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## College Must Shed Less Light on Neighbors

*By Sophie Braccini*

For some Bluffs residents, the night of October 1 was a victory. After months of complaining about lighting and noise on the new intramural sports field at Saint Mary's College, they won a ruling by Moraga's Planning Director that lights will have to be turned off at 9 p.m. rather than the previous 10 p.m. The decision was made in spite of the College's concern that reducing hours could weaken its attractiveness to new students.

Since the light towers were installed in the fall of 2011, complaints about noise and night glare were received by the Town more than once. To respond to neighbors' discontent, the College hired a lighting specialist, Ron Zeiger, who worked with a highly specialized team to reduce the general glare and direct light shining in the windows of some of the Bluffs' resident - the neighborhood located off Bollinger Canyon Road, facing the field that had never been lit before.

During the recent joint meeting of the Planning Department and the Design Review Board, Zeiger presented the modifications that had been made. "We re-aimed the lights, we re-angled the lights, we changed the reflectors on the lights, we painted the outside shell of the reflectors black to reduce the inner reflection between the fixtures, and as a result we cut down the glare," he said. Zeiger added that the level of lighting was still sufficient for competitive sports to be played on the field. The varsity Lacrosse team uses the field until 9 p.m.

Michael Beseda, Vice President for College Communications, added that the College had already significantly reduced the 'on' hours by turning off the lights on weekends, vacations, and generally when the field is not occupied. He also said that an attractive sports program was one of the elements students consider when choosing a college and that the Sports Department needed the night hours to accommodate all the teams' practice times.

Neighbors gathered in number at the meeting and presented a stream of testimonies to the nuisance of both the light and the noise, despite the modifications made by the school.

Bluffs resident Frank Comprelli reminded the Planning Commission and the Design Review Board how the process of approval of the new lights failed to include the neighbors in 2011, and, according to him, had wrongly exempted the College of any type of review of the impacts the new lights would have. He noted that the 2011 ruling included a provision allowing the Planning Director to administratively change the hours if the neighbors complained.

The Planning Commission unanimously agreed to direct Planning Director Shawna Brekke-Read to require that the lights must be turned off by 9 p.m. It added that if the College continues to work on its lighting system to minimize impact, and if it reaches an agreement with the neighbors, it could ask again to be allowed to leave the lights on until 10 p.m.

After the meeting, Beseda indicated that the College was considering appealing the decision.

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