



Town of Arlington
Department of Health and Human Services
Office of the Board of Health

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Artificial Turf Study Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: March 19, 2024

Meeting Time: 5PM-6:30PM

Location: Zoom

Objectives:

- 1) To discuss potential recommendations/conclusions based on the narrative reports.
- 2) To discuss project timeline, deliverables, working group narratives, and details of draft report.

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 03/12/2024 was made by Jill Krajewski.

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 vote)

- II. Correspondence Received

Natasha Waden reported that the following correspondence was received:

- 1) Two emails from Robin Bergman with links to the following articles:
 - a. Plastic Formed Inside More than 50% Plaques from Clogged Arteries
 - b. How PFAS, Microplastics Join Forces as a Synergistic Threat

- 2) An email from Beth Melofchik with a link to an article: Turf Fields may have “forever chemicals”. Should kids be playing on them?
- 3) An email from Mike Gildesgame with a link to the PDF version of the Wetland value table of organically managed natural grass fields.

III. Discussion: Recommendations/Conclusions

Jim DiTullio provided a brief summary of the Committee’s discussion from the previous week’s meeting. Jim reiterated that during that meeting there had been no endorsement from any Committee Members to support a moratorium on artificial turf and verified that all Members were still in agreement. Jim explained that the goal of tonight’s meeting would be to discuss, for as long as necessary, all additional recommendations/conclusions/findings of the Committee based on the working group narrative reports. Jim stated that the merging of the narratives into one document is well underway, but is taking a bit more time than anticipated. With that, the goal is to identify the Committee conclusions/reconditions/findings so that the draft report can be completed and be circulated to all Members by the end of the week. The Committee spent the next 1.5 hours discussing the following topics and potential recommendations: Crumb rubber infill; PFAS; heat guidelines; age guidelines for artificial turf playing surfaces; recycling of artificial turf at the end of life; organic maintenance of natural grass fields; and potential restrictions, if artificial turf is considered, on the installation in areas of town that have been identified as heat islands. Conversations about each topic area are summarized below.

Crumb rubber:

Committee Members all seemed to agree that crumb rubber is not the preferred infill for an artificial turf field. Discussion was had about what this means for the existing fields (Arlington Catholic and Pierce), the proposed new High School field (Pierce) that has already been approved for crumb rubber infill, as well as the financial impacts it might have on Arlington Catholic as their field is likely nearing the end of life. Committee Members discussed that Arlington Catholic’s field is on private property, but that the Conservation Commission would have some jurisdiction over the field when it comes time to replace it. Aside from that, this field is on private property and therefore likely falls outside of the purview of Town control and any requirements to comply with recommendations made by the Committee. The conversation about the High School project will also fall under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission. One Member noted that the High School field had been approved by the Conservation Commission back in 2019-2020, but there may be some interest in reviewing the crumb rubber infill again. Moving forward, the funding for a future project would fall under the purview of the Town in terms of what would be allowable using Town money. However, as indicated by Committee Members, it was determined that the funding associated with the current high school project is a bit more complex since it has already been allocated/approved and this type of change at this stage would likely have to go through another Town approval process.. One Member made reference that the majority of the playing fields about Wetland Resource areas, which therefore will require the review and approval of the Conservation Commission who would not likely approve a crumb rubber infill in the future. Another Member asked if there had been any indication as to whether or not the Conservation Commission would be taking into consideration any of the recommendations made by this Committee. Another Member who represents the Conservation Commission stated there as has not been any discussion among

the Conservation Commission at this time. Another Member explained that the High School project is a “Construction Manager at Risk Project” and therefore it would likely be extremely difficult to change the scope after the fact as it could be very costly. Multiple Members agreed that the high school project is beyond the scope of this Committee. However, Members seemed to agree that perhaps this should be made clear in the final report. As such, Members agreed to allow the chair to draft the recommendation to reflect the Committee’s position on crumb rubber and future projects. The recommendations will be discussed at the next meeting.

PFAS

Committee Members were in agreement that if artificial turf were to be considered, that a recommendation should be made by the Committee to require certified testing which verifies materials are PFAS free. Members discussed that testing should be conducted prior to shipment but conducted by an independent laboratory, not associated with the manufacturer. Additional discussion was had by Members in regards to the varying interpretation of what PFAS free means, especially among manufacturers. A Member suggested that the Committee define what is meant by PFAS free and/or make reference to a regulatory standard or authority that may change over time with new science and technological advancements. Although Members were in agreement, one point raised by a Member was the fact that there are no applicable standards to reference, other than drinking water. At this time there is no indication as to what level of PFAS, Palates or other associated chemicals of artificial turf are harmful to health. As such, it would be difficult for the Committee to define or reference such a standard. Therefore the recommendation should be worded in such a way to acknowledge that PFAS Free means whatever the latest acceptable standard or least toxic level is at the time of purchase. Again, Members agreed to allow the Chair to draft a recommendation that reflects the Committee’s concerns about certifying artificial turf is PFAS free. The Committee will review the recommendation at the next meeting.

Heat guidelines

All Committee Members seemed to agree that heat guidelines should be included as a recommendation for both artificial and natural grass turf fields. Members also agreed that the recommendations should be based off of the MIAA guidelines as they have been widely accepted among sports user groups. One Member raised concerns about whether or not taking temperatures on weekends or during Town “off hours” was feasible or would be burdensome and unrealistic. The Recreation Director confirmed that such recommendation would be reasonable and the Department could work with user groups and coaches to implement such procedures. Another Member discussed the importance of maintenance of the fields, regardless of the type, as without the proper maintenance, neither field will be able to live up to its full potential. The Clerk briefly discussed that field maintenance in addition to a cost analysis between natural grass and artificial turf is currently being worked on and will be included in the report draft for Members to review.

Age guidelines

A discussion was had about the Town of Brookline’s recommendation to restrict the use of artificial turf fields to users in grades K-8 and whether or not the Committee wanted to include such a recommendation in their report. The Chair acknowledge this was not something that had previously been discussed or brought up by the Committee, and he was

not in support one way or another about it, but thought it was an interesting recommendation and would be worth discussing as a group. Some Members expressed confusion as to the recommendation and why it would exclude pre-school age children who are more likely to engage in hand to mouth behaviors. Additional concerns were raised about the amount of time this age group might be spending on such a field and also the relevance of this recommendation if Committee is recommending the discontinuation of crumb rubber as an infill on artificial turf fields. Another point made by a Member was that in terms of scheduling fields, it is less likely for this age group to play on the turf field, as the priority would be to put younger kids who are less destructive in their play on the grass fields as opposed to older kids whose level of play is more intense and destructive to a grass field. Another Member acknowledged that the rationale for such a recommendation is most likely associated with the vulnerability of young children in terms of exposure to chemicals and their development. The Committee determined that this recommendation was undeveloped and seemed a bit arbitrary at this time, especially considering the Committee is recommending the discontinuation of crumb rubber material in future projects.

Recycling of artificial turf

The Chair acknowledged that there is currently a debate about whether or not artificial turf is being recycled and/or what it actually meant by the term “recycled”. While there does seem to be some evidence of recycling of artificial turf, it is not clear as to what extent it happens. However, the Chair asked whether or not the Committee wanted to recommend that recycling be built into any contract, should the town install an artificial turf field in the future, to require that artificial turf be recycled, at the end of life, to the greatest extent possible (whatever the status of technology is at that time). Some Members expressed concerns that the process of burning/melting and potentially repurposing the material creates more of an environmental hazard (air pollution, generation of waste, and use of fossil fuels, etc.); therefore that type of activity does not seem to fit within the context of meaningful recycling. Another Member raised concerns that it’s important to understand what the company means by recycling, as it is also important to ensure the product doesn’t end up in a landfill. The Committee agreed to include a recommendation which would contractually require the installer/manufacturer to take responsibility for the end of life recycling and that the method of recycling be the most environmentally friendly which prevents the least harmful impact to the environment. The Chair agreed to draft a recommendation reflective of the comments made by Members. The recommendation will be reviewed by the Committee at the next meeting.

Organic maintenance of natural grass fields:

The Chair discussed the topic of organic maintenance of natural grass fields and indicated that there seem to be a consensus among the Committee about the importance of high quality field maintenance, but it was not clear as to whether or not the Committee as whole felt strongly about recommending organic maintenance. Members discussed that this is a challenging topic as it relates to budgetary constraints and site specific issues. Another Member pointed out that it is not clear whether or not organic treatment will change the quality of the playing field, but it will not increase access to grass fields during the shoulder season (March-June and September-November). Discussion was had amongst Members about whether or not organic maintenance of fields in their current condition (hard packed fields) would absorb differently into the field than those of conventional fertilizer and/or whether or not it might make an impact on the waterbodies. While there was no real

evidence to reference, the discussion focused on reducing the amount of fertilizer runoff from fields that might run off into the waterbodies. Another point that was made was in regards to the fertilizers being used on private properties, which the Town cannot regulate. The conversation led to whether or not the change to organic maintenance would be cost effective and impactful given the current state of the fields. Multiple Members referenced Ian Lacy's comment during his presentation on February 20th, 2024 when he stated that about 95% of fields in Massachusetts are not maintained properly. Another Member referenced the Robbin's Farm field and funds that have been allocated to making repairs, which did not resolve the issues. Therefore the Member cautioned the Committee about costs and insuring the change would be beneficial and/or effective. As such, the Recreation Director made a recommendation that perhaps the Committee should recommend that the Town consider piloting an organic maintenance program for 1-2 fields over a couple of years to evaluate the costs and benefits. All Committee Members were in agreement of this recommendation.

Restricting the installation of new artificial turf fields near heat islands:

The Committee discussed the possibility of including a recommendation which would place restrictions on installing artificial turf fields near the 5% of parcels that have been identified by Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) as heat islands. One Member discussed that while this may be a best practice, it really seems that it should be a site specific consideration. Another Member discussed that from a usability perspective and in connection with the heat guidelines discussed, it may make sense to include this, as installing an artificial turf field in an already hotter area of Town may result in the inability to use the field due to temperature issues. The Planning Department referenced an analysis that was conducted a while ago in reference to the number of increased days Arlington might experience as extreme heat. That analysis indicated that Arlington could likely expect a couple of weeks in summer of extreme heat conditions, in which case would render a field, especially in an already hot area of Town, unusable. The Recreation Director indicated that closing a field for two weeks in the summer would not impact the user groups because the field demand is not the same as it is in the shoulder seasons. Another Member commented that in reviewing the Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan, it seemed that water and flooding were more problematic than heat, although heat is still a concern. In that respect, the Member explained that usability of fields is highest in the shoulder seasons when temperatures are not typically high but fields have been rendered unusable due to rain/water/flooding. In looking at increasing the usability, the need is for increased access during the shoulder season, not the summer months. The Chair made reference to the Malden, MA Roosevelt Field project and stated that the major concern of the neighborhood residents was about increasing the temperature of their neighborhood, which he could see as being relatable to Arlington and therefore thought perhaps the installation restriction should be considered. Additional discussion was had about justice issues and locating fields in places that are less dense and more urban. An additional point made was that the Committee should consider installation restriction to prevent increase heat concerns in an already hotter area of town. Another Member commented that when looking at justice issues the Committee should also consider accessibility to better playing fields and how the placement in one area vs. another area of town might also contribute to that. Another Member stated that in terms of assignment of playing fields, it is not common that teams and fields are assigned based on residential location and there kids are playing at fields in both the East and West/Heights. The Recreation Director discussed his experience with

resident's reaction to field construction which has referenced frustration with more money being allocated in one area of town (Heights) over another (East). Another Member referenced that by looking at alternative infills as opposed to crumb rubber, this would seem that the Committee may already be addressing the heat issues, regardless of whether or not the field is in a hotter area of town. Another Member clarified that there is currently not a lot of information available about how much alternative infill plays a role in lowering the temperature, as the blades of grass which are made of plastic also create heat. The Committee seemed to agree that the installation of artificial turf should be on a case by case basis which discourages areas identified as a heat island, but not completely prohibited.

IV. Discussion: Project Timeline, Deliverables, Working Group Narratives, Draft Report

The Chair asked the Committee if there were any additional comments or thoughts in regards to the contents of the report. One Member reiterated that one issues Arlington has been trying to resolve with consideration of artificial turf fields is the usability during the shoulder seasons (spring and fall) and the importance of that piece being discussed in the report. The Chair addressed this comment and made reference to Ian Lacy's presentation that while artificial turf costs more, you do get more per dollar per hour out of it than you do natural grass. To that point, the Chair referenced this would be mentioned in the cost analysis section of the report.

The Chair indicated that the Committee Members would have a draft report on Friday, but that there was interest in moving next week's meeting from Tuesday to either Wednesday or Thursday to allow for more time to review the report. The Committee seemed to be in agreement but the majority felt that a later start time would be better. As such, the date and time of the next meeting will be decided on Friday and communicated out to the Committee. Committee Members were encouraged to read over the report and provide comments.

The Chair outlined that the Committee would likely only meet 3 more times. One next week either Wednesday 3/27 or Thursday 3/28 at a time TBD to discuss report edits/comments; the second one the following Tuesday 4/2 at 5pm to allow for public input; and the third tentatively Tuesday 4/9 at 5pm to discuss the final report and vote on it. The preference for the public input meeting on 4/2 is a hybrid option with hopes that all Committee Members would be able to attend in person. The location will likely be the Senior Center, but more to come on that at our next meeting. The goal would be to release the final report on either 4/11 or 4/12.

The Chair informed the Committee that a formal letter was submitted to the Select board formally requesting the extension for the report and it seemed that they would generally be in support of it.

The Chair also informed the Committee that Natasha Waden would be reaching out to individuals to clarify certain sections and asked Members to please respond as quickly as possible as we are on a tight deadline to get this draft completed.

Multiple Committee Members commented on the collaboration among the individuals on this Committee to discuss a somewhat controversial topic and to continually engage in a healthy debate/discussion which will likely lead to a final report that all Members are proud to stand behind.

V. New Business

There was no new business discussed.

VI. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn was made by Mike Gildesgame.

2nd by Marvin Lewiton.

Vote:

Mike Gildesgame, Yes
Leslie Mayer, Yes
Joseph Barr, Yes
Jill Krajewski, Yes
Natasha Waden, Yes
Marvin Lewiton, Yes
James DiTullio, Yes

Approved (7-0)