

Roosevelt Park Improvements

By John Saia, May 13, 2019

The CPA application for Roosevelt park has prompted much discussion regarding how the field will be resurfaced. Residents are considering the difference between real grass against artificial turf, and words like cancer, chemicals, cost, heat, playtime, and safety are all coming up. Personal experience doesn't always line up with scientific studies that evaluate overall risk and because of that, people sometimes find it difficult to trust the available research. Also, everyone prioritizes their concerns differently, so sometimes it can feel like comparing apples to oranges when it comes to boiling all of it down to a final decision.

Fortunately, Massachusetts passed the Toxins Use Reduction Act (TURA) in 1989, and from that, the Toxins Use Reduction Institute (TURI) was established. It's a multi-disciplinary research, education, and policy center that has researched the available data. So, what does TURI recommend as policy? It is the position of TURI that organically managed grass is a safer alternative to artificial turf for sports surfaces. Yes, real grass may have pesticides applied, and it can be uneven, and it can be muddy, but there are many other things to consider as well, at the end of the day, safer is safer, and a policy center of the state has identified that option to be real grass.

Now there is still the issue of cost. The city cannot choose an option that it can't afford. The government of Australia has done extensive research regarding cost projections of real grass and artificial turf, and for nearly every kind of use, with 50 year projections for the cost of ownership, it deemed it a myth that artificial grass was cheaper than real grass. However, Roosevelt park does stand out for having issues with draining and flooding because of its location and the amount of sunlight it receives, and there is an expectation for the field to serve as a workhorse for organized sports. It makes sense that the cost of real grass at Roosevelt park might deviate from the norm, and these leaves the city with a number of questions to ask itself and provide answers to concerned residents.

1) Why can't the city wait until the CPA accrues more money? The CPA was adopted hand-in-hand with non-binding questions regarding the Malden Hospital site. From the very beginning, there has been the mindset that good things may come to those who wait.

2) Can the city afford to lose 2.4 acres of current green space for artificial turf? Say what you want about the quality of the field. Green space is hard to come by, and there is almost nowhere left in the city to obtain more.

3) Will the city trade off safety as a policy in exchange for field time? There is a lot of information to support the idea that real grass is a safer option, and worth the wait for the community if cost is the final concern. In 2016, Dr. Christi Davis published a 12-pages just summarizing the research on concerns regarding artificial turf (a). Today, TURI has its own 28-page report to support its position for real grass (b). Additionally, artificial turf is a product, and like any other product, it is subject to manufacturers defects and customer complaints. Even though the industry keeps re-inventing itself

with newer generations of turf, each generation is coming with its own problems and litigation as well (c).

4) Will artificial turf live up to expectations? In a joint message by councilors Murphy and Winslow(d), Roosevelt Park was compared to Newell Stadium in Gloucester, which had recently had installed artificial turf. What they did not communicate, however, was a follow-up. Just 5 years after the installation, the \$3.7 million dollar project already prompted the ask for additional \$1.26 million in repairs (e).

Sources:

(a) Summary of Research Assessing the Impact of Artificial Turf

annotated bibliography by Dr. Cristi Davis

https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/ntp/about_ntp/bsc/2017/june/publiccomm/stephanattach5_20170628_508.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3xaPdZp4B9plek2QxBWYXq4NoRDEa9c7u4g0hfrEOQG7SOcPEIBSKMIY

(b) Athletic Playing Fields: Choosing Safer Options for Health and the Environment

from the Toxins Use Reduction Institute (TURI)

https://www.turi.org/TURI_Publications/TURI_Reports/Athletic_Playing_Fields_Choosing_Safer_Options_for_Health_and_the_Environment

(c) Lawsuits

<https://www.safehealthyplayingfields.org/synthetic-turf-lawsuits-and-state-news?fbclid=IwAR2QTNUb76j69Op-jM3I94g1BhwVo2vHPqg5QjOC2EFYoLGW-Zkuy1e3qRk>

(d) "Roosevelt Park – Options that Lie Ahead, Opportunities to Be Realized"

By councilors Barbara Murphy (ward 5) and Steven Winslow (at-large), covered by Malden News Network on April 10, 2019

<https://www.facebook.com/MaldenNewsNetwork/posts/2243890972516229>

(e) City: Newell requires \$1.26 million in repairs

https://www.gloucestertimes.com/sports/local_sports/city-newell-requires-million-in-repairs/article_ca6d5b8-3f3e-507e-82b1-862d1e2295ea.html