

Bri McAlevey (text of presentation)

Good evening, my name is Bri McAlevey, and I'm the mother of a Sharon HS varsity athlete. I walked across the HS field for the first time last year and I was appalled. It was a jaw dropping wake-up call that we need to do something to improve conditions for our athletes. Like most of you, I've stood on the sidelines of our competitor's fields and said things like "gee, this is a gorgeous field, why doesn't Sharon have one?" I wish artificial turf was a good choice for Sharon, I really do. Unfortunately, things that sound too good to be true, often are too good to be true. As we just heard, there are real dangers that come with synthetic turf.

Sharon residents care deeply about the environment and the climate crisis. Sharon worked hard to become officially designated as a Green Community. We voted to ban plastic grocery bags, we vote time and again to protect our water, and we do everything we can to lower our carbon footprint with initiatives like energy aggregation and solar canopies.

Currently, there is a wave of litigation in the US chemical industry regarding PFAS. In one settlement, 3M agreed to pay \$850 million dollars to Minnesota over PFAS contamination of drinking water. Lawsuits, in the Northeast, against manufacturers of PFAS include suits in NJ, NH, VT, and NY with more coming as the industry is forced to reveal the chemicals they're using to make plastics. Installing a plastic grass field, that is equivalent to 3.3 million plastic bags, laced with toxic chemicals that are known to pollute water, compromise health, and devastate the towns where they're manufactured, should not be an option for Sharon.

Why shouldn't our kids have the gold standard in playing fields - a natural grass athletic field? We're told that Sharon could never maintain such a field.

According to the Synthetic Turf Council (the organization that promotes artificial turf) fields are typically warranted for eight years, but their life expectancy depends on the amount and type of usage, and the maintenance it receives. If you play 1,000 hours on a turf field, you will be doing a lot more maintenance for more money and shorten the life span. The Synthetic Turf Council publishes this long list of guidelines so you don't damage your turf and void your warranty. Apparently voiding the warranty is easy to do.

GUIDELINES The list includes things like:

1. Purchasing expensive equipment that will need to be inspected and wiped clean every time it enters the turf.
2. Installing pavement all around the turf to prevent contaminants like gum, leaves, soil, dirt on shoes, any organic matter, liquids including sports drinks, and oils.
3. Maintaining and verifying an activity log is mandatory – "each and every maintenance activity, no matter how minor, must be recorded."
4. A maintenance person should walk the field daily to avoid permanent damage and safety hazards.
5. Redistribute migrated infill, look for foreign debris, check seams.
6. Leafy trees should not be located next to the field.

7. Brush, drag mats and rake all over and more often in high use areas.
8. Clean the infill that has collected at the edges of the mat before redistributing it.
9. Track events can cause damage.
10. And, perhaps most disturbing, use chemicals such as algaecides, fungicides, herbicides and anti-bacterial products, all of which would further contaminate our wetlands and lake.
11. Field markings are especially difficult with cork infill and likely with Brockfill, they suggest subcontracting that out to avoid damage to the turf.

This is a partial list of the high maintenance required for turf. If we can commit to this, why can't we invest the same level of resources to caring for a new grass field on a renovated base layer? We're told that synthetic turf would cost about \$1 million dollars to install and natural grass about half of that. The landscape architects state turf maintenance costs around \$10 thousand dollars a year and natural grass costs \$34 thousand, which seems way off. The Sports Turf Managers Association is the leading group of professionals that maintain both artificial and natural grass fields around the country. They state that natural grass costs much less to maintain even with high usage. Around \$14,000 dollars for natural grass, and almost \$23,000 dollars for artificial turf. Those are real numbers by active professionals doing the maintenance.

Investing in a well-maintained organic grass athletic field makes the most sense for Sharon. The Department of Public Works should be given the budget to purchase the specialized equipment, hire and train dedicated staff, and obtain the necessary supplies to properly care for it. These experts and new machinery could support all the fields in Sharon. Why not create a task force of stakeholders: the Department of Public Works, all the athletic associations the Recreation Department, and residents. and figure out how to install the gold standard at the HS this summer, upgrade every other field in Sharon, and work at solving many of the space issues we will have to deal with as we lose playing fields to construction.

Of course we won't be able to play 1,000 hours on that one new grass field. However, a natural grass field with the right maintenance can be expected to withstand more 400—500 hrs. of playing time. I realize that's difficult, given the lack of playing fields in town, but inconvenience is part and parcel of any big construction job. Practices will have to occur elsewhere, we'll have to move teams around town and maybe out of town, but I think with a dedicated task force and the right budget we can figure this out. A well-maintained natural grass field is the gold standard, it's less expensive over its lifetime, and would not pose legal challenges down the road.

We have the money to do something truly game-changing at the HS and contribute to the betterment of all the fields in town. Let's not miss this opportunity. Our student-athletes work their butts off in the classroom and play their hearts out on the field. If we have the money to install a new natural grass field this summer, we should do it, and we should commit to maintaining it at a high level. Our student-athletes and our taxpayers deserve no less.

Thank you.