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Principal

## ARLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

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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 vote on the Arlington High School building project. We are aware that you have received information and commentary from our Committee Chair, Jeff Thielman, as well as documentation from our design team. This letter is to give an overview of the educational value of the artificial turf surfaces. Matthew Janger will also be attending the commission meeting to answer questions.

The overall design of the high school is driven by the Educational Program and a set of Guiding Principles (attached to this letter). These emphasize a balance among educational programs, the creation of usable outdoor spaces, and sustainability. The high school is on a constrained site and the plan was designed to provide the maximum amount of outdoor use. The inclusion of the two additional turf, multi-purpose fields should be seen in that context.

The main benefits of the turf field include improved functionality for multiple athletic uses. Turf fields are also associated with fewer injuries. Because the turf can be cleared and used shortly after rain or snow, it significantly extends the usable season and time, allowing Physical Education (PE) and athletics to move outside earlier and more often. By consolidating the use of turf fields and lights at the high school, we create a flexible multipurpose facility that allows for greater flexibility and lower impact on the community overall. These main benefits run through the discussion below.

Our Guiding Principles include providing “outdoor connections, gathering places, and classrooms.” For the Physical Education program, the playing fields are used for outdoor classes all year round. The turf fields provide outdoor activities and space for classes that would otherwise have more limitations if held in a gym. Because they can be used under wider weather conditions, this substantially extends these opportunities. This has programming impacts for other classes, as we often use the gym spaces to support other activities.

Physical Education is a 4-year requirement and students choose from a wide array of options including climbing, winter survival, backpacking, yoga, mindfulness, personal fitness, weight lifting, walking, and team sports. Students currently enroll in Physical Education beyond the minimum graduation requirements.

The interscholastic Athletics program is also an important part of our educational mission at the high school. Athletic participation is shown to enhance individual and collective growth during high school. Arlington High School's 30 teams make extensive use of town fields for practices and games. The consolidation of the primary fields and practice facilities at the high school will have a positive impact on safety, communication, and effectiveness. Currently, Varsity and JV teams have to play on different fields which affects both supervision by coaches and the availability of the Athletic Trainer. The new facility will support play in the same area rather than at two different fields. This will mean that the Athletic Trainer can support multiple games and practices in one location, which provides more on-site care of students who are injured. The rapid recovery of the artificial turf reduces the impact of inclement weather on practices and games, resulting in fewer cancellations of games after rain events.

Expanding the multi-purpose turf fields at the high school site will not only improve options for students at the high school level, but it will also improve options for youth sports across the community. These groups are eager to use the turf and will also have increased access to green spaces and other playing fields as the high school concentrates its activities.

As noted above, the athletic field facilities are part of a strategy to expand usable outdoor spaces for classes and recreation. The current plan will create an attractive landscape surrounding the building and multi-use outdoor spaces. The design plan includes a large enclosed green area between the STEAM and Humanities buildings. Plans for this space include a work area for makerspace projects, outdoor arts areas, environmental science gardens, and outdoor classrooms. Outside the Performing Arts building will be an outdoor amphitheater for performances, events, classes, and outdoor study. A third courtyard opens into the cafeteria, creating a space for eating, class, study, and display.

The Arlington High School Building Committee has taken the stewardship of the site and environment into account from the beginning. In the context of the overall project's educational goals, the selection of artificial turf fields should be seen in that overall context of sustainability, balance, and access to the outdoors that runs through our Guiding Principles. We look forward to the opportunity to answer questions and discuss this further.

Sincerely,



Dr. Kathleen Bodie, Superintendent



Dr. Matthew Janger, Principal

Enclosure: Educational Program: Guiding Principles

## Guiding Principles

In anticipation of the need to rebuild the high school building, Arlington High School (AHS) administration and faculty have spent the last 4 years visiting schools, reflecting, and gathering our thinking on the future of instruction and the building we will need to support this future. Departments, interest groups formed around areas of focus such as school climate and culture, outside space and student leadership, and affiliated community groups were invited to reflect and create draft reports on their current and future practices and needs. In addition, the high school and district engaged in an ongoing evidence-based strategic planning and goal setting process to create our annual School Improvement Plan (attached).

As a result, we were well prepared as a community to engage in the process of visioning with David Stephen of New Vista Design. Each department and many functional groups produced statements of educational philosophy, current practices, and future needs. We held a series of 3 community forums to gather input. We also held a session with the faculty as a whole to reflect on the work we have done so far. An Educational Visioning Group comprising staff, administration, students, and community members met for a series of 3 workshops to synthesize this feedback and input into an educational vision, as well as guidance on design patterns to support that vision.

We found strong community consensus for the following Guiding Principles to govern the design of the renovated and/or new Arlington High School facility.

At its heart, the renovated and/or new Arlington High School facility must support the best of what AHS is doing now, as well as allow the development and implementation of effective and innovative future teaching and learning practices. It must honor the enduring importance of teacher professionalism in supporting expertise in the academic disciplines and relationships in learning communities, as well as flexibly support interdisciplinary, collaborative, connected, project-based, and personalized learning.

AHS is committed to teaching all children and the whole child. We believe that the future of education in Arlington requires:

1. *Teacher professionalism* - rich classroom and departmental work spaces to support teacher expertise and relationships in learning communities
2. *Inquiry and collaboration* - an interdisciplinary learning commons with research tools, technology, gathering, and breakout spaces to support teaching and learning in the future
3. *Creating and creativity* - specialized and distributed spaces and technology for hands-on and applied learning, including spaces and technology for making, displaying, and storage of work
4. *Support for students' social-emotional needs and social-emotional learning* - centralized and distributed support spaces and personnel, access to nature, and welcoming space
5. *Inclusive and engaged community* - welcoming spaces where we come together as a school and that also serve as a community resource

The following additional principles developed through the visioning process should also guide the design of the new facility:

#### Teach the Whole Child

- Foster personalization, connection, and ownership
- Meet the varied learning needs of students
- Support students in finding their place/passion
- Extend learning opportunities beyond classroom walls
- Promote social-emotional learning
- Be fun and engaging

#### Support Inquiry-Based Learning and Promote Inventive and Student-Centered Learning

- Provide hands-on STEM and STEAM opportunities
- Encourage project-based learning and design thinking
- Include applied and authentic learning
- Support interdisciplinary connections
- Promote visible learning

#### Foster School Community

- Provide accessible and navigable spaces that build community
- Locate Library Learning Commons as heart of school
- Create learning neighborhoods of common interest
- Support interdisciplinary and collaborative learning
- Promote social-emotional health and wellness
- Encourage communication and collaboration

#### Envision School as Community Hub

- View school as hub of learning, activity, and engagement
- Support community access and use
- Employ a design aesthetic and sensibility of its time
- Embody a sense of history, character, and durability
- Reflect the history and aesthetic of Arlington/New England

#### Provide Physical and Programmatic Flexibility

- Adapt to varied and unknown future needs and uses
- Provide flexibility for 21st Century teaching and learning
- Support technology integration and evolution
- Remain flexible and future proof

#### Promote Sustainability

- Ensure energy efficiency
- Promote social responsibility
- Remain practical and cost effective
- Employ building as teacher
- Provide outdoor connections, gathering places, and classrooms