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Planning Commission Approves Development of SMC Rec Center

Neighbors remain concerned about light, noise

By Sophie Braccini

Saint Mary's College will celebrate its 150th anniversary during the coming school year. One of the projects planned for the sesquicentennial is the building of the new Joseph L. Alioto Recreation Center, and neighbors have not been shy about expressing concerns related to noise, parking, traffic, and the use of lights—especially with the recent completion of the new sports field. The Planning Commission approved the development permit July 2, and will require the College to remedy noise and lighting problems. Hearings on these issues will begin August 6.

The 60,000 square foot recreation center will be located in the northwest portion of the campus and will include a swim center and a baseball seating facility. Along with the recently constructed field, the athletic center and offices will create a recreation corridor and pedestrian plaza. The project will require the excavation of approximately 24,830 cubic yards of soil from an existing borrow pit and the grading and filling of the project site to match the elevation of Filippi Academic Hall.

Saint Mary's College (SMC) will eliminate 37 parking spaces on the south side of the baseball field spectator facility to allow construction of the building and proposes to convert 18,600 square feet of existing landscaping along the north side of St. Mary's Parkway into 62 (net) new parking spaces.

Public meetings have been held to discuss the project and neighbors have expressed concerns that the new construction will only exacerbate existing problems. In general, comments focused on light, glare and noise impacts generated by the evening operation of SMC's new field.

"The recently opened sports fields have caused significant inconvenience to my family and the proposed student recreation center will amplify the problems," wrote Joseph Drive resident Darrell King. "Due to our proximity to the sports fields, we are subject to the glare of the huge stadium lights and hear the full spectrum of noise coming from the field activities," which he said disturbs the sleep of his young children.

J.D. O'Connor, who makes his home on Fernwood Drive, expressed additional concerns with

the potential for more noise and traffic impacts. He reported that during the construction of the baseball field, work sometimes started as early as 5:30 a.m. "For some time I have wondered why it was so hard for the College to come to terms with the impact its practices and policies are having on the surrounding neighborhoods," wrote O'Connor in an email to the Town Manager. "I think we can safely say ... that the College's sentiments about being good neighbors have fallen way short."

Phil Arth, who also lives on Joseph Drive, added that his complaints have been ignored in the past. He suspects that the plan submitted now by SMC is only a first step and that the ultimate goal will include even more lights and noise. "I can foresee Saint Mary's coming back to the Town seeking lighting for the baseball field if not for all the athletic fields," he wrote. "Why go to the expense of constructing a baseball field with an attendant 950-seat grand style structure and not provide lighting?"

The outpouring of concern was such that the Town started discussions with campus officials regarding noise and lighting impacts of the sports field outside the context of the current project. The Planning Commission decided to give SMC the opportunity to remedy the problem on its own, and the College hired a lighting consultant who will produce a report before the August 6 meeting.

When the sports field was approved a year ago, the conditions of approval allowed lighting until 10 p.m. unless neighbors filed significant complaints—the hours could be cut back to 9 p.m.

"The residents of the Bluffs community are relieved that St. Mary's College (SMC) has recognized that the performance of the light fixtures on the intramural field has been undesirable," wrote Frank Comprelli after the College hired the consultant. "We concur with SMC that the original lighting design process may have been faulty and that adjustments need to be made, including equipment modifications, equipment additions, or perhaps a new design."

Other areas of concern have been addressed by the conditions set for the approval of the development. To mitigate a potential

increase in traffic SMC must contribute a fair share towards the construction of a roundabout or alternative control at the intersection of St. Mary's Road and Rheem Boulevard. The College will also have to develop a Special Event traffic and parking plan.

With regard to the construction's potential noise impacts, work is permitted only during the week between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m., and on Saturday until September 1. Multiple conditions of approval regarding environmental aspects are addressed in documents that can be found on the Town's website at moraga.ca.us.

Harpham Decides One Term is Enough

Mendonca confirms she will seek re-election

Council Member Howard Harpham wrote in a recent email to reporter Sophie Braccini that he will not seek re-election to the Moraga Town Council, noting that "running, as opposed to serving, is a gauntlet for those who choose public service in retirement."

As of July 26, according to Town Clerk Marty McInturf, Harpham's Council colleagues Karen Mendonca and Mike Met-

calf, along with residents Seth Freeman and Phil Arth, have pulled nomination papers. Mendonca has declared her intent to run again.

The deadline to file nomination papers is August 10, but if one or more incumbents fail to file the deadline will be extended until August 15. Potential candidates should contact McInturf, (925) 888-7022.

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