



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

May 2, 2002

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board
VIA: John A. Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division, JC
Khalid Afzal, Georgia Avenue Team Leader VA
FROM: Frederick Vernon Boyd for the Department of Park and Planning
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REVIEW TYPE: Mandatory Referral
APPLYING FOR: Wheaton High School Stadium Lights
APPLICANT: Montgomery County Public Schools
CASE NUMBER: MR 01505-MCPS-1
REVIEW BASIS: Article 28, Section 7-112 of the Annotated Code of Maryland

ZONE: R-60
LOCATION: 12601 Dalewood Drive
MASTER PLAN: Kensington-Wheaton

FILING DATE: November 30, 2001
**PLANNING BOARD
REVIEW:** May 9, 2002

RECOMMENDATION: Approval and transmission of comments to Montgomery County Public Schools

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Montgomery County Public Schools proposes to install lights at Wheaton High School's stadium. MCPS is proposing four towers, each approximately 75 feet high and each with a bank of 10 lights. The lights will enable Wheaton's football, soccer, field hockey and lacrosse teams to play in the evening, which, school administrators, athletic officials and parents and others believe, would increase parent and student interest in games, increase revenues, and contribute to the cohesiveness of the Wheaton High School community.

Figure 1 shows Wheaton High School and its surrounding community, while Figure 2 shows the proposed location of the towers.

Wheaton High School occupies a 28.2-acre site on Dalewood Drive, north of Randolph Road and about 1800 feet east of the intersection of Randolph Road and Connecticut Avenue. It is adjacent to Glenmont Local Park, the site of the recently completed Wheaton-Glenmont Pool. The campus houses two schools—Wheaton High School and Thomas A. Edison High School of Technology, which offers technical and career education courses for students from throughout the county.

The site slopes from north to south and is oriented to Dalewood Drive. Its playing fields and stadium are located between the campus buildings and Randolph Road to the south. The towers will be visible to homes across Randolph Road from the campus. The towers nearest those homes will be about 210 feet away. The light banks for those towers, however, are oriented away from the homes and will be shielded to minimize “leaking” of light. The towers whose lights will face the homes are about 530 feet away. They, too, will be shielded to direct the maximum amount of light onto the field. Use of these shields will result in levels of light at the property line equivalent to those emitted by street lights. In addition, rows of mature trees on both sides of Randolph Road will mask both the visual impact of the lights and the levels of light visible from neighboring homes.

The cost of the project, about \$98,000, will be shared by MCPS and Wheaton High School’s Booster Club. MCPS will fund the entire project, using money from its Capital Improvements Program, with the Booster Club providing its half share through a variety of fundraising activities over a 10-year period.

Wheaton High School administrators expect that the school’s football, soccer and field hockey teams will use the field in the fall, from mid-August until mid-November. The football team, for example, plays five home games on Friday nights during that period, with games starting at 6:30 p.m. Soccer teams play seven home games during that period on a different day of the week, with doubleheaders being played starting at 5:00 p.m. Field hockey teams play six home games in the fall, and would also play doubleheaders starting at 5:00 p.m. Like other schools, Wheaton uses its own security officers and police to direct exiting fans after games, and school administrators intend to clear the stadium soon after games are completed to minimize potential security issues. In that regard, it should be noted that games beginning at 6:30 p.m. can be played largely in natural light until daylight savings time ends at the beginning of October, leaving about six weeks of a team’s season for “night” games.

THE SITE

As noted above, Wheaton High School is located at the intersection of Randolph Road and Dalewood Drive. To the north, west and south is the Connecticut Avenue Estates community, in the R-60 Zone. To the east is the Wheaton-Glenmont Pool, which is part of Glenmont Local Park. The school was built in 1954. Classroom and cafeteria additions were completed in 1961; gymnasium additions were finished in 1965 and an auditorium was added in 1970. MCPS fully modernized the school in 1983, when the Edison programs were established. The most recent renovation, approved in 2000, added 18 classrooms.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

Master Plan

The 1989 *Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton* had as its objective the provision of "public school facilities needed to sustain high quality educational programs at reasonable cost." The Plan recommended reliance on the Master Plan for Educational Facilities, the Capital Improvements Program and the Annual Growth Policy as guides for developing public schools in the planning area.

Development Standards for the Zone

Development standards in the R-60 Zone require that structures taller than 15 feet increase proportionally minimum setbacks in side and rear yards. For the proposed towers, then, the minimum setback is 65 feet from rear and side lot lines. The towers nearest the eastern lot line are 130 feet away; those nearest the rear lot line are 100 feet away; and those nearest the western lot line are 590 feet away. The towers therefore meet the development standards for the zone.

Transportation

Installation of the stadium lights has no impact on access or circulation at the school.

The Environment

Wheaton High School has an approved natural resources inventory/forest stand delineation and is exempt from the requirements of the Forest Conservation Law. Installation of the stadium lights involves less than 40,000 square feet and does not require the removal of any specimen trees.

Subdivision

No subdivision is required.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

At the request of the Community-Based Planning Division, MCPS held a community meeting on this project at Wheaton High School on April 25, to which it invited homeowners whose properties face the school on Dalewood Drive and Randolph Road. This meeting afforded these neighbors the opportunity to learn about the project's scope and schedule. Several parents and athletic boosters, along with the school's principal, attended. The Department has received no correspondence concerning this project as of the date of this staff report.

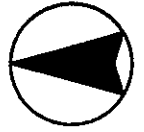
CONCLUSION

The proposed stadium light project meets development standards of the R-60 Zone and has no significant impact on the natural environment or on circulation at Wheaton High School. It conforms to policies and recommendations of the 1989 *Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton*. While the light towers will be visible from some homes across Randolph Road from the school, MCPS has employed shields and other glare reducing technologies to reduce the intensity of the light to the approximate equivalent of street lights. In addition, there are a limited number of home games for varsity teams and they will begin in the early evening, which reduces the amount of time that the lights will be on. School officials indicate that they intend to clear the stadium expeditiously after games, which means that lights may be turned out in a timely fashion. School administrators, parents and athletic boosters strongly believe that night athletics will increase participation in athletic events, especially among working parents, and will lead to a more cohesive and active high school community. This clear 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

Wheaton High School Vicinity

Figure 1



Existing Site Plan

Figure 2

