluating and treating a variety of injuries and physical dysfunctions.

As the debate about this field project has gone on there have been concerns raised about increased risk of injury associated with turf surfaces. I am here today to completely dispel those concerns. Studies often cited come from Division 1 college football or European professional soccer but none of them are conclusive enough to stop athletes from playing on these fields. Professional teams would never risk their multimillion dollar investments in players if they knew the field surface was contributing to injury. There is just too much at stake financially. To date there are no definitive and conclusive studies indicating increased risk of injury from playing on a turf surface.

But let's stay focused on our local field situation. What is very definitive and conclusive is the surface we have been subjecting our children to at MG is an absolute atrocity. It has led to injury...I've been a spectator and seen them happen. I've been the therapist to treat many of these injuries. Injuries caused by running on a rutted uneven surface. Injuries caused by daily practice on a grass surface that feel more like concrete. Injuries caused by foot placement in what could only be referred to as "field potholes".

Given what the students have been playing on, my professional opinion would be that a turf surface would actually reduce the risk of injury for users of the field. We have seen what happens to grass fields. Even a new grass field in this climate will deteriorate quickly and we will be right back in the same situation of having a surface that contributes to injury.

I would also like to add a brief mention about concussions. In the inevitable event of an athlete hitting their head as they fall to the ground during a game or practice, I would much rather have that surface be turf with more shock absorption and cushion than the rock hard surface that currently exists.

So the choice from a safety standpoint is very simple. Building a turf field is the best choice for student safety to reduce the risk of injury.

**2: Anne O'Connor: Against:**

Thank you for hosting this forum.

The main point I wish to make with my comments today is to urge the committee to take a step back and widen the scope of what is under consideration. Rather than zeroing in on what kind of new field to build, the committee should take advantage of its own relative newness in order to make a fresh start. I urge members to examine the larger question of what is needed for a successful athletics and wellness program, and what makes sense for the school as a whole, now and into the future.

Why pick an expensive, short-lived product whose main purpose is early spring access to a playing field, when cross-country skiing and track are two of the most popular programs at the school? Properly maintained organic grass fields for the entire campus would provide close to the same amount of playing hours, with far fewer financial, environmental, and health impacts. With my written comments, I will submit a letter I wrote to the Berkshire Eagle in September 2019, in which I viewed the project through the lens of climate change. Today, we should also consider how the landscape will change after Covid-19. The next ten to twenty years will bring substantial challenges that will require tremendous resilience and creativity from us all. Rather than locking us into an expensive, outdated, technological solution for one small problem within the overall picture, the district should instead focus on developing, diversifying, and preserving its many assets. Mt Greylock has a huge, beautiful campus. I urge the committee to pause the artificial turf project and more broadly examine its options and possibilities. Thank you.

**3. Suk Namkoong: For:**

Turf fields may have an increased risk with regards to injury with contact sports but I find that does not necessarily correlate with our school here. What is a much bigger risk is the overuse injury that would occur with rescheduling games and practices and compressing those schedules.

**4. Huff Templeton: Against:**

Our PILOT fund, or gift, provides a unique opportunity to invest in programming not infrastructure. Let the School Council give recommendations to establish innovative curricula in areas that will make our students intellectually, physically, and emotionally stronger.

I parent two MGRS graduates. One daughter took an Arabic class as an independent study with Principal McDonald a few years ago giving her an advantage in college. Another daughter took concurrent classes at Williams and later managed and tutored for the CLIA tutoring program.

Informal initiatives and innovative programs like these could become more formalized and widespread.

Are we investing enough in Theatre and the performing arts, which caters to the LGBTQIAP community?

Is our anti-racism training comprehensive?

Are we in compliance with Williamstown Town Meeting on Articles 36 & 37?

Are we being ethical and creative, as opposed to simply legal, with our IEP and 504 plan students?

These PILOT funds are not restricted to maintenance as WES's were. We can borrow at historically low rates for major infrastructure improvements like the fields and pay for preventative maintenance the way every other school does, through annual budgeting. Our rate of return on the PILOT funds is higher than our borrowing rate. Why spend it down on financeable items?

When WES had HVAC problems there was a huge incentive to put off maintenance due to the high rate of return on the PILOT. WES is considered a success only because we aren't considering the programs that were jettisoned such as the full-day Side by Side and Mandarin. We may not have major maintenance repair costs at WES but we also don't have inclusive universal preschool.

This is not free money and it shouldn't be treated as such. We have no obligation to future taxpayers to preclude maintenance expenses on our buildings. We have an obligation to students and parents to make this school the best it can possibly be.

Use the PILOT like R&D funds. The highest opportunity costs are not investing in our children when we have the chance.

Decouple the field decision from the PILOT fund. New fields of any kind are either worth the cost of borrowing, or they aren't. Balance the total cost of ownership, environmental and playing time considerations. This is your decision alone and not that of other Town boards and leaders.

Think about traditionally marginalized groups and what you can do to improve their situation over the next 30 years. Great schools attract new taxpayers.

#### **5. Al Terranova: For:**

The simple truth is that grass, be it "natural" or organic does not solve the problem. As an example; about 21/2 years ago the School Committee allotted \$55,000 to "fix" the John Allen Field. Over the next several years we spent another fifteen to twenty thousand dollars on the fields. This does not include the \$ 30,000 for the organic field. That is over \$100,000 in three years and the fields remain unplayable. What is the solution?; "build another John Allen Field. " We in public service are often called to task for not running government like a business. What business solves problems with solutions that do not work?

## **6. Chris Malone: Against:**

My name is Chris Malone and I'm the parent of twin girls in the freshman class. I am also currently the head coach of the Boys' Cross-Country team.

First and foremost, thank you for your collective efforts regarding the proposed athletic infrastructure improvements. I know it's not an easy process or decision.

I can understand why people support the artificial turf field. For instance, people may find it moreplayable" in inclement weather conditions and it may be to Mount Greylock's advantage if consolidation decisions need to be made in the future regarding Berkshire County schools. These are valid arguments.

However, I oppose the artificial turf field for the following two reasons:

1. Environmental: There is potential that toxins and contaminants may leech into the soil and nearby water supply. Even with the use of BrockFILL instead of crumb rubber, there is still the plastic carpet to contend with, as well as the unknown environmental impact of BrockFILL. Although the company representatives may downplay these risks, I would be skeptical as I think they're more focused on making a sale. Despite claims by the architect that the field is recyclable, I understand there is currently no recycling facility in the US.

2. Financial: I understand an artificial turf field will need to be replaced in 8 to 12 years at an estimated cost of \$400K to \$600K. These costs will be passed on to the taxpayers. We shouldn't expect that Williams College will foot the bill.

By deciding to proceed with the artificial turf field, I feel as if we'd be passing on these environmental and financial risks to those to follow us in 10 years. If I didn't think the environmental risk was significant or if I didn't care much about a financial burden on those in the future, then I'd probably support the artificial turf field. However, I do think these risks are significant enough that I'm opposed. I'm afraid there will be a day of reckoning and we're "kicking the can down the road " to those in the future.

If the School Committee decides to proceed with the artificial turf field, I ask that it do so in the most environmentally-friendly way as possible. I also ask that it try to limit financial obligations to taxpayers in the future.

Finally, if the artificial turf field is approved, I ask that you consider including a track. Approximately one out of every six students at Mount Greylock runs either cross-country or track. I'm sure the Nordic Skiing team would also use it. Students from other sports could also use it as well as the general public.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

## 7. Brian Gil: For:

From Brian Gill, MG Phys Ed. and coach  
Brief summary of comments for school committee

Many positives for athletics

- Consistent playing surface
- Avoiding mud season
- Play in extended seasons (Nov/Dec)
- No need to rent other local turf fields
- Generating revenue from rental of our turf field

Based on studies related to athletic injury, risk attenuation is **NOT** a factor in this decision.

A natural grass playing field, while wonderful, would **NOT** benefit phys ed students as we are not allowed on the one game field we have now. **A natural grass field would actually limit the benefit to the smallest of groups.**

- football (if we have it), soccer, and lacrosse

With the installation of a turf field athletics could gain hundreds of student hours of use per year **AND Physical Education students could gain thousands of student hours of use per year.**

- Roughly 350 daily Phys. Ed. students might conservatively gain 7-10 extra weeks of days of outside time over the course of a year.
- Poor weather, shoulder season, and even winter freeze would not inhibit outdoor PE
- Liability often dictates when/how we get outside in PE. Turf mitigates this.
- Five minutes after a rainstorm we can be outside on turf.
- During a month and a half of mud season, we can be outside on turf.
- Winter on warmer days (like the past 3 weeks) when the ground is frozen or water sits on top of frozen ground, we can be outside on turf.
- Football, soccer, cross-country, lacrosse, baseball, softball, and track & field benefit from turf. (running sports benefit because mud/wet hinder any kind of safe speed work, hurdle work, and plyometric/jumping work).

## 8. Wendy Penner: Against:

Taking the time to get it right is important to the long-term health and well-being of our district-do not be rushed into making a decision about a big capital project without having all the information you need. Please be mindful of the danger that a poorly executed process will lower overall trust in the school committee and in the administration making your jobs even more difficult.

Has a comprehensive lifecycle analysis been conducted that takes into account all the knowable information about what is needed for a new athletics field, and the environmental, financial and public health tradeoffs of grass versus turf? A lifecycle cost analysis should consider the cost of disposing of

and replacing the turf at the end of 10-12 years, and a strategy for how that cost would be covered. The disposal and replacement costs must be considered before we commit to this path.

Mass DPH has a warning page about artificial turf last updated June of 2020. Are you willing to take on the risks that playing on turf entails? I'm mindful of our district's reliance on wells and very sensitive to any possibility that runoff could cause water quality problems. We just learned earlier this month that a chemical found in car tires that runoff from chemicals in tires and crumb rubber on turf fields is killing Coho salmon "I don't think anyone could have anticipated this" said an environmental engineer commenting on the study. We can anticipate.

Suitable alternatives exist to a turf field! The Toxics Use Reduction Institute at UMass Lowell has published two case studies that show how organically managed playing fields in Springfield and Marblehead have performed as well as artificial turf and much better than conventionally managed natural grass athletic fields. These organic fields stand up to heavy rain, regular sports and community use and can be played on for a full season with no time lost at the beginning of the year waiting for them to dry out. They are not contaminated with chemicals. The soil and grass are restored with organic products and gradually strengthened to become a healthy resilient playing surface. Instead of ecological harm, they contribute to a healthy ecosystem and increased biodiversity.

Members of this committee have previously discarded concerns from the community members as "white noise" and dismissed people as not caring about what is best for the kids when they questioned a turf field option. I vigorously reject this characterization and ask you to take your responsibility of doing better seriously. Take the time to collect information to assess needs, costs, Lifecycle costs, environmental and health impacts, and weigh the views of diverse stakeholders. I know you have the capacity to do a better job and look forward to following your progress and supporting you in getting the information, and the resources you need to support the well-being of our most precious resource, our children. Williamstown

**9. Thomas Ostheimer: For:**

I am in support of the turf field for the following abbreviated reasons: one, our current field is inadequate and unsafe; two, a turf field would lessen student/anxiety created by questions whether or not game will be played, and if not when will it be rescheduled; third, a turf field will allow the school to host both pre and postseason tournaments; and fourth, given such a large number of students who play sports at Mount Greylock, a turf field would be a real boost for them during these trying times.

**10. Molly Polk: Against:**

Good afternoon, members of the School Committee and Dr. McCandless. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. In my teaching, in my parenting, in my work as a colleague and community member, I try to embody the idea that while we may go far alone, we can go further together. As I reflect at this juncture on the issues that are before us at today's forum, I can't help but asking, "How can we come together and go further? How can we model for the young people of our community a way forward through a complex situation—a way forward that is transparent and inclusive?" I have great confidence that everyone speaking here this evening believes that their perspective represents what is best for the students of Mt. Greylock Regional School. What dismays me tremendously, though, is that there has

not been, to date, a meaningful, sustained effort on the part of the School Committee to bring diverse perspectives together to investigate-and engage in dialogue-about the concerns pertaining to the Williams College gift that have been sparked by the Phase II Subcommittee's recommendation to use the gift for an artificial turf field.

At other times over the last year and a half, I have submitted statements about the value of exploring options for natural grass field maintenance, as have others with much greater expertise than I. I trust that the newly elected School Committee will thoroughly review all of the documentation that has been collected. It was thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Phase II Subcommittee that options for an artificial turf field have been put on the table, but I urge the School Committee to recognize the critical importance of bringing the community together to explore and debate more than just this singular option for our students. Some argue that this process has gone on long enough and that all of the options have already been weighed, but I would ask: by whom? A project of this nature, size, and cost does take time, and, to get it right-really right-so that we can go as far as possible as a community, there need to be more voices invited and welcomed into dialogue, and lingering, unanswered questions about the financial, environmental, and health costs associated with artificial turf need to be addressed honestly and substantively. Thank you for your time.

**11. Malcolm Smith: For:**

I am Malcolm Smith of Williamstown, a constituent, a voter, parent of a student.

Thanks to ALL for carrying water for our community; pro, con and particularly the School Committee.

Tis is my first-time addressing SC on this subject. I'm part of a "quiet majority" in favor of turf, and particularly of the SC making a decision.

I urge School Committee to decide soon, and decide to go forward with turf.

I echo the pro-turf arguments that I've heard now so many times for these many months:

- too many months of the school year grass doesn't work. We need a choice between grass and turf. Please give us the turf option.
- maintaining grass isn't cheap either.
- it's safe. Getting kids and community members outside has tremendous health value that outweighs other health concerns.
- Environmental concerns have been addressed repeatedly over this long process. I'm devoted to conservation causes, and a single turf field is just fine.
- spend the money to benefit the kids and the community; there's ample reserve remaining even then

Stop delaying, looking, considering, studying — that costs money, too. Please make the decision soon and move on to other matters.

Please move forward to get a turf field.

## **12. Bridget Spann: Against:**

Thank you School Committee for your work on this issue.

I am Bridget Spann and the parent of an 8th grade child who plays sports at Mount Greylock. I support investing in quality athletic playing fields as I recognize that sports and physical education are important healthy outlets for youth and I agree that the current fields are not adequately maintained or safe. I remain concerned, however, that playability is considered by some the single most important factor to the exclusion of other critical considerations, which then leads to identifying a single artificial turf field as a need rather than as a want; this is like considering driveability as the single most important factor and then purchasing a Hummer to allow for travel in Berkshire County in almost any weather conditions, while not factoring in important considerations such as its life cycle cost and environmental impact, factors that steer most of us into buying other vehicles. Rather than spending an exorbitant amount on a single artificial turf field, these funds could be better utilized to invest in a new natural grass field that could be managed organically, as well as a track; remaining funds could be used to improve the existing grass fields through organic management. The substitution of BrockFill for crumb rubber does not allay the serious financial and environmental concerns about the artificial turf proposal. In addition to the study by the Toxics Use Reduction Institute, multiple other independent studies, meaning those not conducted by the artificial turf industry, have found that in nearly all scenarios artificial turf fields have higher life-cycle costs than natural turf for an equivalent area.

Traverse Landscape Architects, which provided consultation to the Phase II subcommittee, represented an artificial turf field as the best return on our investment. How? by using a "cost per hours of use" projection that has been written about in Forbes magazine, under the heading "How taxpayers get fooled on the cost of an artificial turf field". In its July 2019 presentation, Traverse also neglected to include any information about the significant disposal costs that our community would incur when replacing the infill or the artificial grass carpet. Traverse also referenced a recycling option for the plastic grass carpet that does not exist in our country, with the result that tons of waste from artificial turf fields is piling up because it can't be recycled and nobody wants to pay for proper disposal.

In this same Return on Investment chart, Traverse included a \$500,000 replacement cost for a natural grass field after 10 years, a figure that the two organic turf specialists with whom I consulted could make no sense of; after improving the soil chemistry to support the growth of the roots of the grass, one would never want to rip out a properly maintained organic grass field and replace it 10 years later. To be clear, in advocating for an organically managed natural grass field, I am not talking about laying down sod.

Communities including Springfield and Northampton have experienced great success with organic management of natural grass playing fields. Their athletic fields have met their expectations for playability and cost while also being environmentally-friendly, safe, and healthy. These organically managed fields are available for more days of play because as the organic matter in the soil is increased, the fields can handle more wetness than conventional grass fields, which means fewer canceled practices and games.

As you move forward with your decision-making process, at a time when professional athletes are expressing a preference for natural grass due to their concerns about increased risk of injuries, I ask that you utilize a sound financial analysis of the life cycle costs associated with an artificial turf field compared to the costs of an organically managed natural grass field and share with the community what the additional days of play available from an artificial turf field is going to cost us.

Thank you for your serious consideration of this important matter. Bridget Spann

### **13. Ali Carter: For:**

I am hoping that as you think about the information presented tonight you're able to answer these key questions, presented along with how I've been thinking about them as a member of the School Committee over the past two years:

- First, can we make grass work? I think we should start with the assumption that grass is the ideal option. My understanding is that this is not realistic for several reasons: lack of a water source for irrigation, poor drainage, high annual maintenance costs, and our challenging weather conditions that lead to unsafe playing conditions and cancelled games.

- Is a Brockfill turf field unsafe? The data say no, from a temperature perspective and a body impact perspective. Regarding chemical exposure, our kids are exposed to a level of toxicity every day through things like furniture, rugs, car interiors, food packaging, and makeup. I do not feel it's fair to vilify environmentally minded artificial turf, free of the chemicals flagged as of concern, while overlooking the other exposure in our lives.

- What is the true net environmental impact of a turf field, in context and in direct comparison to a well-maintained grass field? In a time where 70% of carbon emissions come from the oil and gas industry, and nearly everything we own or do comes at some cost to the environment, we need to have an honest conversation about the environmental impacts of a Brockfill field. I find it hard to reconcile being okay with the high environmental impact of our cars, clothes, food, coffee, and lawn maintenance while vilifying something that has comparatively low environmental impact and helps our kids be more active and healthy, and builds critical life skills.

- Finally, how are other schools balancing field costs with expensive regular maintenance needs? Many schools that do not have millions of dollars of gift money have turf fields. How are they making it work?

For financial, safety, environmental, and health reasons, I am in favor of a Brockfill turf field. I hope you feel the same. Thank you.

**14. Ken Kuttner: Against:**

Williamstown Resident, father of a 2013 Greylock grad.

Two general points.

The first relates to the environmental consequences.

An artificial turf field is an environmental disaster, to put it bluntly. For one thing, its GHG emissions far exceed those from a natural grass field. Using data from published studies, I calculated that an artificial turf field of this size would emit 527 tons of GHG over 10 years. Maintaining a natural grass field does involve some GHG emissions, due to mowing and the like; but the grass also sequesters some CO<sub>2</sub>. On net, published estimates indicate that the emissions over 10 years would be about 31.4 tons - only 6% of what comes from the artificial turf field - or if you prefer, 1,861 trees. I'd be happy to share those calculations with anyone who is interested, by the way.

Waste disposal is the other environmental concern. Ultimately, an artificial turf field is a massive piece of plastic, and there is currently no economically viable way of recycling it - in fact, there is a worldwide glut of quote "recyclable" plastic right now, and virtually none of it is being recycled. Our used artificial turf field would ultimately go into a landfill, where it would remain for millenia.

The second general point has to do with finances.

Related to the previous comment: the estimates we received does not include the substantial cost of disposing of the worn-out field, which happens every 8-10 years.

And another problem with financial calculations presented to justify the artificial turf field is that they treat current and future costs as equivalent. Because most of the artificial field's costs are up-front, this stacks the deck against the natural grass field, whose costs are spread out over time. All of my introductory economics students know this is wrong: the correct way to put costs and benefits on an equal footing is to calculate the present value, downweighting those future costs by an appropriate financial rate of return. Correcting this error significantly increases the cost of the artificial turf field, relative to the natural grass alternative.

**15. Rob Abel: For:**

Hello. My name is Rob Abel and I live at 323 Hopper Road in Williamstown.

I am a financial advisor at MountainOne Investments, where we manage over three quarters of a billion dollars for individuals and institutions, mostly right here in the Berkshires.

To be fully transparent, I have three children at Mt. Greylock that would certainly use and benefit from a turf field. That said, we have heard from teachers and administrators over the past few years that every kid would benefit from having turf available at Mt. Greylock.

One of the major concerns that has been raised is the financial impact that the turf project

would have on future school budgets and tax payers. This is of course a legitimate concern and one that needs to be reviewed.

Here are the facts to consider:

A conservative estimate of the Current Williams Gift amount is approximately \$4 million

The Phase 2 Project cost is about \$2.8 million

This figure includes \$500k for a track and \$1.2 million for a turf field with the upgraded and more expensive NON crumb rubber fill 12 years to turf replacement, although there are fields that go as long 15-20 years and, a Replacement cost of \$500,000.

To get a sense of how this scenario could play out, and using the figures I just mentioned, I went back 12 years and replicated what would have happened if the turf field was built in 2008, and today (12 years later), we were at the point of needing to replace the field. Next, I used the ACTUAL performance results of the Williams Endowment over that time to see what the school committee could do now with this large impending cost.

Now, before I move on to how things worked out, I want to be sure people don't think I am "cherry-picking" a better than average time period in the Williams Endowment history. In fact, the average annual return of 7.84% from 2008 to 2019 is actually well below the Endowment's 10 year average of 11.2% and the Endowment's 20 year average of 9.1%. Furthermore, this time period started with two negative years, including down 18% in year two!

The 12 years I am using includes the great recession of '08-'09, includes Hurricanes Sandy, Irma & Maria. It includes the Russian invasion of Crimea, it includes the California wildfires, and of course includes the Covid-19 global pandemic we are in the midst of right now. As I said, this was a below average 12 year period.

Back to the Turf field that would benefit so many.... If this project was completed in 2008, at the height of one of the worst stock market periods in history, the residual value of the Williams Gift (that being the of money amount remaining after building the administration building, upgrading athletic fields for title 9 and ADA compliance, and installing a new turf field for the students at Mt. Greylock) would have grown from \$1.2 million in 2008 to \$2,752,707 in those

12 years. That's right, over 2.7 million dollars! Today, 12 years later, there would be more than enough to cover the costs of replacing the turf field that provided value to each and every Mt. Greylock student to come through its doors during that time.

While past results never guarantee future performance, this example clearly illustrates that the Williams Gift can not only upgrade our athletic facilities for all and build a much needed turf field for all at Mt. Greylock today, it can sustain that field for far into the future.

This is not an opinion, this is just MATH.

Thank you.

**16. Erin Keiser-Clark: Against:  
(typed by secretary from video)**

Hearing what people are saying, important to have facts clear. We do not have an organic grass field at the high school, that has been mis-stated repeatedly, that has concerned me, that's an untruth, that's not the model we are being asked to consider as an alternative.

I also want to share that I have the perception that I'm part of the quiet majority in the town who has not felt comfortable with the process. I understand parents, youth, kids on the sports team, full range of taxpayers not comfortable with the process, who feel it has been centralized in conversation around those who want the turf, haven't had an open process where all can feel comfortable sharing what concerns and perceptions on what our tax dollars will be used for and what our kids will play on, and precisely who will benefit and how.

My greatest concern and hope is that this new slate of people on our committee will be inclusive and share with us options. A few years back our selectboard asked for advice on how to bring up major builds, and the advice was to provide options to the community, let them participate in the process. I am asking you to please let us participate in the process and allow us to see a comparison.

**17. Jim Easton: For:**

Hello. My name is Jim Easton and I am the Golf Course Superintendent of Taconic Golf Club in Williamstown.

I am speaking tonight in favor of an artificial turf surface and feel obligated to highlight some of the inherent challenges and difficulties in maintaining grass athletic surfaces in our region.

1.) The largest hurdle is rooted in biology.

Spring sports are often scheduled to begin well before soil temperatures are warm enough for the grass plants to fully break dormancy.

A similar pattern emerges during the latter portion of the fall sports season.

Cool season grasses need to be fully growing and vigorous to support sustained use by student athletes, regardless of fertility source.

A new grass field with modern drainage and irrigation would still fail to thrive during the shoulder seasons. Basic plant and soil biology presents an enormous obstacle in producing a safe, reliable grass playing surface in our region.

2.) An often overlooked aspect of maintaining a grass surface well is the countless hours behind the scenes performing maintenance.

A safe and reliable surface requires a regimented program of cultural inputs and an active rotation scheme.

If irrigation is installed, there is a considerable amount of oversight required to ensure its

performing as intended.

It's unclear to me if the school district will have resources available to provide the level of professional care a new grass field would require.

It's my opinion that an artificial playing surface would be an incredible asset for the school district's students.

It would largely eliminate the need to constantly fight the local climate and keep our students active on a much more consistent level.

Thank you.

**18. Dr Nick Wright: Against:**

Just a few years ago there was urgent concern over levels of perchlorate in the wells supplying water to the MGRS. That problem was solved, yet today the School Committee is considering the installation of an artificial turf field containing a variety of volatile organic compounds as well as heavy metals, including lead. Some of these compounds have been found to be carcinogenic.

The concentration of these compounds will vary by source of the discarded rubber from which the artificial field is constructed. The degree of exposure to these materials cannot easily be estimated, yet we would ask our children and grandchildren to play on them for sport as well as for physical exercise. Outcomes of these exposures may be long term, as well as short. Unfortunately, no reliable long term studies are available. None of the short term studies show that playing on artificial turf reduces the incidence of leg, knee and ankle injury, although one peer reviewed experimental study of college football players found a statistically significant increase in knee ligament injury in the artificial turf group. The control group in this study played on natural grass. This study has been dismissed because the study population was college age, not high school, but the age differences are small. The study should be repeated among high school students, but, as it stands, the study suggests how little we know about the effects of artificial turf on athletic health.

All things considered, the prudent course, in my opinion, is to reject artificial turf, and instead, improve and then maintain carefully the existing natural grass.

Thank you for your attention.  
Nicholas H.Wright, MD, MPH

**19. Talia Cappadona and Julius Munemo: For:**

Hello school committee members and everyone else watching.

My name is Talia Cappadona and I'm on the girls soccer and lacrosse teams.

And I'm Julius Munemo. I do boys soccer, and I'm gonna start our statement off. As both athletes and members of this subcommittee we cannot stress how important a cause the prospect of a turf field has

become for us. I know the fields at Greylock are where I made some of my favorite memories. Be it during my own games, or watching other students play, the current athletic setup at Greylock has a special place in my heart.

And that's why it's so important to us, even as seniors, that this school uses the capital gift money, or at least part of it, on the construction of a synthetic turf playing surface. While the nostalgia and memories filled in the current game field are great, the field itself has long since had its day. Covid has tremendously affected our last soccer seasons, and left us with a feeling of unfinished business here at Greylock.

Our abridged senior seasons here at Greylock have left us with a certain perspective that we did not previously have. When we joined the subcommittee as Sophomores, a shiny new field sounded like the perfect remedy to the bounces, bruises, and blunders of highschool soccer. This past season put that in check. The field was not the most important aspect of this season. When it boils down to it, the people you surround yourself with, your team and your coaches, define the year for you, especially for me. The heart of the athletic experience lies in our teammates and our coaches. Understanding that my time on these fields is over there is nothing I want more than a synthetic turf field for the Greylock teams to come. They helped us through this year, I feel it is the least I can do, as their captain, to help them through the foreseeable future.

A more reliable playing surface will provide those students with a blanket to protect them against the unreliable world that we live in. Bidding now would help ensure that this school's students can make some of the same memories that we've been lucky enough to make—for years to come.

**20. Michael Nixon: Against:**

Thank you to the committee members for your time.

I am all for outdoor pursuits, physical and outdoor education.

In addition to the environmental issues already mentioned being serious and legitimate concerns, my major focus and concern is the financial. I totally understand there is a need to address the state of the playing fields and funds should be used from the Williams college donation. But not 2.5 million.

The generous gift from a Williams donor was for two words: educational enrichment. So why the excessive funding for one area of the curriculum? Surely soccer and lacrosse players will be the main beneficiaries, a fraction of the student body. Again, I am all for outdoor pursuits.

Would it not be more aligned with the goals of this large gift to have an expenditure that benefited a larger amount of students beyond dedicated athletes?

Furthermore, on the financial concern, I taught at a public school in Australia where they installed artificial turf (because of an ongoing drought situation) but the maintenance and replacement costs far exceeded forecasts. So by all means, improve the fields as much as possible, but not with 2.5 million. Thank you.

**21. Peter Harrison: For:**

- Williamstown resident
  - President of Williamstown Soccer Club
- a. When significant time and money is invested in building and maintaining grass fields, the tendency is that field usage will become more restrictive as it will be “saved for games”. This results in a better experience for the 200 kids playing organized sports but likely no benefit to the wider school population or the broader community. We need a solution that will increase usage not further restrict it.
  - b. The weather in Berkshire county is a real issue. While the weather in 2020 has been quite mild all year, frequently field conditions become unplayable early in November and in 2018 and 2019 the start of Youth Spring League season was delayed until the start of May due to late winter storms and freezing conditions. Conditions were poor at even at WES whose fields are actually much better quality than MG.
    - a. Both the local pick up soccer group and Ajax youth soccer club (in normal times) make use Williams College turf fields through the winter. Basically the only thing that prevents athletic activity is lying snow. The moment it melts, the space is usable.

If we lived in the Carolinas, or Virginia or even New Jersey I don't think there would be much of a debate, but we don't. We live in Williamstown, on the exposed side of a mountain with a climate that is not conducive to grass playing fields almost 2/3s of the school year. A turf field will not only extend the amount of time for athletic outdoor use, but it will actually benefit all the kids in school and have greater value to the community as a whole.

Thank you.

**22. Mark McDermott: Unify: A field with a track:**

1) I wish to advocate primarily for a field of either sort being constructed as soon as possible and I ask that it include a modern, rubberized track as soon as that can be added.

I view this as an excellent use of funds. I also view it as a community resource. Far more than simply a few sports teams will use it. Many community members of all ages of will walk, play and gather there. As we emerge from the depths of the pandemic, we will need places to exercise, mingle and commune. Getting outside is healthy. Please authorize the expenditure, and please plan for a track. This is well worth the money.

2) While I would be happy with an excellent grass or artificial field, there cannot be any doubt that an artificial surface will have far greater use from November through April. If you need proof, look at the fields at Williams College. You cannot find higher quality grass fields than theirs -- yet you do not see them being used much or at all by college or community kids in organized or spontaneous play during those months. You can, however, observe, a lot of use of the artificial surfaces during those months.

3) I do not believe that the potential direct health hazards of artificial surfaces are high enough to warrant ruling it out as a surface. Very reasonable questions have been raised about the safety profile of artificial surfaces-- however, given the specifics of the planned use, I do not feel that any hazards that may exist are likely enough or significant enough to weigh heavily in the committee's decision. If the committee decides to proceed with an artificial rather than a natural surface, I would ask the committee to use a product vetted to be amongst the more environmentally friendly options now available.

Thanks for all your work on this issue!

Marc McDermott, MD EdM

**23. Blair Dils: For:**

My name is Blair Dils and I have been an English teacher, part time PE instructor, and soccer coach for 21 years. Our commitment has always been to give our students the best possible educational experience that they can have, and the construction of a high quality turf field honors that commitment. When the community approved the construction and renovation of a new high school in 2016, it showed its clear commitment to students by creating 21st century science labs; high level art spaces; a beautiful theater; and one of the best gym spaces in the county. But the quality of the fields are substandard and—quite honestly—embarrassing. In 2017 my soccer players chose not to host a tournament game at our school--their home field--because of the poor condition of our game field. Grass fields don't maintain themselves, and the labor and financial resources needed to maintain grass playing surfaces on a yearly basis will not be sustainable.

Opponents of the turf field would like townspeople to think that turf fields are unsafe. This is a disinformation campaign designed to muddy the truth just enough so that people who may not have been able to study the matter closely will not want to--"take a risk"--and support the building of a turf field. There isn't risk here. Turf fields are reliable, multi-faceted, widely accepted, and preferred by coaches and athletes. I am hard-pressed to believe that hundreds of high schools, prep schools, municipalities, the MIAA, colleges, and universities would assume the liability of installing an unsafe playing surface if turf fields were actually as unsafe as opponents say they are.

There's a reason we no longer play lacrosse with wooden sticks, protect our football players with leather helmets, or use hand-stitched leather soccer balls. They are outdated. The turf field is the modern playing surface. We have an obligation to bring all of our programs into the 21st century and do what is best for our PE students and our student-athletes. Given our location and our resources, building a turf field is the right thing to do.

**24. Hugh Daley: For a 1.5 million endowment:**

I am speaking tonight to ask the School Committee to prioritize the set up of a \$1.5M building endowment fund for Mount Greylock. The Williamstown Selectboard, Finance Committee, and the Lanesborough Selectboard all support the idea.

In 2017, the District agreed to transfer the cost of the parking lot from the Williams Gift into the Mount Greylock building project. We did that to free up money in the Williams Gift for a building endowment fund. We also did that knowing it would increase the total debt service of the project which, in turn, increased each Town's tax rate. The general idea was that our cost of funds (about 3%) would be less than our investment return (probably 7%), which would create earnings that could be used to finance capital needs without further tax increases to the Towns.

This is the critical point. We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to have investment earnings, not taxes, secure the future capital maintenance of our school. We are beyond fortunate to have this opportunity. Let's not squander it.

After you've established the building endowment, I would allocate the remaining money into "have-to's" and "want-to's". The Title IX and ADA compliance are "have-to's". Your "want-to's" are the adds like a track or turf field. Please make sure your future bids will give you the detail you need to decide between the "have-to's" and "want-to's". I believe our goal is a lifetime of fitness for all our students. We want our infrastructure to offer that opportunity to the broadest number of students at the most efficient cost possible.

Please protect our investment in our school, please honor the burden already being borne by taxpayers to create the building endowment fund, and please allow this investment in our District's future to grow for the benefit of all for years to come.

Please set aside \$1.5M into a building endowment fund.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Hugh M. Daley  
Member, Board of Selectmen - Williamstown, MA

**25. Joe Finnegan: For:**

Hi - Joe Finnegan- 91 NW Hill Rd Wtown - we moved to town 15 years ago and I was quickly drafted to be a youth soccer and youth lacrosse coach for several years - we spent many great afternoons spring and fall running around the fields of Wtown from WES to Mount Greylock - my recollection is that depending on the season there are 7-10 natural grass fields in use at the high school and that all of those fields, due to the weather, are unusable from approx Nov 15th – April 15th - that is 50% of the school year -and if I understand correctly , the turf field that is under consideration today would utilize approx 1.5- 2 acres of a 110 acre campus and would not replace any of the grass fields that are currently in use - so when completed, the turf field would take up less than 2 % of the total acreage of the campus and would account for at most 12.5% of the playing field space at MGRHS with the other 87.5% of the playing fields still natural grass (and dirt )-For me- It's all about the kids- I think we owe it to the families

of Williamstown to build this turf field, and give them the opportunity to get outside and play - year round - Thank you for your kind consideration !

**26. Keith Taft: Against (did not speak when was his turn, emailed for comments):**

The injury rate is much higher for artificial turf and grass takes out carbon dioxide as well as toxins and pollutants from the air and replaces it with oxygen.

**27. Jonathan Igoe: For (did not speak when was his turn, emailed for comments):**

I urge you to move forward on a turf field because of the opportunity it offers students and members of the community throughout the year to play sports and to be active. I have expressed this opinion already and firmly believe two things:

1. Williamstown needs more field space
2. Turf fields are the most usable and flexible spaces for the greatest number of people

Every fall and spring for the past 16 years I have lined the soccer fields at WES. We compete for space with soccer and lacrosse in the spring, and have poor quality grass that is overused by students and families year round. Students love playing on the turf at Williams because it is a surface that works, not only in rain, ice, snow and cold weather, but also in a way that makes students feel more confident in their abilities. We sometimes have shared the turf space at Williams with other groups and seeing a hundred youth athletes working out on a turf field in conditions that would normally prevent play is inspiring.

At this moment, on December 13, there is a group of high school students, wearing masks, playing soccer on the WES fields. The fields are muddy. They have been overplayed on by students at WES, by children from the Youth Center, and, like this group, students from the community looking for some way to get outside and play in the months from November to March. Once the snow falls, it will no longer be possible to play on these fields, whereas a turf field could be plowed and made usable. Please support our children and make use of this opportunity to approve a turf field.

Motion to adjourn at 6pm by Michelle, seconded by Curtis, passes 7-0.

Notes taken by Steven Miller (Secretary)

Approved 12.22.20