

WESTTOWN TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Stokes Assembly Hall
1039 Wilmington Pike, Westtown Township
Wednesday September 5, 2018 – 7:30PM

Present

Commissioners – Jack Embick was on vacation, 5 members were present. Also present were Planning Director William Ethridge, Planning Consultant John Snook, and Township Manager Rob Pingar.

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Pomerantz called the meeting to order at 7:30pm and Mr. Lehmann led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Adoption of Agenda (JL/SR) 5-0 in favor

It was agreed to hear new business before old business

Approval of Minutes (RH/EA) 5-0 in favor

Planning Commission (PC) meeting August 22, 2018

Announcements

Crebilly Farm Update – Oral arguments for the appeal of the denial of the Conditional Use application by Toll Brothers will be held on Monday 9/17/2018 at 1pm by Judge Tunnel in Courtroom No. 1 of the Chester Co. Justice Center, 201 West Market St., West Chester, PA. This event is open to the public.

Public Comment – Non-agenda items

None

New Business

2018-09 Westtown School (WS) Conditional Use application & Lighting Ordinance

Amendment –Tori Jueds, Mike Ruffo, Paul Lehmann, George Schaab, & Tim Barnard,

Mr. Pomerantz asked representatives from WS to approach the main table. He then allowed each PC member to make an opening statement. Mr. Lees offered no comment. Mr. Rodia noted he was looking forward to hearing more about this application and working with representatives from WS. Ms. Adler thanked WS officials for allowing PC members to visit the site the week prior but added that she still had several questions about the proposal. Mr. Hatton mentioned his opposition to the lights that were proposed at Rustin HS many years ago and the amendments that were made to the Twp Code to accommodate those lights and night games. He noted the traffic impacts of those night games, especially football. He concluded by saying that he hoped to come to a reasonable agreement to mitigate the negative impacts of the WS proposal. Mr. Pomerantz discussed his personal praise of WS and his desire for a win-win scenario between the Twp and the school, while acknowledging there has not always been a positive perception of the school from the larger Twp population. He added that when he first became aware of WS's Oak Lane proposal he was shocked by the number of nights being requested (258). He then described his experience attending each of the public meetings WS hosted in anticipation of their application to the Twp and the perceptions he noted from attendees at those meetings. He started with the January meeting where WS described their desire to create an Institutional Use Overlay (IUO). At this meeting, Mr.

Pomerantz had asked Mr. Barnard why WS wanted to establish an IUO and Mr. Barnard's response was that it "would allow the school to do what it needs to do" which Mr. Pomerantz suggested, alarmed some people in the audience. He also noted that WS expressed that illuminated fields were needed to allow WS athletic teams to practice at night.

Subsequent to that presentation, Mr. Pomerantz explained that he learned in an email from the Twp Manager that WS had abandoned its proposal for an IUO and was instead proposing a Conditional Use (CU) application in conjunction with an Ordinance Amendment to allow for two illuminated athletic fields which would be used 258 nights per year. It was also announced by WS that the night practices would not be for WS athletics; rather the fields would be rented out to 3rd party athletic clubs which is in accordance with the school's long range master plan which calls for the raising of revenue by allowing rentals of upgraded practice fields.

He then indicated that on the Friday afternoon before Labor Day, Mr. Barnard emailed Twp officials asking to separate the CU application from the Ordinance Amendment, presumably in response to a list of questions that had been emailed to WS from Mr. Ethridge.

In summary, Mr. Pomerantz expressed that WS had appeared to "move the goal posts" several times during the numerous presentations of this proposed project and would like the school to be candid and honest about what it wants moving forward, and to convince the Twp of their need for this proposal. He also asked that at the end of this process a specific written agreement be included so there is no ambiguity about what is ultimately agreed to.

Tori Jueds began the WS presentation. She stressed the school's commitment to a culture of transparency and apologized for giving the Twp any appearance of inconsistency in the school's intentions. She stressed the importance of having a positive relationship with the Twp and that the proposal for the lighting and the night practices is primarily for outside groups and clubs who have demonstrated a need for practice fields in the Westtown area; however, some WS athletics may use the fields at night. The proposed fields and lights however are just two aspects of a larger Oak Lane proposal which will include the reconfiguration and renovation of existing sports fields, the use of artificial turf technology, high tech, low-impact lighting, a modern clubhouse, relocation and renovation of the school's organic instructional farm facilities, improvements to parking and traffic flow, as well as modern stormwater management and environmentally sensitive best practices.

Commenting again about the high-tech, low-impact lighting, Ms. Jueds stated that the lighting was for soccer and Lacrosse practices only from Monday to Saturday during the school year (no football, no marching band), that traffic and lighting impacts to the surrounding communities would be "minimally impactful," that the proposal will benefit the community, and that these proposed changes are necessary for the vitality and financial health of WS. She then spoke briefly about WS's goals, its mission, and its relationship to Westtown Twp.

Ms. Jueds then spoke about the school's desire to maintain in perpetuity all 600 acres of the school's grounds and the amenities within those grounds. She explained that the financial aspect of this proposal would provide additional assurance to the school as well as the Township that the school need not consider the partition of its grounds to developers in order to support itself.

Ms. Jueds then discussed some of the challenges facing independent schools such as declining enrollments and low interest among parents in boarding schools. She noted that WS provides "over \$10 million in financial aid" to its students and has to make up the "tuition gap" through various means. Ms. Jueds did state however, that the school is in "strong shape" and this has been the 4th consecutive year of enrollment growth.

Ms. Jueds acknowledged that many citizens and officials for Westtown are understandably concerned about the nature and scope of the change being proposed but stressed that it is necessary. She noted that after a demonstration to the community regarding the proposed LED lighting technology at the 2nd meeting, the initial anxiety many residents expressed about the lighting seemed to be satisfied. She acknowledged that answers would be provided regarding parking and traffic.

Ms. Jueds then introduced Paul Lehmann, Mitch Linder, George Schaab, Tim Barnard, Alex Meitzler, Jason Best, Tyler Hill, and Mike Ruffo.

Mike Ruffo, President of Anchor Management Group, introduced himself. He stressed that the project will be environmentally conscious and mentioned some of the stormwater management and water quality improvements that are planned. He then discussed the overall master plan for the school and the improvements that will be made along Oak Lane. He noted the features that will be incorporated into the design of the field house such as the bathrooms and porches. He added that the structure is not fully designed yet and is subject to change.

He then proceeded to utilize a PowerPoint presentation and commented in detail about the proposed changes. Slide 5 shows the overall area of the Oak Lane project. There will be two artificial turf fields side by side, separated by a shaded seating area, illuminated by six 80' light poles. To the north the clubhouse/concessions building is shown, which connects to the main Oak Lane parking lot (83 spaces). To the east shows a new softball field, two natural grass athletic fields, and a new baseball field that sits on the far east of the site, with a smaller existing parking lot east of that. The turf fields would be utilized by travel soccer teams, lacrosse, and field hockey (lacrosse and field hockey would be Westtown School teams).

He commented in some detail regarding the proposed instructional farm area on slide 7 which will be surrounded by an 8' deer fence.

He then discussed the analysis and recommendation from Traffic Planning and Design, Inc. shown on slide 12. He noted TPD's conclusion that the proposal would have no impact on the existing roadway network.

On slide 14 Mr. Ruffo discussed the LED technology behind the lights, the "smart technology" that would be utilized in their design and use, and the school's intention to dim the lights at 9:30pm and have them shutoff at 9:45pm automatically. Slides 15-17 show the evolution of field lighting and the ability to focus light onto a playing field and reduce light propagation. He then showed two props he brought showing the width of the poles at their base and how they shrink to a much smaller diameter at the top.

He then discussed slides 19-28 which show five different viewing points of the athletic fields from locations in surrounding communities.

On slide 29 Mr. Ruffo commented on the proposed illumination of night practices Monday through Saturday during the school year (no use June 15 – August 15) and added that WS would like to play 4 night games per school year (2 in the fall and 2 in the spring) as a part of the 258 proposed nights. Outside of those 4 games the night time use of the fields would be for practices held by non-WS travel soccer teams (no games or tournaments). Ms. Jueds added that the request for 4 games for WS athletics is "no different than what [they] have done for the past several years" noting that the school plays 2 games in the spring and 2 in the fall in the evening hours.

Mr. Ruffo concluded his presentation. He then commented regarding the two letters he received from the Township's consultants; John Snook and Stan Stubbe. He noted Mr. Stubbe's concerns regarding glare and blue light and indicated that he contacted Musco (WS's light contractor) for information regarding the intensity of glare from their light poles. He commented that Musco representatives suggested that there was enough distance between the proposed poles and neighboring properties that there would be no such glare. He noted that he would provide Mr. Stubbe with specifications on the light fixtures to be used. He then concluded his remarks.

Mr. Pomerantz then asked PC members for questions. Mr. Hatton questioned the notion that the rental of the fields by non-WS organizations would benefit Westtown Twp and its residents. He asked WS officials if they had considered any other revenue generating options than illuminated athletic fields.

Ms. Jueds replied that WS was considering a variety of options for generating revenue and that it was absolutely necessary to the school's long term viability. She disputed the suggestion that the school's growth was at the expense of Westtown residents. Mr. Ruffo added that the upgrades are necessary to keep the school's recruitment and sports teams competitive.

Mr. Hatton then asked about the shade structure. Mr. Ruffo explained it is an open-air wooden structure with a vegetative roof that would allow for 200 total seats, 100 seats facing each field. Mr. Hatton asked why the shaded seating would be needed for fields used primarily at night. Mr. Ruffo offered that practices and games are regularly held during the day by WS and that this would allow for spectators to watch those events.

Mr. Hatton commented that he believed most Westtown residents don't know about the school, that students from WS aren't visible at a lot of Westtown events, and that he would like to see WS students interact with residents more.

Ms. Jueds thanked Mr. Hatton and replied that she would like to hear any other suggestions about how WS can make a positive impact on the community.

Mr. Rodia noted that Ms. Jueds had commented that this proposal would be good for the community and asked her to elaborate more.

Ms. Jueds replied that the Oak Lane project would more immediately benefit local families whose children either participate in WS sports or are members of club teams who want a location closer to Westtown to practice.

Mr. Rodia noted that the residents of the Twp pay taxes that go toward the roads, sewer system, police, fire, and EMS. The parents of children who attend WS or a club team that might play at WS are willing to pay taxes for WS's benefit because their children will enjoy the use of those fields and lights; however, taxpayers whose children do not attend WS, or who do not have children, gain no benefit from what WS is planning.

Ms. Jueds offered that the success of the school and its ability to maintain its rural views, trails, the lake, etc. offer Township residents a preferable alternative to residential development if the school were to have to sell land to sustain itself.

Mr. Rodia expressed his dissatisfaction with Ms. Jueds answer.

Tim Barnard informed PC members that WS is a taxpayer in the Twp and pays taxes on half of its property (Pete's farm). He offered to give the PC specific figures on the taxes it pays. He added

that anyone who registers as a “friend of Westtown School” may use its tennis courts, track, and other facilities. He also noted that WS donated land to the Twp for the expansion of the sewer plant when it needed additional capacity. Regarding the need to remain competitive, he added that many colleges will not recruit high schoolers who do not have any experience playing on turf fields so the desire for turf fields extends beyond the years the students attend WS. He also reiterated the need expressed by local sports teams for turf practice fields closer to Westtown for use after-hours and their willingness to pay for that use would help WS cover the costs of financing the entire project. He felt it was a mutually beneficial partnership though he acknowledged that a retired family without children would not benefit as much as a younger family with school aged-children.

Mr. Rodia suggested that Mr. Barnard should make a stronger argument explaining how Westtown Twp will benefit from this project. Mr. Barnard welcomed the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Hatton agreed with Mr. Rodia and added that most Twp residents don't know what WS does for the community and that the school should do a better job of explaining those benefits. He also noted that only a small percentage of residents walk the campus and questioned the population size of residents that would gain from WS's proposal.

Mr. Barnard expressed a desire to present a better argument on behalf of the school and to foster more communication between WS and the Twp.

Mr. Lees asked about access to the site and the traffic impact.

Alex Mitesore of Traffic Planning & Design (TPD) acknowledged that while there are three entrances to the school, the most direct access to the site would be from Westtown Rd to Oak Ln. He noted that the school uses bollards to prevent access through the main campus. He referenced a letter dated 7/25 from his office. He estimated what he believed to be conservative estimates for soccer, field hockey, and lacrosse teams using the fields. He noted that soccer would be the highest population, with most traffic occurring between uses when one team is leaving and another is arriving. The maximum intensity would be 147-150 total trips, 85 arriving and 65 leaving for about a 15-30 minute period.

Mr. Pomerantz asked how many teams per field the traffic estimate was based on.

Mr. Lehmann replied that ideally he would have one team per field but if it was needed, but that you could split the fields and practice two teams to a field. The traffic estimates were based on a maximum of 2 teams per field with as many as 3 separate practice sessions per night but that the likely scenario would be 2 teams per field with 2 practice sessions per night, 6-7:30pm and 7:30-9pm for a total of 8 team practices per night.

Mr. Hatton asked about if any improvements would need to be made at the intersection of Westtown Rd and Oak Ln. Mr. Mitesore replied that he did not believe so as there was adequate sight distance at that intersection.

Ms. Adler asked about temporary facilities shown on the plans. Mr. Ruffo responded that during special events like tournaments, WS will bring some temporary facilities onto the campus such as port-a-johns, and wanted to show where those would be placed. Ms. Adler noted that the new location of the mini-farm is currently an overflow parking area and asked where the new overflow parking would be located. Mr. Ruffo indicated that the overflow parking would be located south of the new baseball field. The bollards that control access to Shady Grove Way would only be removed for large events like tournaments.

Ms. Adler asked about traffic control for the large events. Mr. Lehmann replied that the tournament organizer is instructed by WS to provide traffic control. Ms. Adler asked how tall the shade structure would be. Mr. Ruffo replied that it would be 11' at its tallest, accommodate about 100 people per side (2 sided), and that the height difference between the two fields means that the shade structure will be shorter on the side looking west.

Ms. Adler asked about WS's policy regarding public use of its facilities. Ms. Jueds replied that WS asks that residents register with the school as "friends of Westtown School" but acknowledged that enforcement is very lax.

Ms. Adler then asked if PC members could visit a location that currently has the lights that are being proposed. Mr. Ruffo replied that La Salle College High School (LCHS) in Wyndmoor currently has lights installed which match the ones proposed for WS. He added that Abington HS is going to have similar lights installed in the spring, 25' from the nearest roadway.

Mr. Pomerantz asked how close the lights at LCHS were to the nearest residence. Mr. Ruffo replied that they were 70' away. He noted that they were just used for the first time over the weekend and that the school had not received any complaints from neighbors.

Mr. Pomerantz asked Mr. Barnard if he knew the amount of the taxes that WS paid to the Township. Mr. Barnard replied that he did not know the exact amount. Mr. Pomerantz asked the Township Manager Mr. Pingar if he knew. Mr. Pingar replied that he did not know the number at the moment but that he would compile and share a snapshot of the taxes the school pays.

Mr. Pomerantz then asked Mr. Ruffo what the lights would cost the school. Just for the lights Mr. Ruffo replied they would cost \$680k. Mr. Pomerantz then asked about the cost to install the artificial turf fields. Mr. Ruffo stated the turf fields would cost between \$1.3 and \$1.4 million dollars per field depending on stormwater requirements.

Mr. Pomerantz then asked about the lifetime of an artificial turf field. Mr. Ruffo indicated that a well-maintained field can last up to 15 years.

Mr. Pomerantz asked how many WS students are provided with full scholarships. Mr. Lehmann replied that no WS students are provided full scholarships. He indicated that students are provided merit or need based tuition. Mr. Pomerantz asked what percentage of WS athletes benefit from some form of tuition assistance. Ms. Jueds replied that she would be able to answer that with more specificity the next day.

Mr. Barnard then announced that the school's 2014-2015 taxes were around \$25,000 for 6 of their 9 parcels and that this was for "all" taxes.

Mr. Lehmann added that WS does award some small merit based scholarships in the \$1,000 to \$5,000 range.

Mr. Pomerantz questioned the need for 258 nights noting that a variety of holidays would prevent the school from achieving the full 258 nights requested, and asked what the "real" number of nights needed was. Ms. Jueds confirmed that the school likely would not use all 258 nights as requested.

Mr. Pomerantz asked if a resident registered with the school, would they be allowed to canoe in the lake. Ms. Jueds replied that because of liability, it would be difficult. Mr. Pomerantz asked if someone were willing to sign a release, if it would be possible. Ms. Jueds replied that the school would be willing to discuss the possibility. He then asked if it would be possible to allow ice skating in the winter, or if the school planned to bring back a beach that used to exist. Ms. Jueds explained

that a variety of factors led to the discontinuance of both, but that the school would re-examine the possibility of bringing both options back.

Mr. Pomerantz added that the school does not use all of its land and suggested the school consider donating land to a dog park. He emphasized this was only a suggestion. Ms. Jueds noted it was a great suggestion.

Mr. Pomerantz asked about the age range of the kids using the fields. Mr. Lehmann indicated the fields would be used by kids in the lower, middle, and high school ages. He explained that for the safety of the kids on the campus, WS would never allow adult leagues or groups to come to the campus at night.

Mr. Pomerantz asked about security at the school. Mr. Lehmann commented that WS believed it had an adequate number of security personnel to accommodate the expanded playing fields. Ms. Jueds added that the school recently installed a new PA system and over the last few years moved away from part-time security personnel and brought on more full-time personnel.

Mr. Rodia asked about the current enrollment of the school. Ms. Jueds replied that it was 695 students. He asked what the capacity of the school is, and Ms. Jueds replied that the school is almost at capacity for boarding students but that there is room for close to 800 students. He then asked what the tuition cost is. Ms. Jueds stated that the published tuition for an upper school boarding student is \$57,040 but that this is a discounted amount. Mr. Rodia and Ms. Jueds briefly discussed who WS's competitors are.

Mr. Hatton asked about the PA system proposed for the turf fields. Ms. Jueds replied that they would be used for security purposes only. He asked if a scoreboard would be installed, Mr. Ruffo indicated that one would be. Mr. Hatton asked for a rendering or drawings for that.

Mr. Pomerantz asked if practices would be videotaped, and if there would be scaffolding. Mr. Ruffo replied they would not be. Mr. Lehmann agreed.

Mr. Hatton asked why lighting would be turned off at 9:30pm and why not earlier. Mr. Ruffo noted that the ordinance requires lighting turned off at 10pm. To make the fields economically sustainable they would be rentable until 9:30pm as that would allow two 90-minute practice sessions after regular school hours.

Mr. Hatton asked about the age groups of the travel teams that would rent the fields and where they would be coming from. Mr. Lehmann suggested they would be as young as 5 years old to high school aged and that they would come from the surrounding area.

Mr. Pomerantz asked how many teams have discussed renting practice space from WS. Mr. Lehmann responded that 5 teams had discussed the possibility of renting practice space and that they would be renting multiple nights per week, no Sundays, no holidays, and not during the summer.

Mr. Pomerantz noted that the PC has been limited by the Board to no more than 3 meetings to discuss this proposal but indicated he was hopeful that they would get the answers to their questions and be able to offer a recommendation by the final meeting.

Old Business

None

Public Comments

Tom Foster, 734 Westbourne Rd – Mr. Foster suggested that the main impetus from WS for the installation of the lights and the creation of the turf fields is for revenue generation purposes and that the A/C zoning district does not permit commercial uses. He suggested that the field rental business is not appropriate in the A/C zone and that the PC consider if this proposal is even allowable. He added that the West Chester Area School District (WCASD) is going to request additional night events if this application is approved. He suggested that residents in the surrounding area prefer the peace and quiet they currently enjoy.

Charlie Barber, 1030 Little Shiloh Rd – Mr. Barber asked Mr. Ruffo to repeat how much money the improvements were going to cost. The total amount was noted as over \$2 million. He asked if the school had conducted a study to determine what kind of revenue they would need to support this investment.

Ms. Jueds stated that the school was seeking donations from alumni and their parent community, as well as financing a large portion of the construction costs. She estimates that the project should be able to pay for itself in about 15 years.

Mr. Barber then asked several questions about the taxes that the school pays and suggested it was a substantially smaller amount than what residents pay. He also noted that even though WS was not going to allow adult leagues to play on their fields that parents often leave beer cans and other containers in and around Rustin HS after games. He concluded with his recollection of the issues related to the sewer connection.

Mr. Pomerantz asked WS officials to offer the PC information on how much revenue they seek to gain from the rental of their fields.

Eva Foster, 734 Westbourne Rd – Mrs. Foster asked how much WS planned to charge if she wanted to rent one of their new turf fields. Mr. Lehmann replied that the rate would be between \$150 to \$225 per hour. She followed up by asking what WS officials would do if WCASD officials decided to copy their model and undercut them on rental pricing.

Ms. Jueds replied that WS believes there is more demand than can currently be met and that they do not anticipate this will become a problem. Mr. Barnard explained to Mrs. Foster that the proposed ordinance amendment is written in a way that only WS can qualify and that Rustin HS and other smaller campuses would not be able to duplicate what WS is proposing. She added however that if their revenue projections don't pan out as predicted that "that's our problem".

Mrs. Foster concluded by stating that as a property owner without children, she did not feel that WS's financial situation should be her burden.

Gary Bevilacqua, 109 Macroom Ave – Mr. Bevilacqua explained that he was appearing at the meeting as an authorized representative of WCASD. He informed the audience that the school district would be submitting a request to the Twp to allow for an additional 10 nights of games at a later date and that a town hall would be held on 9/26 to present this proposal to neighboring property owners. He also noted that WCASD supports WS's request for additional night practices.

He then added that he has been involved in travel and club soccer for West Chester United (WCU) and Penn Fusion for over 20 years and that typically a team is made up of 70-75% school district residents. He stressed that there is a lot of demand for playing and practice fields. Currently, he noted that WCU rents a facility at a cost of about \$200,000 per year which they use between 200

and 250 nights per year to give the PC some idea of what WS might generate in revenue.

John Snook, Planning Consultant for Westtown Twp – Mr. Snook acknowledged that while the light technology was advanced, the fact that some residents would be able to see the playing surface from their properties meant that they would be able to see the reflection and intensity of the light from the playing surface. He noted that the humidity of the seasons would also create a reflection of the light creating a large glow above the fields. He mentioned his experience seeing the glow of the lights from West Chester University despite the fact that he lives over 10,000 feet away.

Mr. Ruffo conceded that the mist would create some glow above the fields in high humidity but that there would be no glare because of the type of lights and the angle at which they will be aimed (no more than 21 degrees).

Mr. Snook then asked if the traffic analysis and conclusions took into account the increased traffic during overlapping periods between practices, particularly during evening rush hours.

Mr. Lehmann replied that all WS practices would end by 5:30-5:45pm and that 75% of the students live on-campus so there isn't as much car traffic as you might see at a public school.

Mr. Pomerantz commented that he had accompanied Mr. Rodia on a site visit of the existing fields and that during that visit they had walked the estimated size of the field house, (75' x 25') and that they felt it was larger than they had imagined.

Mr. Ruffo noted that this structure would be more than just a concession stand; it would be a gathering place and would host outdoor classes.

Mr. Pomerantz noted that the description of the structure seemed to have evolved as he recalled it being referred to only as a concession stand during a previous visit to the site.

Mr. Ruffo commented that he did not attend that previous site visit. Mr. Lehmann added that WS was trying to refer to the structure in layman's terms. Mr. Ruffo corrected his previous statement removing the word "classroom" and referring to it only as a gathering space or destination.

Mr. Pomerantz noted that schools in the area, including WS, have experienced a "drug problem" and asked how school officials would keep that structure from becoming a destination for drug use.

Ms. Jueds noted that this problem is present anywhere there is not an adult present at all times, didn't have a specific security plan for the fields and the building, but assured PC members that there would be security patrols and cooperation from WEGO PD as appropriate.

PC members discussed when they would like to have WS officials back before them and agreed on October 3rd. PC members thanked WS officials for their patience.

Reports

Board of Supervisors public meeting 9/4 – Russ Hatton (postponed to 9/19 PC meeting)

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 10:16 pm

Next PC meeting – September 19, 2018, 7:30 pm – Township Building

PC Representative at next Board meeting: September 17 (Tuesday), 2018 – Dick Pomerantz

Respectfully submitted,
William Ethridge
Planning Commission Secretary

DRAFT