

# McLEAN CITIZENS ASSOCIATION

## Resolution

### Regarding the Proposed Plans to Install Synthetic Turf on Athletic Fields in Fairfax County

September 6, 2006

**Whereas**, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors voted on June 5, 2006, to place a \$150 million bond proposal on the November 7, 2006 ballot that, among other things, designates \$10 million to be used to convert grass rectangular fields to synthetic turf fields in Fairfax County parks; and

**Whereas**, officials of the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) indicate that there is County-wide need for many additional rectangular athletic fields; and

**Whereas**, the FCPA has determined that replacing grass fields with synthetic turf is a viable alternative that will provide significantly increased field usage; and

**Whereas**, an increased inventory of fields converted to synthetic turf could have the auspicious effect of reducing pressure on the FCPA to develop new fields, allowing more undeveloped acreage and park land to be preserved in its natural state, a form of open space which the FCPA's Needs Assessment Survey showed that Fairfax County citizens value more highly than any other; and

**Whereas**, many families in McLean and Fairfax County use rectangular athletic fields on a frequent and regular basis and support plans to convert athletic fields to synthetic turf; and

**Whereas**, the conversion of natural grass fields to synthetic turf lengthens the present March-to-November playing season to 365 days per year, with as few as eight hours of down time per day; and

**Whereas**, such a substantial increase in field usage could change the basic character of a park, dramatically affecting the quality of life of residents who live near parks with an athletic field that has been converted to synthetic turf; and

**Whereas**, increases in field usage could also place stress on a park's infrastructure, requiring upgrades to a park's amenities (parking spaces, spectator seating, buffer zones, restroom facilities, playground equipment, and waste receptacles); and

**Whereas**, as more athletic fields are converted to synthetic turf, a number of potentially serious questions arise regarding the safety of users, especially children, and the long-term impact on the environment (see attached); and

**Whereas**, despite the fact that public hearings are required before field lighting can be added to a park's facilities -- an addition that, like artificial turf, can have significant effects on park usage and the quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods -- there is no requirement for the FCPA to formally solicit or accommodate citizen input regarding a decision to install synthetic turf on any athletic field in any County park; and

**Whereas,** plans to replace grass fields with synthetic turf playing surfaces appear to the FCPA to be a reasonable compromise that addresses both the needs of those who want more rectangular athletic fields and those who are opposed to converting more open land to athletic fields; now therefore

**Be it resolved,** that the McLean Citizens Association supports the designation of \$10 million in the bond issue to be used to convert grass rectangular fields to synthetic turf fields in Fairfax County parks, provided that the FCPA holds a public hearing before converting any field to synthetic turf, and provided that the FCPA initiates and continues studies that address MCA concerns on issues related to the safety of users and short- and long-term impacts on the environment.

**Be it further resolved,** the McLean Citizens Association strongly and urgently recommends that the FCPA be required to obtain citizen input through public hearing to any proposed conversion to, or new installation of, synthetic turf on any athletic field in any Fairfax County park, in order to address such issues as changes in infrastructure, traffic and parking, environmental factors, restroom facilities, lighting, and other issues that affect both the utility of the field and the quality of life in the surrounding neighborhoods; and

**Be it further and finally resolved,** that the McLean Citizens Association strongly and urgently recommends that the FCPA be required to monitor and study on an ongoing basis the impact of synthetic turf on the safety of users and the short- and long-term effects of the materials used in the installation and maintenance of synthetic turf fields on the environment and to report promptly to the public the results of all studies.

*Attachment: Abbreviated Report: Research Results Regarding Synthetic Turf Impacts on Safety to Athletes and to the Environment*

Distribution:

Supervisor Joan DuBois

Board of Supervisors

Kevin Fay, Dranesville Representative, FCPA Board

Each FCPA Board Member

Michael Kane, Director, FCPA

West Lewinsville Heights Citizens Association

Lewinsville Coalition

MCA Website

## **Abbreviated Report: Research Results Regarding Synthetic Turf Impacts on Safety to Athletes and on the Environment**

July 23, 2006

This brief report was developed through many hours of intense research by several members of the McLean Citizens Association who have become increasingly concerned about the potential impact on safety and the environment of synthetic turf athletic fields. Authoritative sources are listed herein and can be made available upon request to Mr. Jack Hannon, member of the Mclean Citizens Association.

As more synthetic turf fields are built, the safety of athletes and the impact of synthetic turf on surrounding communities and on the environment are in question. These issues are generating debate and concern in local communities and among those responsible for synthetic turf athletic fields including professional, amateur, educational, and recreational organizations, among athletes including professional soccer players and their unions, and among scientists in the United States as well as in other countries.

The following are among the topics and concerns that are being examined:

- A number of studies have proven that synthetic turf fields can rapidly become much hotter than the ambient air temperature, or much hotter than the surface of a natural grass field (synthetic turf can exceed 125 degrees Fahrenheit on a sunny day in hot weather, and can reach temperatures of 170 degrees if unirrigated).<sup>2-4</sup>
- Fields with synthetic turf contain granular rubber infill that has been shown to leach heavy metals, volatile organic compounds, and other substances into ground water.<sup>5-12</sup>
- Studies have shown an association between synthetic turf abrasion burns and the development of an increasingly common and extraordinarily dangerous infection (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus or MRSA) that must be treated rapidly.<sup>14-15</sup>

Independent, long-term scientific evaluations of injury data relating to synthetic turf versus natural grass are not available, and what little information that is known is contradictory. There is growing agreement that studies must continue. Officials who are responsible for decisions regarding synthetic turf athletic fields, and those who are responsible for the safety of athletes and especially children agree that more data must be gathered about how synthetic turf affects the health of those who are regularly exposed to it. Those same officials also share concerns with scientists about the near- and long-term impact of synthetic turf on the environment. Common sense and prudence dictate that studies must continue and that study results must be made available to decision-makers and to the public.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup>“Elephant has left the room’ at McLean park,” by Beverly Crawford, Times Community Newspapers, March 23, 2006.

<sup>2</sup>“Synthetic Surface Heat Studies,” by Drs. C. Frank William and Gilbert E. Pulley, Brigham Young University, c. 2003.

- <sup>3</sup> “If you can’t take the heat....,” by Dr Dave Minner, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Iowa State University, c. 2005
- <sup>4</sup> “Evaluation of Playing Surface Characteristics of Various In-Filled Systems,” by Andrew S. McNitt and Dianne Petrunak, Pennsylvania State University, c.2005.
- <sup>5</sup> “The Myth of Rubberized Landscapes,” by Linda Chalker-Scott, Ph.D., Washington State University.
- <sup>6</sup> “Used Tire Monofill, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
- <sup>7</sup> “Life Tyre Management” New Zealand Ministry for the Environment, c. 2003.
- <sup>8</sup> “Turf Use, Maintenance, and Turf Exhibition,” United European Football Association, UEFA, c. 2002.
- <sup>9</sup> “Rubber tire leachates in the aquatic environment,” by J.J. Evans, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Cooperative Oxford Laboratory.
- <sup>10</sup> “Ground discarded tires removed naphthalene, toluene, and mercury from water,” by A.S. Bunasekara, J.A. Donovan, and B. Xing.
- <sup>12</sup> “Toxicological Evaluation for the Hazard Assessment of Tire Crumb for Use in Public Playgrounds,” by Detlef A. Birkholz, Kathy L. Belton, and Tee L. Guidotti, Air & Waste Management Association, July 2003
- <sup>13</sup> “Air Emissions from Scrap Tire Combustion,” U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, October 1997.
- <sup>14</sup> “A Clone of Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* among Professional Football Players,” The New England Journal of Medicine, February 3, 2005.
- <sup>15</sup> “Body Shaving and Turf Burns Spread Infection in College Football Team,” Infectious Diseases Society of America, November 4, 2004.