

Friday Aug. 10, 2018

DEP nixes artificial turf at Pond Road field

by Marty Green

Advocates for an artificial turf sports field on Pond Road were forced to withdraw their proposal in late July after the state Department of Environmental Protection ruled against it because the field lay within Zone 1, a protected area immediately around the town well. In an email dated July 27, Susan Connors of the DEP's Central Regional

Office in Worcester responded to an inquiry from Karen Strickland, one of the group's organizers, writing, "Unfortunately ... this field cannot be constructed in a Zone 1 area. You cannot remove earth and replace it with plastic in a Zone 1 area."

Just days before receiving that email, supporters of the turf field had vigorously defended their plan at a July 23 meeting of the Bare Hill Pond

Watershed Management Committee. About three dozen people attended the meeting to discuss the proposed field. "We never have an audience like this," pond committee Chair Bruce Leicher remarked, looking around the room.

At Leicher's invitation, representatives from the Board of Health, the Water and Sewer Commission, Planning Board, and several other

TURF continued on page 11

TURF continued from page 1

town boards and committees were present, as well as the town administrator, the DPW director, and three consultants who came with the supporters of the proposed field.

Ed Frackiewicz, who is president of the Harvard Athletic Association, and Strickland, who serves on the Athletic Advisory Committee, presented the case for the new field. Frackiewicz said the goal was to build a synthetic field within walking distance of the Bromfield School, using about \$3.25 million in private funds. The proposed field would include a new softball diamond as well as space for soccer, lacrosse, and field hockey.

"We can engineer an environmentally friendly, multi-sport ... turf field at Bromfield with no tax money," Frackiewicz said. He explained that Harvard sports teams lost 25 to 30 days of practice last spring because the Pond Road field was too wet for use. Frackiewicz and Strickland said that the need for a new field is particularly urgent because the fields at Hildreth Elementary School will be out of use for the next two years while the new school building is under construction.

In the discussion that followed their presentation, both DPW Director Tim Kilhart and Cindy Russo of the Water and Sewer Commission raised the crucial issue of the town well. Kilhart noted that part of the existing playing field is within Zone 1, the primary protection area around a well that supplies public drinking water. Within that zone, Kilhart pointed out, the town must be "environmentally safe, not just environmentally friendly."

Both Kilhart and Russo also emphasized that the project would have to have approval from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection

before getting the go-ahead from any local boards.

DEP letter ends debate

The sports group had planned to seek the Select Board's support the following week. But, by the time the Select Board met July 31, Frackiewicz and Strickland had received the DEP's email, and they acknowledged that there was no possibility of a turf field at the Pond Road location. Speaking at the Select Board meeting, Frackiewicz sounded very pessimistic about the likelihood of such a field anywhere in town, calling the other locations "very challenging if not impossible."

Strickland, on the other hand, said she was still willing to work toward building an artificial turf field elsewhere in town, such as near the McCurdy Track. And she told the Press in a later phone call that she hopes improvements can be made to the part of the Pond Road field that is not within the well's primary protection zone. But before moving ahead, she said, she wanted leadership and direction from the Select Board.

Select Board Chair Lucy Wallace asked Strickland and other supporters of the project if they had spoken with MassDevelopment about using fields at Devens, and they responded they had not. Both Wallace and Select Board member Alice von Loesecke urged them to do so, if only to find some alternative fields to allow the current ones a "rest period" when maintenance and improvements could be done.

Darren Magan, who coaches softball, reminded everyone of the need to move quickly to deal with the loss of a playing field during new school construction. There are about 40 girls in the softball program, he said, who will not have a place to play next spring unless another field is found.