



Celebrating 34 Years of Environmental Leadership!

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Newton City Council
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Ave.
Newton, MA 02459

December 15, 2023

Honorable City Councilors,

As you know, Green Newton has a long history of advocating for the disuse of chemicals known to be toxic to human and environmental health and for their substitution with safer materials. We were strong advocates of an Integrated Pest Management program for the City of Newton's Parks and Schools to reduce the exposure of pesticides on residents, in particular to children. We advocated for the City's multiple plastics packaging reduction ordinances, with the understanding that a reduction in single use plastics means not just a reduction in waste but also a reduction in toxic chemicals such as PFAS and BPA in our environment and in our bodies. The City Council overwhelmingly passed the last packaging ordinance in September 2023 after strong agreement that these plastic materials cause harm to all of us and must be reduced.

Artificial turf is the same harmful plastic in another form. Green Newton understands the competing interests that play into the decision to install artificial turf at the South and North high schools, but we ask you to consider that, if you agree that plastic bags and take out containers are bad for us, that artificial turf is equally bad or worse. Please consider the following:

Toxicity - The harmful effects of chemicals contained in plastics is no longer in question. The EPA has designated PFOS and PFOA as hazardous substances and is considering adding more PFAS to the list. The Massachusetts state legislature is currently considering 4 separate bills to restrict the use of artificial turf (H3948, S2057, S523, and S524).

Greenhouse Gas - Assuming a 10-year lifespan, the life cycle carbon emissions of the proposed NNHS AT field replacement with a TPE infill (with recycling) would be the same amount of carbon as that generated by the use of 65 million black plastic takeout containers, or 200 containers per Newton household per year for 10 years. This effectively negates much of the benefit of the ordinance passed in September.

Questionable Recyclability - Commissioner Nicole Banks recently addressed the reuse of the rubber crumb and sand infill in an email to city councilors, but did not clarify the recycling of the turf material itself. The plastics industry is rife with 'greenwashing'

promises of recycling. The City needs to abide by higher standards and not rely solely on the promises of contractors. It is unclear if there is real evidence of artificial turf's recyclability.

Green Newton recognizes that there is an argument to be made from parents and sports groups to support the installation of artificial turf at certain playing fields, however our group's mission is to advocate for the environmental health and safety of people and the environment.

Natural grass was used prior to the existence of artificial turf and sports were still played on a regular basis throughout our community. As environmentalists, we know there are costs that we ought to seriously consider, such as the effects of chemicals and microplastics on our bodies and on nature. The eventual cost to clean up these chemicals and particles will be enormous, as we know from our experience with Superfund sites. These calculations have not been sufficiently addressed by city officials. Grass, when managed well, is a heat sink and a resource to beneficial insects and animals. Artificial turf is the absolute opposite.

The City has a proven alternative to artificial turf—natural grass. Before a financial commitment is made to install artificial turf at Newton North again, Green Newton requests that you pause the decision on December 18 to take time to thoroughly investigate the safety of artificial turf for our children and the environment, and conduct a lifetime cost-benefit analysis of artificial turf versus natural grass.

Respectfully,



Judy Jacobs
Executive Director
Green Newton