



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

June 6, 2003

MEMORANDUM - MANDATORY REFERRAL

Springbrook High School Stadium Lights
MR 03602-MCPS-1

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board
VIA: John A. Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division *JA*
William R. Barron, Eastern Montgomery County Team Leader *WRB*
FROM: Calvin Nelson, Jr., for the Department of Park and Planning
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REVIEW TYPE: Mandatory Referral
APPLYING FOR: Springbrook High School Stadium Lights
APPLICANT: Montgomery County Public Schools
CASE NUMBER: MR 03602-MCPS-1
REVIEW BASIS: Article 28, Section 7-112 of the Annotated Code of Maryland

ZONE: R-200
LOCATION: 201 Valley Brook Drive
MASTER PLAN: White Oak
FILING DATE: March 31, 2003
PLANNING
BOARD REVIEW: June 12, 2003

RECOMMENDATION: **APPROVAL** with the following comments to Montgomery County Public Schools

1. The stadium lights should be used solely for interscholastic sports events involving Springbrook High School.
2. Schedule not more than 16 night games in the stadium for the school year. The stadium lights should be turned off 30 minutes after game's end.
3. Provide low level safety lighting at the rear of the concession stand to provide lighting for those walking from the rear of the school to the stadium.
4. Continue to manage traffic circulation and parking related to sporting/special events. Increase coordination with neighboring civic associations to address existing traffic and parking concerns on neighborhood residential streets during these events.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Springbrook High School is the only public high school in Montgomery County that does not have stadium lighting. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) proposes to install four light towers, two with a mounting height of 80 feet, and two with a mounting height of 78 feet, at Springbrook High School's stadium. The four light towers are proposed to be located near both ends of the existing bleachers on both sides of the stadium field. The lights will allow Springbrook's football, soccer, field hockey and lacrosse teams to play in the evening hours. Springbrook's administrators, athletic staff, and booster club believe that having some evening games would increase parent and student interest and school revenue.

The light towers would be located approximately 500 feet from the closest residence to the north, and approximately 270 feet from the closest residence to the south. A buffer of mature trees exists between the stadium and residences to the north and south, and because of the orientation of the stadium field, the lights would not be oriented in the direction of these homes. MCPS is proposing to use Musco "SportsCluster-2, Level 8" lighting for the stadium. According to Musco, their lighting system "provides additional reductions in off-field spill light and glare, while maintaining a high quality of light on the field." The average amount of light on the field would be 30.3 footcandles. The average amount of spill light, measured approximately 300 feet from the field is .19 footcandles, indicating there would be very little light intrusion into the surrounding neighborhood.

Springbrook High School administrators anticipate the following 16 night activities in Springbrook's stadium for the 2003-2004 academic year (subject to approval from the Athletic Office):

Fall sports season Two field hockey contests; two junior varsity football games; four varsity football games; two soccer (boys-girls) games.

Spring sports season Six lacrosse (boys-girls) games.

Fourteen of these 16 games already occur at Springbrook High School; the stadium lights will allow these events to be rescheduled from weekday or Saturday afternoons to weekday evenings. Two field hockey games per year will be rescheduled from an offsite location to Springbrook High School. Generally, games will begin at 5:30 or 6:30 p.m. and be over by 8:30 or 9:00 p.m. and the school's administration has agreed that the field lights would be shut off 30 minutes after the game's end. In terms of past attendance, the four varsity football games draw the largest crowd, with a typical range of 300-500 spectators (the homecoming football game draws about 800 spectators, however this game will continue to be played on a Saturday afternoon). Generally, 200 or fewer spectators show up for all of the other games. The varsity football team would play on Friday nights; the junior varsity would play on Thursday or Saturday; the soccer games would generally be played on Monday through Thursday; and Lacrosse games would generally be played on Monday through Friday. Springbrook will use its own security staff for the games and will use County police to direct fans exiting the school site after the games. Springbrook's administrators have stated that ROTC students will

be used to help direct traffic into the school's parking lots for the night varsity football games. Springbrook's administrators also have stated that they do not envision renting out the stadium field at night. Springbrook, like many high schools in the County, has authority over the use of its fields. Two exceptions are Blake High School and Blair High School where the M-NCPPC's Parks Department issues permits for the use of those fields. The Interagency Coordinating Board (ICB) schedules requests for meetings and events which occur inside the high school buildings.

The cost of the project is estimated to be about \$125,000–\$130,000, and will be shared by MCPS and Springbrook High School's Booster Club.

THE SITE

The Springbrook High School site comprises 27.4 acres and is located approximately 2,000 feet west of New Hampshire Avenue between Valleybrook Drive and Springbrook Drive. The school fronts onto Valley Brook Drive which provides the only vehicular access to the site. Adjacent to the site to the north and east are single-family homes in the R-200 Zone. Single-family homes in the Rural Zone are located to the south. The Northwest Branch Stream Valley Park extends along the west and northwest boundary of the site. There is about a 14-foot change in elevation from the stadium field and the nearby parking area up to the rest of the school site. The school was built in 1960 and last renovated in 1994 and comprises 305,000 square feet. There are about 500 parking spaces on the site, divided into several areas, and all having access from Valley Brook Drive. Springbrook is a signature high school with an emphasis on information technology and has an enrollment of 2,046 students.

ISSUES – Proposed Stadium Lights

There is both opposition and support in the community for the proposed installation of stadium lights.

MCPS/SHS Booster Club position - Springbrook High School is the only public high school in all of Montgomery County without stadium lights. The stadium lights would build school spirit for students, provide greater family and community involvement, and generate additional revenues to help support athletic, social and academic programs (see ⑥).

Opposition position – Seventy-two residents in the community have signed a petition opposing the installation of stadium lights for the following reasons: traffic safety; parking and traffic; security and noise (see ⑦).

Staff Recommendation – Staff recommends approval of the stadium lights with the four comments noted on the first page of this report. The lights will be turned off 30 minutes after each game. A maximum of 16 night games will be played each year. Adequate off-street parking spaces are provided, and ROTC students will be used to help direct traffic into the parking lots for the night varsity football games.

ANALYSIS

Master Plan

The subject property is located in the area covered by the White Oak Master Plan, which was adopted and approved in 1997. The Master Plan states that public schools are an essential component of community life and identity, and provide not only educational but recreational services to the community as well. All public school improvements are programmed through the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) and the Approved Plan for Educational Facilities.

Development Standards for the Zone

The proposed light towers meet the definition of an accessory structure set out in the Zoning Ordinance. In the R-200 Zone, the ordinance requires that accessory buildings or structures must be located in a rear yard and must be set back 65 feet from the street line, 7 feet from a rear lot line and 12 feet from a side lot line. The nearest tower to the northern lot line is 290 feet away; to the southern lot line 185 feet away; and to the western lot line 90 feet away.

Transportation

Transportation Planning staff finds that the proposed installation of lights will generally result in the rescheduling of events already occurring at the school and will therefore have a negligible effect on traffic and parking conditions. Staff finds that the installation of stadium lights will neither exacerbate nor alleviate community concerns regarding existing traffic and parking conditions (see ④).

Environmental

Springbrook High School has an approved Natural Resources Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation (NRI/FSD). An exemption of the Forest Conservation Law has been granted because the proposal is a modification to an existing use that is clearing no more than a total 5,000 square feet of forest; does not clear forest within a stream buffer or on property subject to SPA WQP requirements; and does not require a new subdivision plan.

Subdivision No subdivision is required.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Springbrook's Principal, Michael Durso, sent out letters inviting the immediate community to attend a meeting to discuss stadium lighting in the school's cafeteria on September 9, 2002, and also a second meeting on March 12, 2003 (see ⑧). These meetings afforded these neighbors the opportunity to learn and ask questions about the proposed stadium lighting project. Some of the questions raised were how many evening games would be played in the stadium and how would security be handled. On

May 20, 2003, staff received a petition signed by 72 residents in the area who oppose the stadium lights (see ⑦). Planning Board staff also mailed notices identifying the subject application and the Planning Board date.

CONCLUSION

The proposed stadium light project meets development standards of the R-200 Zone and has no significant impact on the natural environment or on circulation at Springbrook High School. It conforms to policies and recommendations of the 1997 Master Plan for White Oak. The school's administration anticipates having 16 night games per academic year, and with the exception of the four night varsity football games in the fall, large crowds are not expected. The lights proposed by MCPS are not orientated towards the neighborhood, and are designed to focus light on the field. The lights will have low levels of spill off at the school's boundaries. School officials have agreed to turn off the stadium lights 30 minutes after completion of the games. School administrators, parents and athletic boosters strongly believe that night athletics will increase participation in athletic events, especially among working parents. This benefit, coupled with the relatively low overall impact of the stadium lights, enables the Department to recommend approval of this project.

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Attachments