

# Comments on Proposed Artificial Turf Field, Pleasant Street

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## Letter from the Ashland Sustainability Committee

10/22/25

To: Ashland Planning Board

Cc: Ashland Conservation Commission, Ashland Town Meeting, Town Manager, Select Board

From: Ashland Sustainability Committee

Subject: Comments on Proposed Artificial Turf Field, Pleasant Street

Dear Members of the Planning Board,

The Ashland Sustainability Committee recognizes the need for more high-quality athletic and recreational facilities but we have serious reservations about the proposed plastic turf field on Pleasant Street. We urge a more holistic evaluation that fully accounts for environmental, health, and lifecycle impacts. Among our concerns:

- **Plastic waste** - Artificial turf has a limited useful lifetime and its disposal involves large volumes of plastics that are very difficult to recycle successfully.
- **Microplastic contamination** - Artificial turf sheds microplastics resulting in chemical exposures. Turf components may release PAHs ([Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons](#)), heavy metals, and PFAS (“forever chemicals”), and recent studies in Massachusetts (e.g. see PEER cited below) found PFAS transfer to players via turf use.
- **Elevated heat risk** - Synthetic turf surfaces can reach substantially higher temperatures (as much as 40-60%) than grass, increasing heat stress risk for athletes.
- **Injury risk** - Some studies show higher rates of lower extremity injury and abrasion on synthetic surfaces.
- **Loss of ecological benefits** - Natural turf supports infiltration, cooling, soil ecology, and carbon sequestration which are features lost under plastic surfaces.
- **Lifecycle costs** - Artificial turf typically needs to be replaced in 10-12 years. The costs of replacing and disposing of turf likely outweighs any maintenance savings versus grass fields.

In light of these factors, the Sustainability Committee respectfully recommends that the Planning Board:

1. Prefer high-performance natural turf solutions;
2. Require comprehensive environmental/health risk assessments if turf is pursued;
3. Pilot and monitor smaller installations before full approval; and
4. Ensure transparency and community oversight.

Thank you for your careful consideration. We are willing to assist further in technical review, public education, or convening expert testimony.

Sincerely,  
Ashland Sustainability Committee

## Appendix: Fact Sheet on Artificial Turf Impacts

Below are expanded details and references to support the Committee's concerns:

### Plastic Waste & Microplastics

- Artificial turf systems degrade and shed microplastics into soils and stormwater.
- Each field requires many tons of plastic and infill; disposal is challenging and often ends up in landfills.
- Reference: Springer study on artificial turfs and microplastics (2024):  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13762-024-05689-3>

### PFAS & Chemical Concerns

- Artificial turf may release PFAS, PAHs, and heavy metals.
- Massachusetts studies (Boston Globe, PEER) have found PFAS in turf blades and on athletes' hands after play.
- Reference: MassDEP fact sheet: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/artificial-turf-fields>
- Reference: Boston Globe coverage (Westford, MA):  
<https://westfordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/16378/2024-Toxic-chemicals-are-found-in-blades-of-artificial-turf--The-Boston-Globe>
- Reference: Boston25 News (PFAS exposure study):  
<https://www.boston25news.com/news/local/turf-trouble-environmental-groups-concerned-about-harmful-chemicals-fake-grass/26LRHFP3C5DULJ4VRHR3WS4SME/>

## Heat Risks

- Synthetic turf reaches significantly higher surface temperatures than natural grass, sometimes 40–60°F hotter.
- Measured field temps exceeded 150°F in New England case studies.
- Reference: MDPI Sustainability study (2024): <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/17/14/6292>

## Injury Risks

- NFL study (2021–22) shows higher rates of lower extremity injuries on artificial turf.
- Local reports (Arlington MA Artificial Turf Study Committee) highlight injury and safety concerns.
- Reference: Arlington MA report: [https://archive.org/download/Arlington\\_MA\\_ShowDocument\\_Id\\_69624/Artificial%20Turf%20Study%20Comm.pdf](https://archive.org/download/Arlington_MA_ShowDocument_Id_69624/Artificial%20Turf%20Study%20Comm.pdf)

## Loss of Ecological Benefits

- Natural grass provides infiltration, evapotranspiration cooling, carbon sequestration, and habitat.
- Artificial turf reduces permeability and may increase stormwater runoff.
- Reference: Alaska Community Presentation (Susan Chapnick): <https://www.akaction.org/wp-content/uploads/Slides-Susan-Chapnick-1.pdf>

## Lifecycle Costs

- Artificial turf must be replaced every 10–12 years.
- Lifecycle costs (install + disposal) often exceed well-maintained natural grass fields.
- Reference: MDPI Sustainability study (2024): <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/17/14/6292>
- Reference: Verona NJ Case Study: [https://www.veronanj.org/media/Sustainable%20Verona/2024/Centennial%20Field%20-%20Turk%20Study/Verona%202024%20Final%20Report\\_.pdf](https://www.veronanj.org/media/Sustainable%20Verona/2024/Centennial%20Field%20-%20Turk%20Study/Verona%202024%20Final%20Report_.pdf)