

The April 28, 2021, Special Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Selectmen was convened at 5:05 p.m. by First Selectman Beth Heller via teleconference. Ms. Heller declared the following members present via roll call: First Selectman Beth Heller; Deputy First Selectman Mica Cardozo, Joseph J. Crisco, Jr.; Joseph S. Dey, III; Dwight C. Rowland; and Sandra T. Stein.
Present for staff: Town Counsel Gerald Weiner; Media Specialist Pua Ford; and Board Clerk Geraldine Shaw.

The April 28, 2021, Special Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Selectmen may be viewed on YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/ZcbbQRRupE0> It is recommended you view this video for details of the presentations.

FIRST SELECTMAN'S REMARKS

"Welcome everyone. I will now call the April 28, 2021, Special meeting of the Board of Selectmen to order. As permitted by Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7B, extended by Executive Order 9A, related to the COVID 19 Pandemic, this meeting is being held remotely with no in-person attendance. At the SCRCOG meeting I attended this morning we were reminded that today is day 422 of our State Response to the Pandemic.

We are holding this Special Meeting for the sole purpose of information gathering, and discussion, regarding two proposed ordinances submitted by the Ordinance Committee to the Board of Selectmen, that will prohibit future installation of artificial turf fields with synthetic infill in Woodbridge.

In December 2019, an Amity Regional District Referendum which included installation of an "all-weather field" made of synthetic turf was approved.

Many Woodbridge residents have come forward following the approval of this field with their concerns about potential health and environmental issues. Tonight's conversation is to help the Board decide whether-or-not the Town should create an ordinance to prevent future installations of artificial turf fields in Woodbridge. Again, to prevent future installations.

*The Ordinance Committee has submitted two potential ordinances to the Board of Selectmen for consideration. Both proponents and opponent speakers were each given 30 minutes to speak. We have two **proponents** of artificial turf fields who will be given 15 minutes each to speak (totaling half an hour) and three **opponents** of artificial turf fields who will be given 10 minutes each (also totaling half an hour). I will set a timer and I would ask each speaker to be respectful and end his or her remarks once the timer goes off.*

As this is a special meeting, there will be no public comments. I will ask that the Board members give each speaker their full attention, and write down any questions they might have, which may then be asked during the Q & A portion of the meeting.

This evening's meeting will be an opportunity for the Board of Selectmen to become well-informed, to make an informed decision on whether-or-not to create this ordinance. At the end of tonight's meeting,

we may choose to set a date for a public hearing for one of the two proposed ordinances to move forward.

Again, I will remind everyone, that regardless of any decision that is made tonight, there will be no impact on the current turf field project at the high school, which has full approvals in place, and has already begun. Thank you.”

PRESENTERS

Ms. Heller informed the audience that the order of the presenters had changed from the list on the published agenda.

Ms. Julie Lemay, MPD, Sr. Environmental Health Scientist at Gradient Corp and Dr. David M. Teter, PhD, PE, QSD, an independent consultant based in San Francisco presented power point slides supporting the use of artificial turf, and studies that the risks to health and the environment are low.

Dr. Graham Peaslee, PhD, Professor of Chemical Physics at the University of Notre Dame, Dr. Diana Zuckerman, PhD, National Center for Health Research, and Dr. Debbie Tatro, PhD – Independent Biomedical Researcher all presented power point slides opposing the use of artificial turf and detailed studies showing the risk of toxins to the environment and human health.

Q&A SEGMENT

Dwight Rowland – asked what is the normal life of a properly maintained “turf field”?

Dr. Tatro answered that the normal life is approximately eight to ten years. She said that part of the required maintenance includes a yearly hardness test – the result of which may require replacing infill each year. She also mentioned some fields in the Washington DC area that lasted only two years.

Mr. Rowland asked if the life of the field depends on the type and frequency of activity.

Dr. Tatro said that that play is part of the length of life, but also the weather plays a role. If there is a lot of rain, a waterbed affect often occurs and the infill can flow out of the field.

Mr. Rowland asked about the toxins being absorbed through any turf burns or wounds.

Dr. Tatro cited the case of a teenager in Maryland who developed MERSA after getting a turf burn. She said that bacteria stay on top of artificial turf instead of being absorbed in the natural dirt. Ms. Lemay stated that that result probably resulted from poor medical care of the burn. Dr. Teter agreed with Ms. Lemay that the MERSA did not result from the artificial field. Sunlight, UV light, kills bacteria very quickly. He said that any reports of MERSA are usually traced back to locker rooms, wrestling mats, etc.

Ms. Stein – said that continual infill needs to be done every year to maintain the field and that any ordinance that prohibits artificial turf installation, would preclude maintenance of the current field. The Board must take that into consideration. Ms. Stein noted that there are environmental costs to be considered and she likes Dr. Peaslee’s suggestion to sample the water now and then continue to monitor it – establishing the amount of risk the Town is under. She asked if there were others that support that methodology to help the Town understand the exposure.

Dr. Teter said that he agrees with everything that Dr. Peaslee said about base-line monitoring. Base-line monitoring is performed in all his projects to be sure of the integrity of the product and make corrections before there are any problems. He said that the purpose of the fields is not to reduce environmental costs, but to increase the hours of play. To answer Ms. Stein's question about replenishing infill each year, Dr. Teter said that to maintain natural grass fields it requires fertilizers which can add nitrates and nitrites to your ground water – or herbicides and mossicides. Both have risks, both have costs.

Dr. Zuckerman said that grass fields can be well maintained organically. She said that once an artificial field is installed the PFAS is there, forever and the turf is very difficult to replace with natural grass.

Ms. Stein is also concerned about the cost of, and the ability to dispose of the worn field when it has to be replaced. As to the use of fertilizers and pesticides, Woodridge has organically based practices.

Ms. Heller – asked Dr. Teter, that since it was decided to install a cork field instead of crumb rubber at the Presidio in San Francisco – is this something the Town should be concerned about?

Dr. Teter – said that the decision between cork and crumb rubber is site specific. He said that if fields are located where outfall would enter wetlands, bio-swales can be designed to filter out PFAS.

Ms. Heller – directed her next question to Dr. Peaslee. She said that that Amity Turf Field experts testified that there are no PFASs in this product. If the level is zero – is it zero? Because the Board just heard that there is PFAS in the product no matter what.

Dr. Teter said that the term PFASs is over-reaching. It includes polymers and other solids which generally are regarded as safe and to his experience do not breakdown into unsafe materials. None of the molecular compounds tested for were found in the material being used for the Amity field.

Ms. Heller reminded everyone that the Board is not concerned with stopping the construction of the Amity field, but trying to decide if they want to allow future fields.

Dr. Graham said that PFASs are in artificial turf, and they are polymeric. Polymers are classified as “safe” but they are manufactured from a class of compounds called monomers. When textiles are produced, the manufactures switch to a substance that degrades in sunlight. These chemicals never go away.

Ms. Heller asked if artificial turf freezes.

Dr. Teter said the fields can freeze. Organic infill, such as coconut husks need to be watered to maintain their warrantee. Crumb rubber will not freeze. Cork fields do not freeze. Coconut infill requires watering to maintain the warrantee and can freeze. Dr. Teter said that the use of organic infill is relatively new.

Dr. Tatro said she disagrees with Dr. Teter that the polymers do not degrade into PFAS. She said that since Sharon CT imposed a moratorium on the artificial turf, several Massachusetts companies are gearing up organic methods to improve grass fields. Dr. Tatro noted that artificial fields are six times

more expensive than maintaining grass fields do you the frequency of replacement and the cost of disposal.

Mr. Cardozo asked Ms. Lemay if, after the first year following the installation of a field, would testing show that there is increasing run-off of toxicity from degradation of the field material, and replacement fields.

Ms. Lemay answered that you would have to think through what was being tested for: run-off for ecological reasons; ground water for residents; content of turf vs soil for the players.

Dr. Teter said that the ongoing testing on the Presidio field does not show increasing amounts of any leaching. There is an initial leaching with the first rain, and then no increase. As to crumb rubber vs organic fill, Dr. Teter said he is more concerned about the use of organic infill, as the material come from countries of high use of pesticides some of which have never been approved in the United States.

Mr. Cardozo directed his next question to Dr. Tatro – He said that the reason for installing the turf field at Amity is the lack of playing time. He said that most of the comparable high schools all have turf fields. What drove Sharon’s decision for a moratorium.

Dr. Tator said that the driving force for proponents of the turf field was the lack of playing time. However, the Conservation Commission rejected the field at the high school because of possible contamination of plastics and PFAS – and at an Annual Town Meeting the voters instituted a 3-year moratorium while the Town works with local companies to build up the grass fields and make them more resilient to the weather and the Town is also looking for more land to put in additional fields to enable a rotation program.

Mr. Cardozo said that his concern is the disposal of the artificial field when replacement is required. As far as installation going forward, he said that he sees no major risk factor between an artificial field and a natural field.

Mr. Rowland suggested that Bethany be contacted regarding the turf field installed at the soccer complex.

Mr. Dey said that he does not support an ordinance banning turf fields in Woodbridge.

Ms. Stein said that she does not support a moratorium. Given the risk factors of expanding this type of fields in Woodbridge she does support going forward with consideration of an ordinance.

Ms. Heller and Mr. Crisco agreed with Ms. Stein.

Mr. Rowland said that he does not like to “say never”. Science evolves and at some point there may be a product that the Town would like to consider.

Ms. Heller asked if there was any support for a public hearing, and if so, which ordinance would the Board support.

Mr. Dey said that he would not vote for either ordinance – and recommended the Board write its own.

Ms. Stein and Mr. Dey supported waiting until the new Board of Selectmen is seated in July.

Ms. Heller said she would like to move it forward to a public hearing – and then the new Board can continue from there.

Mr. Cardozo also stated that he does not support going to public hearing on the either of the proposed ordinances.

Ms. Heller asked Town Counsel Gerald Weiner how best to go forward with a moratorium.

Mr. Weiner said that he would seek a definitive answer as to the Board of Selectmen’s authority to issue a moratorium effecting building. If they have no authority the request can be referred to The Town Plan and Zoning Commission.

CONSENSUS OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

The Board of Selectmen agreed that it was the consensus of the Board to not schedule a Public Hearing at this time. Instead, the Board requested that Town Counsel Weiner report at the May 12, 2021, Regular Meeting what the authority of the Board is to institute a moratorium on building and if such a moratorium is not in the purview of the Board of Selectmen to aid in a request to The Town Plan and Zoning Commission.

Ms. Heller and the Board thanked the presenters for sharing their knowledge and experience with Artificial Turf Fields.

ADJOURNMENT

On a non-debatable motion by Ms. Heller, seconded by Mr. Crisco, the meeting adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Geraldine S. Shaw, Clerk

