

Minutes

Walkersville Planning Commission Workshop

April 9, 2019

Commission Chairman Dick Brady called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. with members David Ennis, Mike Kuster, Tim Pollak, Ray Santullo, Russ Winch and John Zimmerman present. Also present were Town Commissioners Tom Gilbert, Mary Ann Brodie-Ennis, and Michael Bailey, and Mike McNiesh.

1. Revised Site Plan: Rock Creek School

Planner Hauver reviewed the staff memo outlining changes to the site plan since the January hearing.

Chairman Brady noted that he would like to take public comment at the end of the meeting, allowing each speaker two minutes to address any subject not covered in the discussion between the applicants and the Commission members.

The applicant, Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS), was represented by Mr. Bruce Dean of Linowes and Blocher, Mr. Jason Fritz of Adtek Engineers, Ms. Kori Purdum Matheis of Profitt and Associates, Mr. Mike Norton of Norton Land Design, Mr. Carl Wilson of the Traffic Group and Brian Staiger of FCPS.

Mr. Dean noted that the Commission had asked the team in January to re-evaluate the drainage area to the property. They found that the drainage area was much larger than they had previously thought (based on analysis done for the Mill Run property). There is a significant amount of water coming onto the property, which functions as an unconstructed stormwater management (SWM) facility. The design team needed to come up with a way to properly convey the water across the site without harming the neighboring properties. The revised plans show a 30' wide concrete swale. The team met with Ms. Hauver, Town engineer Shawn Burnett and Frederick County SWM engineer Dave Crable and Frederick County DUSWM (utilities) engineer Rodney Winebrenner on March 15 to discuss the Town concerns about the concrete swale.

Mr. Dean said that they are actively considering replacing the plans for the concrete swale with a lined and seeded swale, as requested by the Town engineer. They would lose part of the grass field adjacent to the proposed school. The water will move slower so the channel will need to be wider. Mosquitoes could be an issue, but that might be better than skateboarders.

Mr. Jason Fritz noted that they had removed the drive aisle on the Mill Run side of the school and reduced the length of the retaining wall on that side of the property as well. A grass swale will need to be 45' wide since the water will move more slowly than in a concrete swale. There is too much water coming to the site to use underground culverts. The swale will alleviate flooding that occurs at the end of Maryland Avenue. He also noted that a significant sewer line crossing the middle of the property will be moved to the area of the swale. County DUSWM staff is okay with it.

Mr. Ennis asked about the height of the retaining wall along the Glade Village side of the property. Mr. Fritz and Ms. Purdum Matheis said it would be 11 feet tall at the highest, in the back corner of the property. Mr. Ennis noted that the lights on the parking lot at the top would be 25' feet above the ground. The design team members also noted that the lights are dimmed to 50% at 8 or 9 pm. There will be a chain link fence at the top of the retaining wall. It was noted that cars will not be parking at the edge of the retaining wall, because a drive aisle separates the retaining wall from the parking.

Design team members also said that they met with representatives of the Mill Run homeowners' association. They reduced a significant amount of the retaining wall on their side of the property. They will save as many trees as possible and plant a lot of new trees for screening.

Mr. Mike Norton reviewed the location of the three specimen trees for which they are seeking a waiver from the Town to remove them. One is in a proposed basketball court and two are along the proposed swale and sewer easement. There are 13-17 total specimen trees on the property, so most will be saved.

Mr. Brady asked about FCPS planting additional trees on the HOA property adjoining the school, and, if so, who would maintain them. Mr. Dean said the HOA would be responsible.

Mr. Brady asked about the view of the property from the Glade Village side and wondered how the applicant could soften the view of the retaining wall. It was noted that an existing utility easement along the property prohibits planting. Plants along the retaining wall will grow to about 8 feet tall. The concrete surface of the retaining wall will be a poured form liner of brick or stone, with a stain and anti-graffiti treatment. Commission members asked if the driveway leading to the new school could be narrowed, but Mr. Fritz noted that it cannot be any narrower.

Mr. Brady asked about the barrier at the end of Maryland Avenue, and Mr. Fritz said it would be a lockable pipe gate to allow DUSWM to have access to their sewer line.

Mr. Winch asked about the plan to move the path from Mill Run to the middle school. The design teams do not want students crossing the swale, so a path would run along the Mill Run property line to Maryland Avenue and connect with the sidewalk extending from Maryland Avenue. Mr. Winch said the proposal was a nonstarter. An ADA-compliant structure crossing the swale needs to be added.

Mr. Kuster said that the path needs to be lighted because troopers need to see what is going on.

Mr. Winch wondered whether the community would lose any of the current after-hours uses of the middle school, including a polling place and athletic facility.

Mr. Ennis asked about the relationship between the parking lot size and the trip generation for the new school. There are 150 parking spaces but only 70 vehicle trips. Mr. Carl Wilson said that the 70 vehicles represent peak hour trips, which is mostly full time staff. Additional off-peak trips to the site include volunteers, vendors and therapists for whom parking is needed. Mr. Ennis also asked for confirmation that the revised traffic study reflected the closure of Maryland Avenue. Mr. Wilson agreed that it did.

Mr. Ennis also reiterated his disapproval of the use of the site for overnight bus parking.

In response to a question from Mr. Ennis, Mr. Dean said that an access agreement with Frederick County was in progress.

Mr. Ennis asked that the applicant address the criteria for approving a second principal building on the lot in writing. Mr. Dean said they would submit a written statement.

Mr. Matt Lubold of Ports Circle (Mill Run) asked if the grading could extend all the way to the property line. He also expressed concern that the walking path from his neighborhood would be used by staff/visitors who choose to park on Ports Circle. He asked who would be responsible for maintenance of the swale when it gets to the property owned by Mill Run. He wondered what would happen if the HOA and FCPS do not have an agreement.

In response to question from Mr. Winch, the applicants said they did not expect to blast on the site.

Mr. Mike Malec of Mill Run asked how far they would be coming onto Mill Run's property. He noted that they had not brought this up to the HOA. He wondered if the culverts under the railroad tracks were not big enough and is concerned about their property being flooded.

Ms. Cara Lubold asked for a 3D rendering to help the neighbors visualize the proposed building and structures. She wondered about the height of the slope along the school building, and is concerned about the view from her back yard. She asked whether an Environment Impact Statement had been prepared. Had the impact on the surrounding area been studied? She noted that huge holes had been left on the site after the geological studies had been done. She asked what size trees would be planted for the screening. Mr. Norton said they would be 2 ½" caliper trees and 8-10' evergreens. Ms. Lubold noted that with the removal of existing trees will include the loss of roots that mitigate the stormwater. Mr. Fritz explained that the SWM on site will result in cleaner water leaving the site. Ms. Lubold asked whether they had reconsidered the site selection after discovering the storm drainage issues. Mr. Staiger said that was a BOE decision.

Town Commissioner Mike McNiesh asked about the width of the drive aisle, and whether the fire marshal would permit the width to be reduced. He questioned the pupil yield figures used in the traffic study, noting that families choose Walkersville for the schools so perhaps they are higher than average. He also asked why the building for 75 students and 78 staff would be so large, especially when compared to the building footprint for the middle school servicing 891 students. He suggested the building and retaining wall will look like a medieval fortress or prison.

Ms. Casey Ramsburg, Ports Circle, expressed concern about losing the tree line between her house and the school and wondered how long it would take to replace it. Mr. Norton said that fast-growing trees would develop into a full screen in 5 to 10 years. The Mill Run retention pond already has standing water.

Town Commissioner Tom Gilbert asked why not construct a fence along the boundary with Glade Village? He noted that kids cut through yards on Georgetown Road to get to the school. He wondered if the swale could be deeper to make the water flow better. Mr. Fritz said if it's deeper it will become a pond. Mr. Gilbert asked for elevation drawings so the neighbors will know what they will be looking at from their properties.

Mr. Lamar Estridge, Mill Run HOA President, said that they would be losing green space that they can walk to. He is concerned about the loss of the walking path.

Mr. Brady thanked everyone for coming and for their participation in the workshop. He noted that the Commission would meet to consider the site plan on April 23, 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan J. Hauver