


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 27, 2011

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
CHAIRMAN KOMOROSKE AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: JAMES B. SPENGLER, DIRECTOR 
RECREATION, PARKS & CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

SUBJECT: FRANCIS HAMMOND LOWER FIELD
RESPONSES TO EMAIL FROM NANCY JENNINGS OF MAY 18, 2011

On May 18, 2011, an e-mail statement from Nancy Jennings, President of the Seminary Hill Association, was sent to all City Council and Planning Commission members addressing four particular concerns relating to the proposed Athletic Field Lights at Hammond Middle School (SUP #2010-0079). The purpose of this memorandum is to respond to those concerns.

1. Ms. Jennings Statement:

“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.”

Response:

a. *As confirmed in an e-mail sent from both Brian Hricik, EMS Operations Manager, and Adam Thiel, Alexandria Fire Chief, to Pat Escher, Principal Planner of the Department of Planning & Zoning, on January 24, 2011, EMS and the Fire Department’s use of the site does not affect a decision to install the field or lights; the City may decide to relocate to an alternative landing zone in the area without operational impact.*

2. Ms. Jennings Statement:

“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 minimum.”

Response:

a. *The second portion of the Special Use Permit (SUP) application is a request to allow a public school facility to construct a structure (athletic field lights) up to 60 feet within the City (Sec. 7-2100). The Staff Report is recommending approval of the Special Use Permit.*

- b. *The SUP request includes a modification to the R-20 front yard setback of 70 feet from property line to allow installation of two of the four proposed light poles. The portion of the track/field next to North Pickett Street is within the R-20 zone that has a 70' front yard setback requirement due to the non-residential institutional use. Although the City's setback requirements do not apply to athletic amenities at ground level, they do apply to structures including, in this case, two of the four proposed light poles that will be located approximately 23 and 25 feet from property line. The impact of the light poles will be mitigated by provision of additional deciduous trees and evergreen trees along North Pickett Street, the use of cut off shields and advanced technologies that will direct the light onto the field/track and will have minimal impact the adjacent properties. The Staff Report is recommending approval of this modification to the front yard requirement.*
- c. *Under Section 622.6 of BOCA Code, the City of Alexandria minimum average lighting design standard for illumination of sidewalks in a residential neighborhood is 0.6 foot candles. Currently, the highest foot candle reading on the residential side of North Pickett Street is 0.26 foot candles. When activated, the proposed athletic field lights, in combination with existing street lamps, would not exceed 0.44 foot candles on the residential side of North Pickett Street.*

3. Ms. Jennings Statement:

"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.)"

Response:

- a. *A technical review of the proposed lights has been submitted by the project consultant, Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc.*
- b. *In 2003 Fairfax County, Virginia conducted a lighting study of its existing and proposed facilities and subsequently developed Athletic Field Lighting Performance Outline Specifications and County Ordinance 14-904. Through this ordinance the Fairfax County Park Authority does not have a setback between lights and a residential property, but rather, measures the off-site light spill at a distance of 150 feet from the light source, regardless of location. Fairfax County Park Authority specifications require a maximum of .3 foot candles at 150' from the light source. In comparison, the proposed lights for Hammond would have a maximum of .09 foot candles at 150 feet (from the light source) on the North Pickett Street side. This light amount is less than 1/3 of the Fairfax County Off-Field Spill Light Limitation requirements.*
- c. *The Arlington, Virginia 2005 Open Space Master Plan recommended a minimum conversion of one natural grass athletic field to synthetic per year and that all synthetic grass conversions should have existing lighting or a plan for future athletic field lighting installation. In 2004 the Wakefield High School athletic field was renovated with lights approximately 120' from the closest residence. Subsequently, in 2005 the Washington-Lee High School Stadium was completed with athletic field lights approximately 100 feet from the closest residence.*

4. Ms. Jennings Statement:

“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.”

Response:

- a. *As presented at the public meeting on February 7, 2011, a Fields Priority Strategy in 2009 (presented to Council in January, 2010 and documented in a letter from the City Manager in March, 2010) found that four existing natural turf fields would need to be converted to synthetic turf with lights in order to meet the demand of 9,450 additional hours of intensive sports on rectangular fields. Hammond Upper Field had the highest potential for conversion, following Ben Brenman, as determined by its size, location, field condition, access, constructability and fiscal impact.*
- b. *Since 2009, synthetic turf and lights have been installed at Ben Brenman Park, decreasing the number of hours in need by 2,750 hours. When completed, the two additional lighted fields at Witter, in combination with approval of lights at Hammond, will meet the 2009 demand for rectangular fields. However, between 2009 and 2010 sport enrollment increased another 22%. Preliminary enrollment figures for 2011 year-to-date show a continued increase of 8%. There are now two additional fields needed to meet 2010 demand.*

Cc: Margaret Byess, Deputy Superintendent, Alexandria City Public Schools