



ARLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE

July 9, 2020

Arlington Conservation Commission
Department of Planning and Community Development
Town of Arlington
730 Massachusetts Avenue Annex
Arlington, MA 02476

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment prior to your upcoming vote on the Arlington High School Building project.

We understand that members of the Commission have raised concerns about the additional artificial turf fields at Arlington High School and the potential effects on Mill Brook. Our design team has answered your questions and provided supplemental documentation, and we are committed to responding to any future concerns you have.

The purpose of this letter is to give you an overview of the process by which our community came together to support and approve the Arlington High School Building project, explain the committee's support for the artificial turf fields, and share information about how we featured the artificial surfaces in our public education campaign.

Arlington High School Principal Dr. Matthew Janger and Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Bodie will present a separate letter detailing the educational value of the artificial turf surfaces, and Dr. Janger will be at your meeting to answer questions.

Since we were formed in 2016, the Arlington High School Building Committee has worked to create a very energy efficient and green building, which will operate without the direct use of fossil fuels while generating significant amounts of solar electricity on site. Through a highly public process, we built a broad coalition of community members committed to doing what was best for students, including people who care about the arts, academics, athletics, and the environment.

The Arlington High School Building Committee has engaged in a very public, four-year process of community input, which included presentations to all Commissions and Committees in Town, including

the Conservation Commission. We held multiple public hearings and made a presentation to Town Meeting, which voted in favor of the project. Ultimately, we campaigned throughout the community in the spring of 2019, educating the public about the value of the project, answering questions about costs, and providing detailed specifics on the design of the project. Last June, 76% of the Town's voters approved the building project.

Prior to the town-wide vote, the Building Committee voted to include artificial turf in the final design we presented to voters because our educational leaders believed this surface was in the best interest of our students. The turf allows for longer outdoor athletic seasons, provides more space for outdoor gym classes required of all students, results in fewer injuries, and reduces the number of cancellations of games and practices.

Additionally, the Building Committee voted for the turf fields because town leaders believed placing multiple artificial surfaces at Arlington High School benefits the broader community, which needs places for recreation and athletics. The Town's youth sports program will benefit from having access to additional turf fields that close less often in inclement weather than grass fields.

Throughout the process, we explained that the building design included additional artificial turf fields. The artificial turf fields were mentioned clearly in the 2019 campaign, we answered questions about turf surfaces at multiple forums, and the field plan was a motivator for some voters to support the project. One of the Boards we presented to – the Arlington Recreation Commission – asked for a guarantee that the AHS Building Committee would not remove the artificial turf should we need to reduce costs in order to meet the budget approved by the voters.

The high school site is compact and complicated. Reducing the size of the new artificial turf surfaces so that they fall outside of the jurisdiction of the Conversation Commission, as some have suggested, would make the space too small to be a varsity baseball field, and result in a potential Title IX violation. (Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs and activities). Eliminating one of the artificial fields, the one closest to Mill Brook, also could subject the town to Title IX litigation because one gender would have more practice and playing time than the other.

The new Arlington High School, including the artificial turf fields, enjoys widespread support in our community thanks to a highly collaborative effort by a broad and diverse coalition of residents.

We have great respect for the work of the Conservation Commission, and our design team has worked tirelessly to answer every question Commissioners have raised. We hope the information presented has been helpful. As our design team has indicated, the Arlington High School Building Committee is committed to selecting artificial turf that will last and minimize any potential harm to the environment.

We are happy to answer any additional questions you have, and we respectfully request that the Commission unanimously support the current design of the Arlington High School Building project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Thielman". The signature is stylized with a large, looped initial "J" and "T".

Jeff Thielman
Chair, Arlington High School Building Committee