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To: [Carol Ann Desiderio](#); [Emily Granoff](#)
Subject: Oppose Artificial Turf: Remove Toxic Soil: Restore Natural Grass - Public comment for City Council 5/23
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Oppose Artificial Turf: Remove Toxic Soil: Restore Natural Grass - Public comment

Dear Malden City Council,

Please include this letter in the public comment. I am **opposed to installing artificial turf** at Roosevelt Park. I urge city leaders to **remove the 3 feet of contaminated toxic soil** necessary for natural landscaping, switch the plan to **restore a natural grass** athletic field with proper drainage and grading. A natural grass solution would score more goals: living grass will be more cost effective, provide our kids with healthier play time, provide science-based climate solutions, naturally cool our neighborhood, and demonstrate leadership integrity for environmental justice for our community.

In a new article from last week, UMA's Neighborhood View reported that:

"Other Malden sports groups have also voiced concerns about Roosevelt Park becoming an unplayable field. In a letter to City Councillor Steve Winslow, Malden resident and soccer player Kim Brookes wrote that she does not trust that Malden can maintain a grass field."

But I say, if artificial turf fields are so easy and cheap to maintain, then why doesn't Malden take care of its aging, unsafe artificial turf fields? Nearby Maplewood Park has failed its GMAX testing: which means players are even more likely to be injured and get concussions. If fake turf is so cheap, why doesn't Malden replace fields that are getting worn out? When fake plastic fields are due for replacement, playing on them is actually more dangerous.

It is true that Malden needs a park commission to maintain parks and fields. It is true that the DPW is spread too thin trying to maintain all the parks without an adequate budget. But why heap these economic consequences on a formerly red lined-neighborhood, where most of the heat-trapping plastic fields are already located? Why "solve" the problem by taking away living green space from the lowest income census tract of the city? Why turn a problem of old environmental racism into more, new, environmental racism?

Why is Malden targeting this small area of Ward 5-1, formerly red-lined, already suffering from an urban heat island added to by most of Malden's artificial turf fields? Where the most children of immigrants attend school every day at the Salemwood School? Why is this park being targeted for removal of public green space? The answer is environmental racism.

Deborah Burke is quoted as saying *"This was a matter of equity, rooted in the belief that Malden children—no matter their race, class, or background—deserve every opportunity that their peers in wealthier communities receive."*

Peers in wealthier communities have more green space, more natural grass, more cooling shade trees. They are not called leafy suburbs for nothing. As a someone who grew up in a leafy suburbs and has taught in cities, I see what urban children are missing out on, and it's NOT the opportunity to play on a heat trapping, chemical laden, hazardously hard plastic-over-gravel surface. Artificial turf is an unregulated plastic product that raises many valid health concerns, and PFAS regulations are coming. Malden children should have equal access to healthy public green space, and freedom from increased environmental burdens placed on them. Our climate is heating up. Maintaining living public green space in every neighborhood is an important cooling solution. Our kids need a healthy place to play. Healthy play is vital to growth and development. Play is healthier and safer on natural grass. Plastic turf is known to contain toxic PFAS chemicals, increased chance of joint and head injuries from increased hardness, more staph infections from turf burn, increased risk of heat illness from heat trapping plastic grass blades: those are not healthy choices. Our kids need us to listen to the science, that play is healthier and safer on real grass. Our kids need us to show grit, to do the right thing to provide fair treatment to all neighborhoods, to prudently protect and restore the environmental benefits of natural living green spaces for all to play on and enjoy.

But I am just one person. Don't just take me word for it. I've spoken with many parents of Salemwood students and asked their opinions. Have you? Over 50 caregivers I polled told me they did NOT want plastic turf for their children to play on, citing concerns of plastic chemicals, heat and loss of green time in nature. Artificial turf proponents recommend scheduling games on early morning or evening hours to avoid extreme heat exposure. Salemwood Students have recess at the sunniest time of day and will be most vulnerable to extreme heat exposure. The surrounding neighborhood does not consider the removal of two acres of public green space a "benefit" either. Adjacent neighbors and over 200 Salemwood School community members signed a petition for natural grass. Where is the inclusion of these voices? Who's voices count?

The idea that *"flood storage capacity would be set to improve" is not true*. The plan does not improve flood storage capacity. Natural soil and grass absorbs 27,000 gallons per acre/per inch of rain. The artificial turf plan will store only a twentieth of this amount of stormwater. Floodwater overwhelming the storm drains would spill over into neighborhood streets and basements. During extreme precipitation events, the Park receives a lot of storm water from the highlands above. The project is uninsurable because it is in a flood zone. The City acknowledges this in the Section 108 Loan Application Appendix B, as a risk they are willing to take. When the water storage under the artificial turf is or becomes inadequate or the system fails will this cause an increase in flooding for a neighborhood that already experiences flooding during heavy rains? Since the neighborhood drainage and flooding is not being addressed as part of this project, is the City prepared to be legally liable if after the natural grass is removed (which is absorbing thousands of gallons of water) and flooding increases for residents in this low lying neighborhood?

City leadership maintains that *"the number of residents who will be able to play on the field will increase. Youth athletic groups, Salemwood School students, and the surrounding neighborhood would experience these benefits."*

Another excuse for removing our public green spaces is because its a soggy field. *“Bowdridge also mentioned Roosevelt’s longtime issues with drainage as another reason for support of the project. Citing it as an “ongoing problem,” Bowdridge said that even the replacement of drainage during the construction of the Salemwood School did not ameliorate the issue.*

“If you go down there and it rains, you can see the puddles sitting there for days,” she said.”

Malden's Devir Park is another notoriously soggy public green space with a soccer field and two softball diamonds, also. Devir is getting an improvement project with all natural grass. We spoke with the landscape architects about the soggy factor, and they said that with proper grading and drainage, natural grass at Devir Park would be perfectly fine. Neighbors objected to the idea of fake turf at Devir, and so Devir is getting all real grass. If Roosevelt’s field were renovated with proper drainage and grading, and the natural grass restored, it would be an asset to the community, just like Devir.

Some view Roosevelt Park as a fringe issue that they wish would just go away. But the festering debate reveals intersectional questions at the core of governance: Who's Malden is this? Who is asked for their input? Who is excluded? What levers are behind real land grabs? Who feels entitled to take away a public living green space from a neighborhood? Who is being robbed? What parts of the city code will we abide by and which ones will we ignore? Voting power, marginalized voices, real estate desirability, climate science, systemic racism, and environmental justice. Roosevelt Park is an opportunity for our elected leaders to walk the talk on diversity, equity and inclusion, climate and public health infrastructure. I hope this election will help Malden find its way toward environmental justice for all neighborhoods, Falkner included.

I urge the Malden City Council to listen to the recommendations of the Malden CPC and remove the lead contaminated soil down to a level to prepare it for natural landscaping. I also urge the City Council to switch the plan to natural grass and get it done.

The science shows that natural grass is healthier for playing on.

A natural grass playing field would score more goals: it would align with Malden’s climate goals, by preserving a cooling living green space in an urban heat island. It would repair environmental racism and prevent new environmental racism in a historically red-lined community by preserving access to living green space for residents and school children most vulnerable to extreme heat and chronic stress. Roosevelt Park is an opportunity for you, our elected leaders to walk the talk on diversity, equity and inclusion, climate and public health infrastructure.

Sincerely,

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