SC 1-15-2026

Item No. 4
2026 Work Plan

Written Communications

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From: Andrea Wald <waldmba@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Jan 12, 2026 at 3:45 PM
Subject: Agenda item # 4 - review and approve Sustainability Commission 2026 work Plan
To: <sustainabilitycommission@cupertino.gov>

Dear Sustainability Commission members,

I've had some interaction with various depts (staff and council and some commission members) in Cupertino in the past but have been super focused on places (cities and schools - both locally in the Bay Area and across the US) who are discussing the topic of choosing artificial turf over natural grass for their parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, school yards - and even residential and commercial properties).

For those I've not met/interacted with I'd first like to introduce myself. I would have attended your mtg on the 15th in person but have so many other meetings and obligations that I decided sending this email would suffice for now - especially since I've understood that there are no current discussions regarding ground coverings for any city owned properties.

My name is Andrea Wald. I co-founded Community for Natural Play Surfaces. Our mission:
We advocate for safe natural play surfaces. We educate public and private stakeholders on the harms of artificial turf and other artificial materials. We strive to increase the amount of grass and natural materials in our playing fields, playgrounds, parks, and towns.

The purpose of this email is simply to make you aware of the harms of artificial turf and more importantly, how as Sustainability commissioners, you should be acutely aware of the fact that artificial turf is not sustainable. Even though your discussions on Wed evening revolve around approving the 2026 work plan - specifically items 1 & 2 - and artificial turf is not part of the work plan, I wanted to get ahead of the game should it come up at some later date. I've found that education on this hot topic is the key to getting the best outcome for all - natural is better than plastic!

I've got so much info I could send you on artificial turf and why its so bad but I've chosen just one article for now. It was written by someone for Sustainable Silicon Valley. The link no longer works since this organization has merged with Accterra - but the message is still accurate and clear.

Thank you for taking the time to become a bit more educated on something that is so important for the health and well-being of your community and our environment. I'm available if you ever have any questions regarding this topic - now or in the future. Research is ongoing and continually proving more and more how bad plastic is for us all - including artificial turf - which is not an essential plastic product.

Andrea

https://www.sustainablesv.org/fake-plastic-fields-no-good-for-anyone/

Fake Plastic Fields: Not Good for Anyone

Matt Abbott

Sustainable Silicon Valley strongly recommends investing budget, maintenance and water resources in natural grass athletic fields and replacing synthetic turf fields with natural, living grass as they wear out. This transition is essential to prioritizing the well-being of playing field users– children, teenagers, and adults– and to fostering a healthier environment and aligns with practices adopted by many cities in California, nationally, and internationally,

While artificial turf has been promoted as a cost-effective and low-maintenance grass alternative to school districts and city park departments due to perceived lower expenses and water usage, recent reports underscore the significant environmental and health repercussions associated with synthetic grass, documented in great detail by the Santa Clara County Medical Association's Environmental Health Committee. A comprehensive analysis of the full life cycle of various turf options points to the high direct and indirect costs of artificial, single-use non-recyclable plastic turf. Moreover, pending legislation in California will potentially mandate the replacement of heat-trapping surfaces like plastic turf with natural systems or other cooler alternatives. We aim to address and mitigate an anticipated rise in extreme heat scenarios, underscoring the urgency of transitioning to more sustainable practices.

Many natural grass fields are badly prepared and properly maintained, leading to unsafe playing conditions and sometimes giving the false impression that the field needs to be replaced rather than refurbished. According to the Sports Turf Managers' Association, the construction cost for an artificial playing surface with artificial infill and base is $4.50 to $10.25 per square foot. This compares to at most $5.00 per square foot, usually less, for a natural field with drainage.

Typical reasons for installing artificial fields, despite their higher long-term cost:

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Which of these anticipated benefits are likely to be actually true?

Anticipated water savings Synthetic fields include no living components, so water isn't needed to keep an artificial field from turning brown. But temperatures on a synthetic field can reach 160°F to over 200°F, whereas a grass surface retains a much more comfortable temperature for users. Water for cooling an artificial field turns out to be approximately the same as irrigating a natural turf field: $6.000 to $35,000 annually.

Anticipated lower maintenance costs According to Safe Healthy Playing Fields' calculations, the maintenance cost of an artificial field is less than that of a natural field, but the difference isn't as pronounced as one may assume. It's a myth that synthetic fields require less maintenance than natural turfgrass fields or that synthetic turf fields are maintenance free. Synthetic fields require additional infill, irrigation because of unacceptably high temperatures on warm-sunny days, chemical

disinfectants, sprays to reduce static cling and odors, drainage repair and maintenance, erasing and repainting temporary lines, and removing accumulated organic matter. Overall, an artificial field costs range from $23,250 to $127,000 to maintain, while a natural field can cost $42,800 to $205,500 yearly.

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As a parent, as a citizen and as a tax payer, make your voice heard.

- Do your diligence starting with the Links listed below. The SCCMA Environmental Health Committee Page is especially useful.
- Join local efforts like Community for Natural Play Surfaces and Ban Plastic Turf
- Keep up to date by subscribing to the SSV Newsletter
- Ask your elected officials their position on artificial turf and tell them you'll vote according to their answer.

Anticipated longevity Field manufacturers and installers claim that synthetic fields last an estimated 500 event hours. It is true that a natural field needs to be resodded after about 100 event hours.

Anticipated safety benefits Safety must be vigilantly maintained by testing field hardness regularly; infill must be redistributed and added periodically according to the results. If the field hardness isn't tested sufficiently, serious injury can result, including spinal injury.

Beyond these purported benefits of synthetic fields, we must consider more enormous drawbacks of artificial fields: toxicity and disposal.

Toxicity Heavy metals, volatile organic compounds (e.g. benzene), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and 1,3-butadiene have been detected in turf infill made from recycled tires. Plastic "grass blades" get worn by wear from use, the sun, and the elements and can shed (or become) microplastic.Further, plastic and rubber can be highly flammable. All of this damages the local environment and can be toxic to playing field users.

Disposal & replacement Fake plastic turf is a single use product. There are no facilities in California that recycle synthetic turf. In fact, there are none that currently recycle turf in the United States. The vast majority of old artificial grass is currently in landfills, ravines, deserts, and empty lots. When an artificial field needs to be replaced after 8-10 years, disposal of the old field alone can cost $45,000 to $191,000. Turf resale has become more common but provides the same end result of being dumped in landfills or incinerated, which can release toxic chemicals.

Natural grass provides a natural habitat for insects and creatures such as worms that keep soil healthy. And as a living plant, grass produces oxygen.

To conclude, artificial fields:

- Can be dangerously hot
- Can be dangerously hard
- Are more expensive than grass when taking into account replacement every 8-10 years
- Need maintenance on par with the effort required for grass, but different equipment and skills
- Produce plastic pollution (chemicals & microplastics)

Contain toxic materials (benzene, arsenic, styrene, PAHs, zinc, cadmium, chromium, VOCs, SVOCs, neurotoxicants, phthalates, crystalline silica, latex, particulate matter)

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Santa Clara County Medical Association Environmental Health Committee **Information Page**

https://www.sccma.org/programs/environmental-health.aspx

Safe Healthy Playing Fields Main Site: https://www.safehealthyplayingfields.org/

Safe Healthy Playing Fields Costs: Grass Vs. Synthetic Turf : https://www.safehealthyplayingfields.org/cost-grass-vs-synthetic-turf

York Daily Record Worn out artificial turf fields pose huge waste problem across nation:

https://www.ydr.com/in-depth/news/2019/11/18/old-artificial-turf-fields-pose-huge-waste-problem-environmental-concerns-across-nation/2314353001/

Beyond Plastics Synthetic Turf is HAZARDOUS- https://www.beyondplastics.org/fact-sheets/synthetic-turf

Institute for Climate Change, Environmental Health, and Exposomics Artificial Turf Health Risks:

https://mountsinaiexposomics.org/artificial-turf/

Synthetic Turf Fields Are Failing (YouTube): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iV-Mh_q0gMI

NLPA Only Natural Grass Can Level The NFL's Playing Field: https://nflpa.com/posts/only-natural-grass-can-level-the-nfls-playing-field

PEER Artificial Turf – A Plague on the Earth https://peer.org/commentary-artificial-turf-a-plague-on-the-earth/

Beyond Plastics Parks for a Sustainable Future Program:

https://www.beyondpesticides.org/resources/power-organic-parks-program/overview

National Center for Health Research Injuries Related to Artificial Turf : https://www.center4research.org/injuries-related-to-artificial-turf/