

Dear WSESU School Board Members:

Now that Gale Associates has been approved by the board to provide estimates on athletic field projects for BUHS, I urge you to allow members of the public to present to this company the concerns and priorities that many of us in this community have for the environment, the safety and health of our student athletes and the school budget. Particularly in this time of climate emergency, Gale needs to understand the objections many of us have towards a synthetic turf solution to the problems at Natowich Field.

In the last meeting of the board, David Schoales mentioned that one of the expectations should be "recommendations on how to improve the quality of the surface." It should be made crystal clear to Gale Associates that "improvement" of the surface does not necessarily mean removing soil and replacing it with synthetic turf.

I urge the board to seriously consider additional recommendations from soil experts such as Osborne Organics (osborneorganics.com), SportsTurf Managers Association (www.stma.org) and/or the Toxics Use Reduction Institute (www.turi.org), organizations with experience and expertise in establishing organically managed natural grass athletic fields.

A review of the Gale Associates website indicates that this company may have little or no experience or expertise in designing organically managed natural turf fields. Gale's website lists 22 "Featured Projects for Athletic Fields" on their website. Of these 22 projects, nearly all had the goal of either converting natural grass fields to synthetic turf or replacing existing synthetic turf fields to an updated synthetic field. Examples:

- Hopkinton High School. "Gale was engaged to convert an existing natural grass field to a synthetic turf, multipurpose playing field."
- Penders Field, Connecticut. "Gale's challenge was to provide a state-of-the-art synthetic turf field..."
- Norwell High School. "Natural turf field conversion of a multipurpose rectangular field to synthetic turf."
- Torrington High School. The project scope included "Infilled synthetic turf field."

While a few of Gale's projects included natural grass fields in combination with synthetic turf fields, it is quite apparent that their experience and expertise in athletic field development are in the conversion of natural grass fields to synthetic turf. To my knowledge, nowhere on the website does Gale mention expertise in soil management. Nowhere in their mission or vision statements is there any reference to environmental sustainability. Chris Sawyer may be right in stating that Gale is "pretty much the industry standard in New England" (Reformer, Dec. 6), but that particular industry may well be in conflict with the values and concerns that many of us embrace in Southern Vermont. The public needs to convey these values and concerns directly to Gale Associates. The public needs to convey its opposition to athletic field "solutions" that are detrimental to the environment and counter to the long term educational priorities of the budget. Most importantly, the public needs to hear alternative assessments and proposals from soil and natural grass experts like Osborne Organics, TURI and STMA.

The Reformer article (Dec 6, 2019) reported that Gale Associates would provide estimates on different projects that can be undertaken and that the company would meet with Principal Perrin, AD Saywer, and Facility Manager Robert Clark. It is evident from their statements at public forums that they see synthetic turf as the only viable solution to the problems with Natowich Field. However, there are many of us who will continue to argue that organically managed natural grass is the better solution.

In conclusion, I ask that the School Board (1) include members of the public to meet with Gale Associates to present our viewpoints and (2) seek alternative assessments and proposals from organically managed natural grass experts.

Thank you for your continued patience and thoughtful attention to this issue.

Tim Maciel

Brattleboro Common Sense