

January 13, 2016

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES
JANUARY 13, 2016**

Present: Mary Blanchard, Chairman
Priscilla Gimas
Mary Dowling
Craig Moran
Michael Suprenant
Leon Gaumond, Jr., Town Administrator

Dr. Erin Nosek, Superintendent of Schools
Deborah Boyd, Associate Superintendent

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. following the Pledge of Allegiance.

Discussion Regarding Artificial Turf for Athletic Fields

Dr. Erin Nosek, Superintendent of Schools and Deborah Boyd, Associate Superintendent appeared before the Board.

D. Boyd provided the Board with background information on the proposed artificial turf on some of the fields at Tantasqua Regional High School. The Tantasqua Regional School Committee had discussed the proposal at their meeting on December 15, 2015. They discussed the benefits of synthetic fields, specifically the increased availability to school and community users, more reliability and decreased maintenance costs in future years. The proposed project includes resurfacing the track, which will need to be done in the next year or two, and making the press box handicap accessible. The press box has been limited to employee use only since its installation in 2002, as that building project did not include funds to install the required ramp and elevator lift to meet new codes. The Committee discussed the proposal to fund the project through the issuance of bonds. The proposal would have bond payments funded completely from the District's Summer Sports and School Choice Funds. She stressed that no increased debt payments would go to community towns, nor would the operating budgets increase due to bond payments.

After discussion, the Committee voted the following:

1) "To appropriate \$50,000 from its School Choice Revolving Fund and \$50,000 from its Summer Camps Revolving Fund for the purpose of paying for engineering and design services on the proposed artificial turf project." No debt will be incurred for these services. District funds will cover them.

2) That the District incur debt of up to \$2,100,000 in accordance with Chapter 71, Section 16(d) of General Laws, for the purpose of paying costs of designing and constructing artificial turf fields, resurfacing the track and making the press box handicap accessible.

D. Boyd explained that Massachusetts General Laws require that the District notify the Town of these votes within seven days. MGL then stipulates that the District cannot issue any debt until at least 60 days after the vote of the School Committee and that "prior to expiration of said period (60 days) any member town of the regional school district may hold a Town Meeting for the purpose of expressing disapproval of the amount of debt authorized by the district committee, and if at such meeting a majority of the voters present and voting thereon express disapproval of the amount authorized by the district school committee, the said debt shall not be authorized."

D. Boyd said that if none of the member towns convene a Town Meeting to discuss the debt issuance within 60 days, the authorization is considered approved. She noted that school administrators and committee members have had numerous meetings with community and Recreation Committee members and have heard nothing but support for the project and proposed means of funding.

D. Boyd said that the community use of the fields is constant at both schools, and the fields take a beating. She said that it costs between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year as part of the capital plan for reseeding and maintaining the fields. They preserve the football field, so they do not allow much community use of that field. They propose to convert two fields to artificial turf to allow more use of those fields.

C. Moran said that the artificial turf gets hot in the sun, and questioned whether the children would get burned. Dr. Nosek said that they would have to monitor that and would regulate access to the field in the summer months. She said that on a 95 degree day, they would not let anyone use the field. D. Boyd added that they would redirect sports activities to non-turf fields at that time.

C. Moran said that the turf field should last about six to eight years. Dr. Nosek said that the turf would last about eight to ten years, or as much as 20 years. She will look for product comparison. D. Boyd said that the fields will be vacuumed regularly, and

patches of turf can be replaced easily, which will be built into the cost of their capital plan each year.

D. Boyd said that an artificial turf field must be designed to make sure that drainage is accurate. A design firm would create the specs and oversee the project. Soil samples would be tested to ensure that all codes have been met. Dr. Nosek said that they will follow DPH guidelines, and assured the Board that they will not put the children at risk.

M. Dowling said that she would support it, and noted that natural fields don't drain as well as turf fields. She noted that her son played sports in the deep south, and never had a game canceled due to heat. She expressed concern about the carcinogenic risk of the rubber filler component. Dr. Nosek said that the Department of Public Health has done studies on the rubber concern, and there is no scientific evidence to support that it is dangerous. M. Dowling stated that she would only support the field if softer organic fillers would be used.

M. Suprenant asked whether there was a budget detail for this project. D. Boyd said that they had obtained three quotes from turf installers that were in the ballpark, then the track and handicap accessible components were added. She said that they receive \$900,000 from School Choice every year, and \$300,000-\$400,000 are put toward lowering the assessments for the five towns.

M. Suprenant expressed concern about an increase in students' injuries, and said that he would prefer having the students play on natural turf. M. Blanchard said that there is more bacteria in natural turf as opposed to the artificial turf. She said that there was a good letter from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services regarding the rubber; nothing is perfect, but this is better for maintenance and competition.

Ted Goodwin, 58 McGilpin Road, expressed concern about the rubber component, as it is basically hazardous waste. He said that there are real risks regarding children ingesting this substance. He stressed the need to ensure that the materials used are proven to be safe.

D. Boyd said that the vendors have talked about the use of organic products. She noted that there would be economy in doing more than one field at the same time.

M. Blanchard said that if it goes to Town Meeting and even one town votes "no," then the project is dead.

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MOTION: That the Board support the School Committee's proposal to use artificial turf on their fields, as discussed this evening, by P. Gimas.

2nd: C. Moran

M. Dowling was not satisfied with the Department of Public Health's assessment, and hoped that there were other people on the School Committee who are looking at the health issue, not just the cost.

M. Suprenant said that the timing on this has made it difficult for communities who may not have a Special Town Meeting planned in the near future. He noted that it came to be known on December 17, 2015, making it difficult, if not impossible, to hold a Special Town Meeting in time. M. Blanchard commented that this is not the case in Sturbridge.

Vote: Four in favor; M. Suprenant abstained.

MOTION: To adjourn, by P. Gimas.

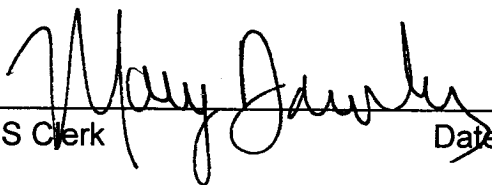
2nd: C. Moran

Vote: All in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Knowles


BOS Clerk _____ Date 3/24/16