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Department of Health and Human Services
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Artificial Turf Study Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: March 12, 2024
Meeting Time: 5PM-6:30PM
Location: Zoom

Objectives:

- 1) To discuss the narrative reports submitted by each working group.
- 2) To discuss potential recommendations/conclusions based on the narrative reports.

Committee Members present: James DiTullio, Chair; Natasha Waden, Clerk; Mike Gildesgame; Leslie Mayer; Joseph Barr; Jill Krajewski; Marvin Lewiton; Joseph Connelly; David Morgan

Agenda

I. Acceptance of Meeting Minutes

- Motion to approve meeting minutes from 02/20/2024 was made by Mike Gildesgame.

2nd by Marvin Lewiton.

Vote:

Mike Gildesgame, Yes

Leslie Mayer, Yes

Joseph Barr, Not present for vote

Jill Krajewski, Yes

Natasha Waden, Yes

Marvin Lewiton, Yes

James DiTullio, Yes

Approved (6-0, with 1 not present for the Vote)

- Motion to approve meeting minutes from 02/27/2024 was made by Marvin Lewiton.

2nd by Leslie Mayer.

Vote:

Mike Gildesgame, Yes

Leslie Mayer, Yes

Joseph Barr, Not present for vote

Jill Krajewski, Yes

Natasha Waden, Yes

Marvin Lewiton, Yes

James DiTullio, Yes

Approved (6-0, with 1 not present for the Vote)

II. Correspondence Received

Natasha Waden reported that the following correspondence was received:

- 1) An email from Beth Melofchick with a link to two videos:
 - a. South Florida, We're All Plastic People Now.
 - b. We the Guinea Pigs.
- 2) An email from Phil Lasker with a link to a large document titled: Information for Artificial Turf Committee.

Natasha clarified that only the first 7 pages of the document were included due to its size, however, a link to the full document was provided in the packet to Committee Members and the public.
- 3) An email from Robin Bergman with a link to an article: Microplastics in Every Human Placenta.
- 4) An email from Mike Gildesgame with a link to a report from EPA: Requiring toxic release Inventory Reporting for 7 Additional PFAS.
- 5) Three Emails from Susan Chapnick with the following links:
 - a. TURI Document: Building An Organic Maintenance Program for Athletic Fields
 - b. A study about Engineered Green Infrastructure to reduce 6PPD-quinone in Storm Water Runoff; and
 - c. A Referendum from Newton, MA banning the purchase of PFAS containing material.

Jim DiTullio thanked the public for submitting correspondence. Additionally, he reminded everyone that to comply with Open Meeting Law requirements, any information received after the deadline (typically, Thursday evening's at 5pm, prior to a Tuesday meeting) would be included in the Committee's next meeting packet.

III. Discussion: Draft Working Group Narrative Sections

Jim DiTullio addressed the Committee and stated that for the most part the narratives were fairly consistent with each group's bullet points. DiTullio stated that the purpose of tonight's meeting would be for the Committee Members to discuss, defend, and present any questions or concerns about each of the working group's narrative reports. DiTullio mentioned at the conclusion of the discussion, he hopes to begin a discussion about potential recommendations/findings for the final report, as outlined in the Artificial Turf Study Committee charge. DiTullio also explained that efforts to combine the three reports

into one cohesive document are going to take a bit more time than originally anticipated; therefore the Committee can reasonably expect to see a draft on March 22, 2024. DiTullio suggested that instead of following the “report out” format (health, safety, environmental) for working group narrative reports that we have a less formal discussion that focuses on specific questions or concerns about the narratives.

A Member of the Environmental group commented on the Health and Safety reports stating that the narrative seemed to provide a very balanced view.

The Member also wanted to point out a commonality among the three reports in reference to testing and how it has changed since 2019 and is going to continue to change over time. As such, acknowledging and referencing future changes should be the focus in the report as opposed to trying to cite specific testing methods which may end up being outdated.

In response, a Member from the Safety group highlighted that a key component of the report should include identifying gaps in analysis and clarifying that any recommendations from this Committee are based off of a moment in time, which is spring 2024.

A Member from the Safety group raised concerns that the environmental report does not address or acknowledge the evolution of recycling that is currently happening with Artificial Turf. Additional conversation was had amongst members discussing that there does appear to be varying views on what “recycling” means. As such, it will be important to acknowledge this and explain that while some companies may be recycling artificial turf in some way; the extent of that recycling is unknown and at this time varies among manufactures. Another Member suggested that if the Town were to move forward with artificial turf field(s), that language be built into a contract(s) that requires an end of use recycling plan.

A Member from the Health group raised a concern about references made in the Environmental report in regards to the communities of Springfield and Marblehead, MA. The Member expressed concern and referenced Committee conversations in which Members have discussed comparable communities to Arlington; however, they did not include Springfield and Marblehead. A reference to the city of Malden had been mentioned by Members in previous meetings as being more comparable to Arlington, specifically as it pertains to the land space constraints related to green space. As such, multiple members believe examples should reference comparable communities that Members have agreed upon.

Multiple Members raised concerns about the closing recommendation in the Environmental narrative, particularly as it states new or reconstructed athletic fields should be constructed and maintained as organically managed natural grass rather than artificial turf fields. Members discussed that this was a bit surprising, as the statement did not seem to align with the views expressed in previous meetings by either Committee Members or the Environmental working group members. Members also referred to comments/discussions of mitigation measures in previous meetings such as recycling methods, requiring PFAS free material, and references to MIT’s use of both types of fields and mitigation measures. However, these were not mentioned in the environmental narrative.

A Member of the Safety Committee raised concerns about the Wetlands Value Table that was submitted with the Environmental narrative. The Member pointed out that the chart compares artificial turf fields to natural organically managed grass fields. However, Arlington's grass fields are not currently organically maintained and therefore felt it is not a relative comparison. The Member was concerned that use of the table in its current form may give off an impression to the reader that Arlington's fields are organically maintained. As such, a recommendation was made that the chart should be reflective of how the current grass fields are managed.

A Member of the Environmental group clarified that their intent was to suggest that the grass fields should be organically maintained. The Member acknowledged that while the recycling of artificial turf is evolving, the current recycling practices do not seem to be meaningful. The group acknowledged the issue of comparability of communities to Arlington. Additional discussion was had amongst Members in regards to the importance of addressing the costs associated with the differing surfaces (natural vs artificial) and maintenance options (organic vs non-organic).

Another Member of the Environmental group pointed out that the Environmental narrative is a draft and only one piece of the study. While, their group identified that natural grass turf that is organically maintained may be the best for the environment; they understand the other reports (health and safety) would also be taken into consideration when discussing findings/recommendations in the final report. Additionally, the Member discussed fiscal challenges with balancing and understanding the constraints associated with both the operating and capital budgets. Whereas there is limited funding for existing critical town/school maintenance projects; costs and funding associated with field construction and maintenance is an important component that needs to be considered as well.

A Member of the Health group made reference to all three reports, stating that in reading the Health and Safety reports, they both seemed to have a balanced perspective in regards to artificial vs. natural turf, but that the environmental report seemed to reflect an anti-turf perspective. The Member wondered if this is what others thought and why there may be so many questions about the Environmental narrative report.

A Member of the Health group asked for clarification on the reference to toxic algae blooms and artificial turf fields. The Member referenced seasonal toxic algae bloom at Spy Pond and Monotony Rocks Park over the years, but noted that artificial turf fields are not in those areas. As such the Member wanted to understand the connection trying to be made by the environmental group. A Member of the Environmental group explained that toxic algae blooms are the result of runoff from fertilized lawns and fields that end up in the waterbodies, which allows for algae to bloom. When grass or shrubberies are removed, it prevents the ability for nutrients to be absorbed into the soil. As such, nutrients enter the waterbodies which may cause nutrient loading. The combination of increased nutrients and fertilizer in waterbodies may result in toxic algae blooms. A Member from the Health group commented that this example did not seem appropriate in reference to artificial turf, as one might say that by installing artificial turf and not applying fertilizer it may prevent a bloom. The Member was particularly concerned about the reference given Arlington's history of toxic algae blooms and the fact that there are no artificial turf areas in the vicinity of where

blooms have been identified. As such it was recommended that this reference be excluded from the final report.

A Member of the Safety group echoed the concerns about the Environmental narrative reflecting an anti-turf perspective. The Member recognized that perhaps this is the nature of the environmental findings, but mitigations measures such as considering PFAS free material and/or testing of materials prior to installation did not appear to be discussed in the narrative. The Member raised concerns about the reference to Mass DEP, considering language to define artificial turf as an impermeable surface, as it has not yet been finalized. The Member also raised concerns about the TURI statement at the end of the narrative, stating that despite its affiliation with the State; in his experience, TURI comes across as an anti-plastic/anti-turf organization and seems to overlook any potential benefits to the use of either.

Another Member from the Health group question how impactful the changes in fertilizer and nutrient load in waterbodies would be if a natural grass field that is fertilized and does not absorb water very well, is replaced with an artificial turf field that does not require fertilizer. The Member acknowledged that replacing a large meadow or forest with artificial turf would seem to her to be impactful; but did not agree that replacing a poorly maintained grass field with an artificial turf would be that impactful on the fertilizer and nutrient loads in waterbodies. The Member also referenced conversations had amongst the Committee in regards to the possibility/feasibility of forcing more natural landscaping around areas where artificial turf may be installed to help with absorption.

A Member from the Environmental group clarified that they are not aware of any research that demonstrates artificial turf is better in regards to abating or minimizing nutrient runoff. However, the member clarified that it requires a lot of area to infiltrate water and collect nutrients. As such, any amount of absorption that is taking place on a grass field will be more effective than on artificial turf surface. The environmental group was also not aware of any research that describes the size or type of mitigation needed to remove contaminants and nutrients from runoff associated with artificial turf fields. However, with Arlington's space limitations, it doesn't seem realistic to think that there would be adequate space to install a mitigation measure large enough, such as a wet meadow, near an artificial turf field.

The Environmental group also addressed comments about the anti-turf perspective mentioned by others in regards to the environmental narrative. The group clarified that similar to the other groups, they looked at all of the evidence. Whereas their task was to focus on environmental impacts, the evidence did not suggest a positive determination. The group also referenced that TURI's focus is the same as the Environmental group (to evaluate the environmental impacts), and in doing so they did not find any positive environmental effects of artificial turf to date.

A Member of the Safety group acknowledged the perspective outlined in the environmental group's narrative, but speculated that the research studies regarding environmental impacts of artificial turf may have been less neutral overall as compared to the other two groups (Health and Safety).

A Member of the Safety Committee asked a clarifying question in regards to artificial turf surface temperatures getting too hot and preventing wildlife from walking across it. The Member wondered if this was a relevant point, as it didn't seem likely that wildlife would be walking across either an artificial turf or grass field in the middle of a very hot day. Therefore, the Member was interested in whether or not the group had come across any research studies that discussed or showed evidence of this.

The Environmental group explained that the reference to wildlife and heat was a larger picture and intended to reflect how micro-organisms and other things that might live in the soil would be displaced by installing artificial turf. As such, this would have an effect on wildlife such as birds, squirrels, etc. as they would disappear from the area as a result of the lack of biodiversity to support them.

Another Member of the Safety group expressed concern that mitigation measures to capture runoff were not discussed in the environmental narrative. In her experience with the Recreation Commission, they have heard from industry that there are ways to address this, especially if they are considered during the design and building phase. One example given was the installation of chambers under a field to capture runoff. Additionally, the Member made reference to artificial turf being considered impermeable but stated that just as with infill materials, carpets are evolving and will likely change to be more permeable in the future.

The Environmental group responded that their intent was not to imply that there are no possible mitigation measures for storm water runoff; or to conclude that artificial turf is or is not a permeable surface. The section was meant to inform the reader of the direction the regulatory authority may be heading in the near future and explain that mitigation measures are possible; but fundamentally may not be considered permeable because the runoff does not infiltrate directly to the soil. The group also mentioned that the installation of chambers under a field is associated with more extreme flooding situations, not necessarily a typical field. Additionally, the cost of installing such mitigation measures is another factor that would need to be considered. The group acknowledged that it does seem that the industry is changing as far as permeability is concerned, but as mentioned previously by other Members, decisions should be based on what is currently known.

A Member of the Environmental group share that his overall opinion is that each project should be considered on a case by case basis. The Member questioned whether or not the Committee should/could make blanket recommendations or should/could provide information about issues that should be considered when making a decision about the surface of turf fields.

IV. Discussion: Recommendations/Conclusions

James DiTullio led the group discussion by stating that it did not appear that any group was in support of an outright moratorium on Artificial Turf fields. A couple of Members disagreed and expressed that the way the Environmental narrative reads, it seems that they are in support of a moratorium. Members of the Environmental group responded that their narrative is coming from strictly an environmental perspective. However, the group recognized that their narrative as well as the others (Health and Safety) is just a draft and

the assumption is that the narratives, as written, will likely change in the final document. The Environmental group also acknowledged that it was not their intent to provide their recommendation as the recommendation of the entire Committee. The group acknowledged that the report findings and recommendations will come from the entire Committee.

A Member of the Health group thanked the Environmental group for clarifying the position of their narrative and acknowledged that her initial reaction to it had been that of an anti-turf perspective. However, after hearing from the group tonight, it does not appear that that was the intent. The Member explained that it was just very surprising that mitigation measures were not really discussed in detail and there was such a strong recommendation for natural turf, mainly because this was not mentioned by the Environmental group in the weekly updates.

A Member of the Safety group wondered if the group could have looked at areas of Town to distinguish if there are specific areas/fields that may be more or less suitable for artificial turf fields. Additionally, the Member referenced examples from the communities of Malden and Brookline and wondered if any mitigation strategies identified in those communities that might be applicable in Arlington.

Upon completion of the discussion, DiTullio addressed the Committee by stating that it did not appear that anyone on the Committee was in support of a moratorium on artificial turf fields. All Committee Members agreed.

DiTullio initiated a conversation with the Committee to discuss the use of crumb rubber infill in future projects (this would not include ongoing projects or projects that have already been committed). While there seemed to be a general consensus among the Members, additional points were raised about the two existing artificial turf fields that utilize crumb rubber. Whereas, some Members had other meeting commitments, DiTullio decided in the interest of time to table this discussion until next week and move on to the next agenda item.

V. Discussion: Reports, Deliverables, Project Timeline

The Committee will plan to meet next week to continue the discussion about potential recommendations/findings that may be included in the final report. Some topics that will be discussed include but are not limited to the following: crumb rubber, PFAS free certifications, heat guidelines, age guidelines, recycling, irrigation, and other testing.

A draft of the final report will most likely be ready and sent out for a first review to the Committee on March 22, 2024. The plan will be to discuss the draft on March 26, 2024.

The Chair and Clerk will be submitting a letter to the Select Board requesting an extension from the requirement to submit the report within 30 days of the start of Town Meeting. As explained, the Committee does not believe it needs a long extension to complete the work, just a couple of extra weeks to draft the report, review with the Committee, revise, hold a public input meeting, and then finalize and submit the report.

Natasha Waden reminded the Members and public that the Committee would continue to accept comments up until the report has been completed and approved by the Members.

DiTullio reminded Committee Members to submit their references/citations to Natasha, regardless of whether or not they have been cited.

VI. New Business

There was no new business discussed.

VII. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn was made by Natasha Waden.

2nd by Leslie Mayer.

Vote:

Mike Gildesgame, (not present for vote)

Leslie Mayer, Yes

Joseph Barr, Yes

Jill Krajewski, Yes

Natasha Waden, Yes

Marvin Lewiton, Yes

James DiTullio, Yes

Approved (6-0, with 1 not present for the vote)