

Seminary Hill Association, Inc.
2115 Marlboro Drive
Alexandria, VA 22304

May 18, 2011

Alexandria City Public Schools
2000 N. Beauregard Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22311

Superintendent Morton Sherman and School Board Chair Yvonne Folkerts:

On November 17, 2010, Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) filed an application for a Special Use Permit (SUP) to erect four (4) 70 foot lighting poles at the upper field at Francis C. Hammond Middle School (Hammond). The SUP application contains a short narrative in support of the application but does not address many basic questions normally applicable to SUP applications, nor does it address technical analysis of the effects of stadium lighting on surrounding neighborhoods or how it plans to comply with City Code. The City held public meetings to discuss the issues on February 8, 2011, and April 26, 2011. Neither the applicants nor staff disclosed significant new information during these meetings or stated plans to modify the SUP application slightly. For the reasons below, Seminary Hill Association, Inc. (SHA) strongly recommends and requests that ACPS withdraw this application before the Planning Commission hearing scheduled for June 7, 2011.

1. Hammond has been designated as an emergency response staging area, and there has been no indication that Inova Alexandria Hospital or regional emergency planners concur with the loss of a facility that is already used for urgent purposes;
2. The SUP application appears to violate City Code in at least three significant ways—exceeding height restrictions of 40 feet, exceeding setback restrictions of 25 feet, and exceeding illumination restrictions—thus requiring a variance at a minimum;
3. There has been no technical or economic impact analysis performed (Note: Arlington has decided against lighting athletic fields adjacent to residential properties and Fairfax has adopted regulations which effectively bar it); and
4. The City has repeatedly recommended against installing stadium lighting at Hammond and with the opening of the Witter Fields next March, the City met its recommendations of four lighted turf fields as explained at the February public meeting.

In addition, SHA is disturbed that this proposal violates long-standing agreements between it, ACPS, the School Board, and the City, and that there was no input from the community before filing and no regard to the potentially devastating impacts the area faces when the BRAC-133 at Mark Center opens later this year. In lieu of developing and responding to the issues identified in this letter and in public meetings, City personnel were marshaled to defeat the “push back from the community,” according to recent City documents describing naked political efforts.

SHA supports a strong athletic program, especially for our youth. Two lighted fields—Minnie Howard and Fort Ward Park—are within SHA boundaries but away from residential properties. SHA is disturbed by the City’s handling of this issue and the lack of economic impact analysis. SHA lacks confidence in City staff in Planning & Zoning and Parks & Recreation who are advocating for their own interests rather than those of the taxpayers of Alexandria.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy R. Jennings".

President Nancy R. Jennings
Seminary Hill Association, Inc.

CC:

Members of the Alexandria School Board
Mayor and City Council
Planning Commission
Faroll Hamer, Planning & Zoning
James Spengler, Parks & Recreation