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Please consider this testimony in your further discussions of synthetic turf on MCPS and other County property. We apologize for the late submission.

Testimony of Kathleen Michels and Jerry Kickenson

**RE: MCPS discussion of Synthetic Turf fields – Whitman and Einstein HS**  
**- Correcting “Alternative Facts” and misleading information presented by MCPS**  
**- Proposal for discussion of safer, healthier natural turf fields**

At the presentations by MCPS (Seth Adams) in January at both Whitman and Einstein High Schools there were a number of inaccuracies and simply incorrect statements. If the case for synthetic turf fields in partnership with private organizations at schools is so strong the truth should be sufficient. As parents of two K-12 MCPS athletes/graduates from Down County Consortium schools including Blair HS (and veterans of that field) we would like to set some facts straight and make a proposal.

Some of the "alternative facts" Seth Adams presented at both meetings which should be PUBLICALLY corrected were:

1) That shoes and plastic somehow met the definition of the "plant based infill" the county and MCPS now require (of course only the cork, coconut based options currently available do fulfill that definition). Mr. Adams presented ground up athletic shoes and plastic pellets as “plant based infills” being considered. If that is true, we look forward to touring their shoe and plastic tree farms from which these plant based infills will come.

2) Skewed and misleading cost comparisons for synthetic vs grass turf fields making grass fields look more expensive when they are not.

- **life-cycle costs were not considered for synturf. Only supposed maintenance cost differences were considered.** Even the 2011 county council review and report admitted grass fields were much less expensive when both initial and life cycle costs for both were calculated, even over 20 years. (2011ATMoCo) Their analysis showed the difference in maintenance costs alone did not even come close to making up for the much more expensive initial and replacement costs for Synturf fields<sup>1</sup>. In fact, to try and make synthetic turf look financially competitive that report had to factor in a “fudge factor” of hoped for, **not actual**, hugely higher rental fee revenue for each synturf field to make up for the synturf cost.
- No mention was made that **Replacement Costs are high and can be early**. The early replacement of the Blair HS Synturf is prematurely draining **\$750,000** from other needs. WJHS and RMHS are looking at similar costs.

**3) Misleading Maintenance and Safety testing statements**

- With synthetic turf Fields like Blair not even lasting the length of their 8-year warranty and the others (WJHS and RMHS) threatening student safety and health as they become too hard and degrade, there is real-life evidence and consensus that to keep the synthetic turf fields at least minimally safe for students **MORE maintenance needs to be done not less**.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/atworkgroup/atreportfinal.pdf>

- **HOWEVER, Mr. Adams** repeatedly indicated to save money **more synturf maintenance could be cut – even though needed for athlete safety**. MCPS needs to state publically and DEMONSTRATE its commitment to increasing maintenance and hardness testing for student athlete safety, NOT to make such safety related testing and maintenance optional.
  - What he also left out is that MCPS COULD provide another option but has so far chosen not to: safe healthy **STATE OF THE ART grass fields** to replace poorly constructed poorly maintained grass which would be much more cost effective than synturf especially if implemented throughout the system of school and public sports fields.
- 3) **Giving schools false and limited options and downplaying the impact of replacement costs**: the assertion that the only choice parents have is old muddy rocky fields or new synturf because there is no money for fields is bogus. The BOE actually proposed many millions of dollars as partial payment for SYNTHETIC TURF HS fields. BUT only for synturf! They could have proposed a fraction of the cost for state of the art durable grass instead. The synturf funding from the CUPF fund as proposed was nixed because of its high cost in the face of other priorities combined with the explosive and ever expanding impact of synturf on the MCPS capital budget.
  - 4) That "alternative fact" is further highlighted by Mr. Adams's repeated insistence that there is a slush fund of some kind (the Community Use of Public Funds) that **will pay for the synturf rug and infill replacements** for all synturf fields every 8 years. If that money is available, it could be made available for high performing **grass fields too** without blowing the budget on repeated and ballooning synturf replacements. In addition, since MSI is paying for the installation of the fields in this case with guaranteed use over 10 years, no revenue would go into the fund to offset the later replacement costs of those same fields. So where would the money come from to replenish those funds and what needs would synturf replacement funding take priority over?
  - 5) GRASS vs Plastic SYNTURF comparisons are misleading at best: Mr. Adams / MCPS's visual comparisons were for old poorly installed abused grass fields vs new synturf fields. The correct comparison is well constructed and maintained state of the art grass vs synturf And looks are misleading at best- synturf field plastic is always green no matter how hard the field gets. Grass fields indicate when maintenance is needed.

There are many examples of all the latest construction and maintenance techniques to ensure make grass fields are more playable and durable under adverse conditions.

For example From the 2014 Montgomery Parks Soccerplex report:

...“On Columbus Day weekend we host our Discovery Cup tournament and for several days prior to the weekend it rained buckets. By Friday morning we had received 6" of rainfall. We put our sand drained and sand based fields to the test. Every other tournament in the Mid-Atlantic region either cancelled their tournament or only ran their event on synthetic turf fields. **We were the only tournament/facility playing games on natural grass. The decision to add or convert to sand was a success.** ..... In 2014 we will begin to increase capacity on these fields by offering weekday training time. With new maintenance practices we believe we can increase the number of hours to 1,000+/year.”...

We would like to propose the county step back from paving sports fields with plastic given all the advances in constructing and maintaining durable grass fields, at a fraction of the cost of

synthetic turf fields especially when the lifecycle costs are considered. For the price of one synthetic field, 2-3 state of the art grass fields could be installed AT EXISTING FIELD SITES and this could be done across the sports field systems (Rec, MCPS and Parks) so that pressure isn't just put on a very few fields while the others have potential for so much more use for many more players. We just are not doing it.

We propose the county council pull together a forum and present the issues and solutions for fields across the county run by the Recreation Dept, the Schools and the Parks. **The goal should be that everyone can play on safe healthy fields and not have to make the sad choice between playing on abused poorly constructed, poorly maintained grass or hot, unsanitary toxin-laden plastic and tire crumb. Or not playing at all.**

You see: the one preferred option of state of the art grass fields - although much more cost effective- is not even on the table. Although the Parks dept is taking some steps in that direction with centralized expertise and funding support. Solutions that prioritize state of the art higher performance grass fields as the healthiest and safest option for all, must at least have a "seat at the table" when decisions are being made.

At the end of the day even the highest performing grass field with all the bells and whistles is MUCH cheaper to install, durable and, especially when maintenance is centralized, cost effective to maintain than synturf. But the parents are not being offered that option by MCPS ( or MSI) It's synturf or no turf.

Until MCPS, the BOE, the County Council and the Executive all together step up and stick up for what is right and healthy for their kids, hot, unsanitary and short lived unsustainable plastic will continue to pave our children's fields and blow up our county and education budget.

Let's keep the conversation going and fight for what's right for our children and communities

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