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SMC Moves Fields to Make Room for New Rec Center

By *Sophie Braccini*

Within a few months the entrance to Saint Mary's College will look quite different. Right now, as one enters the campus on Saint Mary's Parkway, the view is of the white chapel set against the backdrop of the hills, with green fields to the left and right of the driveway. Maintaining that open feel will be a challenge when the baseball field, which is now located at the south corner of the campus, is relocated next to the college's front door.

According to the college, moving the baseball field to the east, by the entrance, is the only option short of grading the hills that will allow the construction of a new recreation center - complete with a pool - where the baseball field now stands.

"The view will never be the same," commented Design Review Board (DRB) Chair Allen Sayles during the DRB meeting on March 28. The biggest visual impact will be created by the right outfield fence located 70 feet southwest of the main entrance road.

The outfield fences will have 8-foot high green padding on the inside of the chain link fence. A 10-foot high net fence will extend above the chain link fence on the northwest, north and northeast sides. The total height will be 18 feet. A 25x60-foot "batter's eye" wall will be installed behind the center outfield fence. There will also be a 25x35-foot score board behind the right outfield fence. The plans for the baseball field include new landscaping with redwood trees to screen the backside of the batter's eye and score board. Tension poles varying in height from 30 to 50 feet tall would be installed along the southwest, south and southeast sides of the baseball field to deflect foul balls and for the bullpen.

Brother Dominic Berardelli, Special Assistant to the President of SMC, stated that with the deep setback and the addition of trees, the perspective entering the campus would not be compromised.

The DRB unanimously approved the design of the new field and made the recommendation to cover the outside of the right outfield fence with a filling that will allow the growth of a mix of evergreen and deciduous vines.

SMC will now be working towards obtaining approval for the new recreation center.

Changes Spur Noise Concerns Among Neighbors

As Saint Mary's College moves forward with plans to shuffle its sports fields, some of its neighbors are worried about the conversion of an existing grass field, located between the Stadium and the McKeon Pavilion - close to Bollinger Canyon Road and the Bluffs residential area - to a synthetic turf playing field. Scheduled improvements include four new 70-foot high light poles with 12 lights on each pole. It's not the lights per se that the neighbors dread; with the lights comes the authorization to use the field until 10:00 p.m. - it is potential noises in the night that are raising concerns.

The college was eager to play a 'good neighbor' role as it presented the project to the community. College staff and consultants came in number the Design Review Board meeting to explain their project.

After hearing SMC's presentation and listening to the neighbors' concerns, Moraga Planning Director Lori Salamack proposed that the college be allowed to light the fields until 9:00 p.m., and then perhaps earn the right to use them until 10:00 p.m.

"We were in support of the Planning Director's proposal to limit the lighting/use to 9:00 p.m. initially, as a neighborly gesture, with the proviso that it could be extended to 10:00 p.m. if nighttime use of that particular field did not present a problem to neighbors," commented Bluff's resident Frank Comprelli. "In other words, allow for the neighbors to acclimate to the new environment and get some experience with a 9:00 p.m. limit before expanding to 10:00 p.m." The DRB voted against this plan, enacting the 10:00 p.m. shut down.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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