



Everything Jersey

Planners debate merits of lights at SHS field

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By ROBERT KOPACZ

SUMMIT -- The plans of the Board of Education to continue to provide a robust recreational program at Summit High School went up against the needs of the surrounding neighborhood for quiet enjoyment of their property, as the Planning Board listened to a presentation of proposed improvements to the Summit High School Upper Field to the Planning Board on Oct. 23.

The plans, under concurrent review at the State Department of Education, call for the installation of artificial turf as well as field lighting, in what Board of Education witness Michael Disko said would "greatly expand the recreational program" at Summit High School.

Characterizing the general sense of trepidation about the project, Planning Board member Vicki Weber noted "this is unlike anything we have seen in Summit," with the majority of the Planning Board's attention directed to the proposed field lighting and its impact on local area residents.

Paul Griggs, business administrator for the Summit Board of Education, introduced two witnesses in support of the improvements: Mr. Disko, a civil engineer with experience in artificial turf, and Jerry Magovern, a representative of Musco Lighting. Board of Education Superintendent Carolyn Deacon also attended.

Mr. Disko, a licensed civil engineer since 1962, presented the Board of Education's proposal for installation of artificial turf on the field surface. He testified that he had presided over the installation of three synthetic fields in the last 12 months, all of which were in operation.

Referring to a series of drawings offered as an exhibit, he noted that the proposed plan for the artificial turf would use the same technology currently used at Giants and Rutgers stadiums, two venues that get "much heavier usage" than the Upper Field. Mr. Disko underscored that the type of artificial turf proposed allows for good drainage, and that a bed of gravel would allow for gradual dispersal of water into the soil below.

In response to a question by Planning Board consultant Peter Tolischus, Mr. Disko responded that the turf has rubber under-padding of one and a half inches, sufficient to minimize serious injury. "This isn't a pillow, but it is much better" technology than other artificial turf technologies afford, said Mr. Disko.

Mr. Disko then introduced Mr. Magovern, field representative for Musco Lighting of Farmingdale, who offered testimony on the lighting plan. Mr. Magovern qualified his firm by noting that the company's sole activity is the installation and calibration of field lighting. The company lit 42 venues at the last Summer Olympics, as well as Shea Stadium and the stadiums for Farleigh Dickinson and Seton Hall universities.

Mr. Magovern testified that the two key goals in lighting installations are to avoid glare for the players, and to minimize the seepage of light into surrounding neighborhoods, referred to as "spill."

The city's zoning official, Gary Lewis, expressed concern over the location of light poles at the property line that backs the residences on Weaver Street. He appeared not to be persuaded by arguments that the light spill would not affect the residents there.

In response to Mr. Magovern's previous testimony about spillage over the rear of the residences along Weaver, Mr. Lewis noted "five foot-candles [10 feet over the property line] is bright." A "foot-candle" is a measure of light intensity. Field lighting requires 50 foot-candles of lighting intensity, and lighting installers seek to direct the lighting so that the intensity drops off rapidly behind the lights, so as not to disturb event viewers or surrounding areas.

Mr. Magovern noted that a standard streetlight has an intensity of two to five foot-candles, so that the light intensity in question would be of a similar intensity.

In earlier testimony, Mr. Macgovern, in an effort to assure Planning Board members of Musco's commitment to minimal neighborhood disruption, described how he sat in the living room of one local resident on a prior project, and communicated by walkie talkie with a technician who adjusted one light's direction until the resident was satisfied the light would not disturb him in his living room.

Planning Board members' discussion with the issue of light spill was complicated by the fact that the Planning Board review in this case is only advisory in nature.

F. Clifford Gibbons, the Planning Board counsel, in noting the Planning Board advisory role, emphasized that if the Board of Education plans became "inimical to the objectives of the Master Plan, then there would be a problem."

Responding on behalf of the Summit Board of Education, Mr. Griggs noted that "we will do whatever it takes" to make the field improvements comply with the spirit of the Master Plan."

The evening's review concluded with the members of the Planning Board asking their attorney, Mr. Gibbons, to prepare a resolution for board members' approval embodying the board's comments and observations to the Board of Education plans.

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