

Dear Select Board,

Mr. Pooler's ban on artificial turf until July 2023 leaves our community, our environment, vulnerable to additional plastic sports fields. Advocates of plastic sports fields have included in Arlington's Land Management Plan the following: "Consider converting natural grass fields to artificial turf." P 290 and P 295 "Where appropriate consider converting existing natural turf field to synthetic turf to allow increase in usage rates."

<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/63856/638109481537800000>

Please allow discussion and vote at Town Meeting on Article 12 otherwise the stage has been set to allow additional plastic sports fields.

Allowing the use of Artificial Turf is at odds with the environmental-protection decisions Arlington has made over the last few years:

- We banned stores from using plastic shopping bags.
- We banned fossil fuel connections in new construction
- We banned the sale of plastic 1 liter water bottles
- We strengthened protections for trees
- We eliminated the use of polluting, gas-powered leaf blowers (to reduce noise, but reducing fossil fuel emissions as well)

We know the health and environmental hazards of artificial turf.

Artificial turf contains the forever chemicals called PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. Plastic grass cannot be manufactured without using PFAS which allows the plastic to pass through the extruder to create the "blades" of artificial grass. Any company who promises PFAS-free artificial turf is mistaken. In 2020 Portsmouth, NH, was promised a PFAS-free artificial turf field and after it was installed PFAS was found in the plastic field. There are NO safe levels of PFAS.

[PFAS expert tips: How to reduce your exposure to harmful 'forever chemicals' | WBUR News](#)

The following is a quotation from Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, PEER:

"Virtually every PFAS studied for toxicity is associated with adverse health effects ranging from thyroid dysfunction, delayed puberty, obesity, osteoarthritis, liver problems, immune disorders, kidney problems, decreased vaccine response in children, more severe cases of Covid-19, to cancer. Research also shows human exposure to PFAS can occur through inhalation and ingestion, as well as direct dermal exposure."

PFAS and other chemicals in plastics are polluting our drinking water and air. These chemicals bioaccumulate with deadly consequences. Arlington is in the Mystic River Watershed. Runoff from sports fields across town ends up in the waterways. As of 2022, the EPA requires permits for previously unregulated stormwater discharges in Massachusetts. [EPA Implements Advanced Effort to Protect Water Quality in Three Boston-area River Watersheds | US EPA](#)

Artificial turf cannot be recycled, nor can it be made from recycled plastic. Anyone who says otherwise is misinformed. All over the world artificial turf is dumped and stored in remote areas and in environmental justice neighborhoods where it leaks toxic microplastics and chemicals into the waterways and soil. In the US it is accumulating in Luzerne County Pennsylvania. There are no plastic turf recycling facilities in the United States.

[Artificial Turf's Big Lie: Old Fields Not Recycled - PEER.org](#)

Artificial turf can become as hot as 200 degrees on a hot summer day. Plastic sports fields are heat islands. Natural grass absorbs CO₂.

Everything associated with Artificial Turf goes against Arlington's Climate Action Plan and the achievements I listed earlier. Artificial Turf off gases methane and ethylene into our air and water and contributes large amounts of CO₂ emissions to our environment.

At a time when Arlington is working hard to reduce the carbon footprint of our public and private buildings why would we seek to laminate sports fields with plastic. Natural grass does the opposite of plastic. It absorbs CO₂. Springfield, MA shows that organically managed grass sports fields are competitive with playing times for plastic fields.

[Natural+Grass+Playing+Field+Case+Study+Springfield+MA.+June+2019.pdf \(turi.org\)](#)

As we pride ourselves on the reduction of solid waste in Arlington and our single-use plastic shopping bag ban, let's not consider additional plastic sports fields. The manufacture of one plastic turf field uses the equivalent of 4,800,000 plastic bags or 69,000,000 plastic straws. Mr. Poolers moratorium expires July 2023.

Please allow Town Meeting the opportunity to review and discuss the merits of a moratorium on artificial turf.

Sports fields should not determine environmental policy. Plastic sports fields near wetlands seem to violate new EPA regulations. Plastic sports fields have too many known unintended consequences. Please afford the community the time to research and discuss options.

Properly installed and organically managed grass fields exist and can be maintained without using toxic chemicals. Grass fields help to cool communities, they protect our athletes from toxins. They are sustainable. Chip Osborne Organics is a New England-based company that specializes in organic playing fields. <https://osborneorganics.com/about-chip-osborne-jr/>. Wayland and Sharon have placed moratoriums on Artificial turf because of the environmental and human health risks associated with it.

Springfield, MA, successfully uses organic grass fields with adequate playing time.

Why would Arlington do any less?

The claim that Artificial Turf is "less expensive" than real grass can be challenged based on data.

Artificial Turf is much more expensive to install than real grass. But the claim that it is much cheaper to maintain over its useful lifetime may not, in fact, be true. And claims that Artificial Turf can be "recycled" when it needs replacing is not true. Let's not laminate the environment, the cost is too high. Let's reduce not increase our children's exposure to unnecessary heat, injury, and chemicals.

Sports fields should not determine environmental policy nor should a town manager position in flux.

Please allow Town Meeting to consider what is best for the community.

Respectfully,
Beth Melofchik