

Mount Greylock Regional School District School Committee

Location: Zoom Remote Meeting

Date: December 14, 2020

Time: 7-8 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. Presentations
- IV. Questions from the School Committee V. Motion to adjourn

Called to order at 7pm

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

Also present: Jake, numerous members of the community

Heard from community earlier (5pm meeting), John Skavlem and Stephanie Boyd will present on two general viewpoints and for the committee to ask questions. Fifteen minutes each then questions.

Stephanie: Thanks for opportunity to speak and commitment to the issue and all the work. Question trying to address is whether we want artificial or natural turf, been thinking about this for awhile, might not be the question want to address. Share my thoughts and framework on how to move forward, spotlight some issues community has had.

Fundamental question: need a strategic infrastructure plan for athletic and physical education programs for next 10-20 years, rational approach with well-crafted plan.

Lot of new people since last conversations, in the midst of the pandemic, uncertain financial future, drops in enrollment. When I look at issues look at pros/cons. Financial, performance, health, environment, community desires/needs. Shows map of fields.

Traverse said artificial has a lower cost per playable hours. Important to use 2250 as playable hours for artificial vs 500 or so for natural. Need to look at present value dollars. Using consultant numbers (I think understate artificial and overstate natural). Over 25 years artificial costs about \$200,000 more, but with net present value more like \$400,000 over life-time. Should recognize paying a significant premium. Cheaper to maintain artificial but more to put in.

Playability: FAQ: brushing is required once every 100 hours or about once a month, expect 25 hours per week. All year that is 1300 hours, more realistic with school year 650 – 900. Can also go thru how many hours each sport plays. Get around 800-900 ideally. Now cost per playable hour grass is cheaper.

Environment: pictures of nearby field well maintained, these are crumb rubber. Estimates in Europe that each year a field loses 150 pounds of pellets.

Speaker earlier mentioned study last week on how these bits of crumb rubber are killing wildlife.

PFAS chemicals harmful if in water supply. No testing done to make sure these products are not included, no third party validation, no certification. It may not be there, but certification given is not proof.

Talked to supplier about recycling. Said 100% recyclable, but haven't sold such a field, no market for such.

Can do mitigation strategy. Can get rid of crumb rubber and use Brockfill, about \$115,000 more. Possible environmental problems. Could design a system that keeps material on field (\$100,000). Purchase a more recyclable field (another \$80,000). Additional costs around \$300,000. Net difference now \$700,000 to \$800,000.

Natural grass impact: greenhouse gases from mowing, water, fertilizer. Will have natural several fields we will be maintaining anyway. Water is not as critical environmental issue in New England. Propose use sustainable growing methods.

Mass DPH: wash hands after using fields before eating, not for passive recreation (no lying / sitting), heat issues, take off clothes after use.

What do we do with all of this? What is a community solution to the fields issue? Every person who spoke wants to do what is best for kids / community. No debate on that, often difficult to figure out what is best. Value different things differently.

Current solution: condition of existing infrastructure, sports/programs supported, maintenance costs. Then look at future needs: what is the population in 10 years, visioning opportunity. Alternative analysis: how to decide among competing options, community involvement, prioritizing plan. Finally comprehensive financial plan: capital, operating costs, funding sources (fundraising, tax revenue, state, gift).

John: Thanks all. What I did is I took what Joe (Business Manager) did for October 16th, he presented to the school committee to update as to what has happened since Phase II last met back in December 2019. He did a really nice job, used that, embellished in some areas to give more background on the process.

Background: Williams pledged \$5 million for capital needs outside the building project back in 2016, when not used in endowment and grows. At time objective was to deal with MSBA project limitation (fields, parking, district offices).

2017: Williams gift committee established. Part of committee (me, Carrie, Al). Working with Jones Whitsett Architects to look at options. Former grounds director part, so were principal, athletic director. Fields, district office designs proposed, included at the time was an artificial turf. The artificial turf goes back to the original design proposals more than 3 years ago. At the time was regionalization, transition committee established, at the end of the year new architect Perkins Eastman hired.

2018: Transition committee takes over capital gift responsibility. Carrie and Steve are on. Perkins Eastman did design concepts and presented: district office (with garage for storage, cross country ski, bathrooms). Had field options contending with title IX, ADA, part of proposal artificial turf. Working closely with transition committee, which established Phase I committee (building) and Phase II (fields / athletic facilities). Idea maybe one comes first, probably building, fields maybe later, lot of demolition occurring on campus grounds. That November the Mt Greylock School Committee was organized. Went back and looked at the priorities.

2019: Phase II committee: representation from school committee, athletic, coaches, students. Had a review from Traverse Landscape Architects (sub-contractor), reviewed proposals which included artificial turf. In the process in all the meetings b/w January and making a recommendation we looked at the fields, talked to the college, came to conclusion that artificial turf best. In May school committee took recommendation and authorized bids (ADA accessibility, new softball field, new track as add-alternate, artificial turf). Decision made to hold bid as not ideal to bid going in to summer at a cost could afford, so put off. Public forum held in July when concerns expressed by community. In the RFP: 3 reputable bidders, all 19-22% over. Each of them came on budget for at least one aspect. \$2.3 million estimate came in around \$2.8 million; one bidder made a \$750,000 estimate instead of \$250,000 for the softball field thinking that was an artificial field as well. Did include an add-on for track. Slide on athletic team and physical education participation. PE impact is huge, that is what made a big difference in the sub-committee about the advantage of artificial turf; not just athletes, convinced us this is the best way to go.

Since then lot of talk, artificial vs grass. Issue for us is playability. How allows kids to get on the fields at all different times. One of our teams had to play all of their games at MCLA on a first generation turf field, not as safe as the newer fields. Safety has always been our priority. When games get rescheduled costs time, money, burden. Turf available immediately, grass can take a year or more (seed best over sod). Saving water and other regular maintenance, can get LEED points.

Cost per playable hours: we had an engineer look at and determine that artificial is cheaper per playable hour.

Revenue generation: on an artificial turf: can charge for use of it. If we go to MCLA or BCC there are costs.

Sub-committee recommendation has remained consistent and unanimous throughout the years.

Want to respond to some issues: recommended BrockFILL instead of chrome rubber due to community concerns. Disposal issue eliminated (pellets amend soil), warrantee goes from 8 to 10 years. Expect field to last longer, we say 12, college thinks 15 if not more. MtG can lead by example: none of these fields in our region, being built elsewhere. Can require certification from manufacturers on artificial turf grass is PFAS free. Only non-recyclable is grass mat backing, expect in the future.

Turf costs: about \$500,000 for grass and \$1,000,000 for artificial. Both have drainage. Grass more to maintain. Depends on conditions. Internal vs external labor.

Both have renewal costs of around \$500,000; range from 10-15-20 years depending on usage, the two are comparable.

Regional school districts usually fund thru E&D, capped at 5%, right now have \$1.1 million. Could establish a stabilization fund (need town approval, put money aside each year to fund future). We have money for these right now.

Current fields update: Tim Sears has done an excellent job on the fields. PJC Organics studied last year, poor was the grade for all fields, gave recommendations and are following, look better, also a matter of maintaining, but have benefited as the fields haven't been used much since fall. Irrigation important, no water out there, poor drainage. Lot of clay in soil, always been a problem.

State of gift: was \$5 million, \$1.8 million in growth as of June 2020.

Time really is now, been nearly 5 years, resources are available. We can do the full scope of this project as recommended last December, bid environment is favorable, some people are desperate for work. Students on committee emphasized the advantages, the impact on PE, on the Williamstown soccer club, fewer injuries. The Greylock Way: Responsibility Perseverance, Integrity, followed these for five years, hope we can get this done.

Christina: Opens up for questions

Jose: Group met when communities across MA looking at moratoriums on artificial turf. Were you aware, were you engaged with any of these communities?

John: Lindsey did a survey, number of artificial fields being done was increasing for similar reasons as to why we were looking at it. Relied on expertise of our architects, Williams College.

Stephanie: Lot of debate in many communities on artificial turfs. Recently issues at BCC as in jurisdiction of conservation committee (we are not); a shortcoming of our environmental regulations is that we are not. Even though doing BrockFILL could be some issues in getting in to the water. Not sure how this will be received by regulators of this project. I think communities that have a hard time... Some places looking at banning, better products. All want our kids out and playing. Everything we do has an environmental and financial cost, have to teach our kids how to have a community conversation on

difficult items. Molly talked about this: all of us sitting down and listening to each other. Instead of working together we're pitting us against ourselves.

Christina: Where were the increase in resistance? Rural? Suburban?

Stephanie: Saw database in CA for lead, whether growing faster than grass....

John: misperception about Traverse is that they are artificial turf only, Williams and other districts would not be building if they had safety concerns.

Stephanie: No one debating benefits of turf, can play in winter, what the question is on the cost.

Julia: Reiterate Jose's gratitude for the two of you and public comment, exceptionally valuable. Appreciate the point that Stephanie made that no one is debating benefit of playable field, trying to understand costs that come with. Stephanie: did NPV for natural grass vs turf: how that natural field cost was calculated – does it include fixing irrigation, sustainable practices, or was it?

Stephanie: Used numbers of Phase II sub-committee, does not include irrigation as I don't have a number for that. Does include fairly high \$35000 annual maintenance, and some costs after a few years for replacement.

Julia: For John: what drives natural grass replacement.

John: Got an update from architects. The challenge is doing apples to apples; performance grade natural grass to be comparable. Jim Easton maintains a golf course; cannot make too thick. If just did performance grass would limit to games only not practices, not let PE go on it, cannot have revenue generated on it. No field being sacrificed. We all love playing on grass, gives ability to play more and PE, can play at new times. Issues with irrigation. Demand on wells high due to fire suppression for buildings, possibly less water available now. If don't irrigate risk investment.

Michelle: Irrigation same for both fields. Is there a significant cost difference? Regardless need irrigation system as what have is not great. Feel that is level for both. Trying to understand for myself, if -2 degrees outside that we have a turf field that we've plowed we would have kids outside. As an elementary school teacher wouldn't take kids out. Feel going really far in one direction, trying to pull out what is realistic. Will we bring PE out in 10 degrees? High school kids do not dress properly. Having a hard time seeing field used in all seasons. Why would we need to completely replace? If only grass option is field that can only be used for games not realistic, not a Div-I school. PE should be primary target: that's all students. Lot of questions. Say always playable but maintenance free, have to do some to have playable. Have some concerns on BrockFILL or otherwise leaking out. Cleanup, replacement. Biggest concerns cost. Not sure if have questions, these are my thoughts. Can't see how artificial turf will pay in fees.

John: fees to help with costs, not saying play in winter, really getting on to field at end of shoulder seasons (when rained out / snow early). Can get out now when other fields are too wet. Don't need irrigation for artificial turf.

Stephanie: Demonstrated savings, grass fields need to be improved, one thing to help improve them is an irrigation system, can take savings and build irrigation. Would advocate infrastructure.

Jose: For John: Work of Phase II: What was the warrantee as part of purchase? In brief reading I've done a number of cases when artificial turf defective, ranging from 30% of fields in NJ defective....

John: It was 8 years for crumb rubber and 10 on BrockFILL. Have benefit of Williams (have already replaced one), have used Clark companies, issues with Weston field, undulated some, Clark came out and fixed without charge. Know about maintenance, talked The emphasis was to respond. We are excited about BrockFILL. Crumb rubber goes away, disperse on other fields and amends them. Trying to get kids out there safely, consistently, Not just athletes, can benefit all kids. That's what moved the committee.

Julia: apologize, might be a longer question, gets to process. Struggling with, how'd we get here, flawed or not it is where we are and what do we do? Questions raised around voice. Stephanie: suggested a way we move forward. John I know the Phase II received request from school committee on how to move forward. Stephanie's proposal looks reasonable, what has already happened John?

John: Tried to go thru what has gone on, the number of different sub-committees, school committees, architects, Had a forum in July. Held very open meetings for Phase II, let everyone speak at those.

Julia: I look at the minutes, January 2019 reference to a strategic plan need for infrastructure. Did that happen? How does this fit in with long term plan?

Stephanie: We've struggled with this a few times, been asked a few times to be on a new committee, one disbanded, pandemic, All feeling a bit uncomfortable about process, not being critical about people involved. Sometimes takes a few runs to figure out what needs to do. At first I didn't think much about artificial turf but then as looked more.... Have had so many changes in the last couple of months.... If the decision was made would have to live with it, but we know the school population is going to be dramatically different, changes from pandemic, New people on committee. Take a deep breath, step back, recognize community wants to be engaged, need to engage at the beginning not the end. Haven't looked seriously at what grass can do / what will take to make it functional, and trying to pick between. Need to step back, not to say work done isn't valuable,

John: Push back, what would be the maximum benefit to the most students, been identified since 2016 as one of the priorities, dealing with the fields. Have this incredible school, all these wonderful facilities, and our fields are an embarrassment. School recognized this need all along. There are 70% of kids doing some type of athletics, PE / wellness key part of curriculum here (more so than other schools). Been evaluating for 5 years.

Michelle: I hear that there has always been a need, basic question: did we or did we not explore a grass field and the cost? Why/why not? Did we get a quote for a grass field.

John: Explored, didn't get a quote as would cost more money to get a quote / bid, same people who build artificial do natural, can respond to bids in whatever way they want to build.

Michelle: What led to dismissing grass field?

John: Playability. Unanimous agreement of committee throughout on what this would provide for our kids.

Michelle: Just trying to understand why only got a quote on artificial. To get a quote would cost more money and does not solve the problem. We have been very conscious about money (hence portable bleachers, goal posts, ...). Idea was these things work in tandem. Have ability to rotate between them, artificial grass field provides dependability / consistency for games.

Stephanie: May have heard proponents of natural grass say it was not considered seriously. There are some experts who work in this area who would provide different ideas on how might build / costs / performance / maintenance would be. Do not think need two sets of bid documents, but could have gone farther about understanding trade-offs.

Christina: Thank you both for coming and presenting.

Question in chat, said to email the committee.

Motion to adjourn by Curtis, seconded by Jose, passes unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20pm.

Minutes by Steven Miller (Secretary, School Committee).

Approved 12.22.20