

Minutes: Russell Township Board of Zoning Appeals
Russell Town Hall
August 25, 2008

Present: Steve Gokorsch, Chairman
Fred Cuffari
William Downing
Matthew Glemmo
Edith Lerner, Ph.D.
Diana Steffen, Secretary

Also in attendance: Ric Machnics, Zoning Inspector.

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**CONDITIONAL USE #380 LAUREL SCHOOL 7420 Fairmount Road
Request for expansion of existing conditional use to construct an 11,800 sq. ft.
fitness center/locker room facility**

The Secretary confirmed that a legal notice was published on 8/14/08 in the Chagrin Valley Times and the News Herald, and was sent to neighbors and parties on 8/6/08 by certified mail.

The Chairman swore in all those in the audience who planned to present testimony or make comment. He then opened the public hearing for the expansion request.

In attendance were Mary Ann Pellerano, Director of Facilities Services for Laurel School, Jill Akins, owner of Van Auken Akins Architects, LLC, and Kevin Kennedy, registered architect with Van Auken Akins Architects, LLC.

Mr. Kennedy presented Laurel School's plans, stating that they were requesting an expansion of the existing conditional use permit on the upper school Butler Campus. The proposed building is a new fitness center to be located south of the existing athletic fields, directly north of the pavilion and on the path of the existing loop road. They also plan to add a wall at the road entrance on the other side from the existing wall, which would have a sign, to be lit at night, identifying 'Butler Campus'. He showed a rendering of the proposed sign.

Mr. Kennedy showed a site plan of the property, and explained the proposed building is 11,800 sq. ft., and will be primarily a fitness center with locker rooms and shower rooms serving the sporting activities held north of the building. Two staff members will work in the building, and there will be new parking spaces for three to four vehicles. During sporting events the girls will be dropped off by buses on the road just before the building. They do not plan to add large parking areas for the facility.

The fitness center will have fitness machines in a large central area, and home and visiting teams will use locker and shower rooms. There will be two team meeting rooms with a removable wall that would open up to one large room, with a stone patio wrapping around outside. A kitchen will serve events on the patio or in the two small lodges or pavilion. There will be two small offices, a training room and a drop-off lobby. Showing elevations, Mr. Kennedy stated that the building will be 25 feet in height at the highest part including two cupolas.

Mr. Machnics stated that he was not aware of the amended request for signage. Ms. Akins replied that they also wished to add the lighting along the driveway that was approved with the first expansion, plus a concrete water treatment facility, and were waiting to tie in to a waterline.

Dr. Lerner asked if students would come to the campus solely to use the fitness center or to use the other facilities as well. She asked if the number of buses would increase. Ms. Pellerano stated the number of girls coming to the campus will be the same but they will have the option of using the fitness center during sporting events. They will be able to take showers after events. The building will not be open to students and their families to use individually, but only for the students during school events.

Ms. Akins said there will be no increase in traffic since the athletes already come to the campus for sporting activities. She stated the proposed building replaces the one approved in 2000 that was never built. The school still uses caterers who will utilize the kitchen for warming and washing, but they will not mass-produce meals. This will be the only place on the campus for this function.

Mr. Gokorsch asked about the occupancy capacity of the building. Mr. Kennedy said it is sized for 30 to 40 girls if all the machines are occupied and there is a queue, which is unlikely to occur often. The equipment will not be moved at all once it is installed. They also wanted to allow for teams to meet before games. Ms. Akins said the two team meeting rooms will be 950 sq. ft. each.

With regard to the driveway leading to the fitness center, Mr. Downing asked if Mr. Machnics knew its dimensions. Mr. Machnics said he did not but it is a drop-off area. Ms. Akins stated that the existing driveway will remain as it is, and buses will continue to park along it. There is room for vehicles to pass the buses when they are parked there. Mr. Kennedy said at its narrowest point the driveway is 25 feet wide and at the wider areas it is about 30 feet wide. Mr. Downing asked if safety vehicles can pass by the buses. Mrs. Steffen said both the Russell Fire Chief and Police Chief have reviewed the plans. The Fire Chief had no issues, and the Police Chief said his main concern was fast access to all rooms in an emergency. Mr. Cuffari asked for written approval letters from the safety forces.

Asked about the amount of water that will be needed, Mr. Kennedy said a water treatment system was planned for the previously-proposed natatorium building. That system has not been used, but it is sized to accommodate this new building and more.

Mr. Gokorsch asked the school to provide evidence that the size will be adequate for the new building. Ms. Pellerano confirmed that the proposed building will replace the natatorium that was approved in 2000.

James Halloran, 13601 County Line Road, asked about exterior lighting for the building. Mr. Kennedy and Ms. Akins said there will be low landscape-type lighting for the path into the building, but no tall light poles and no floodlights. The exits and entries must have wall-mounted lights, and the patio will have either shoebox or landscape lighting. Mrs. Steffen said the 2000 approval limits lighting to 15 feet in height and "down focused shoebox" style, and that "light intensity shall not exceed 1.0-foot candle maximum illumination at any boundary line on the site." Mr. Halloran asked if there will be an external sound system. Ms. Akins said this has not been discussed. He asked if the building will be rented out, and Mr. Downing pointed out that the 2000 approval mandated that the "site shall be solely for the use of Laurel School and its guests in the case of events hosted by Laurel School." Mr. Cuffari asked that the school address parking issues as part of the current expansion request. Mr. Halloran asked if there were plans still for a natatorium and Ms. Akins said it is not being considered at this time.

Richard DeBacco, 7492 Fairmount Road, said that in the four years he has lived next door to the site this is the third request. He had been told the site would never be used as a school, but asked if that is in the plans now. Ms. Pellerano said the school has consultants working on a master plan for both campuses, and they do not recommend moving the school. The consultant visited the Butler Campus and said he has not seen one like it anywhere else in the country. The current Head of School does not want to move the school. They want to keep the site as natural as possible, and continue with the original focus of teaching the students about nature and recycling and being good stewards of the land. They will share the master plan with Russell Township once it is completed by about April 2009.

Mike Giarrizzo, 7435 Fairmount Road, asked if the driveway lighting would be on timers. Ms. Pellerano said it would be off most of the time, but will be switched on and off. An astronomy group meets out there and so a dark sky is a priority. Ms. Akins said that shoebox style down lighting was approved in 2000. With regard to a security system, Ms. Pellerano said there will be an alarm system on the new building.

Asked by Mr. Halloran if they will have to remove some of the old trees now, Mr. Kennedy said they hope the trees will provide shade, and protection of the trees will be written into the construction documents. Only one or two trees may have to be taken down.

Gary Palmer, 7555 Maple Grove, Chesterland, asked if the waste water treatment facility that was installed in 1999 is up to code. Ms. Akins said that only the concrete structure is there now, but they do plan to use it and it will be part of the permit process with Geauga County. It was noted that the proposed building is in nearly the same location as the previously-planned natatorium that was to be 33,000 sq. ft., and the approval letter for that building stated, "Well water use on the site shall be minimized through the use of

retention ponds for field irrigation and the re-use of water from on-site treatment for non-potable applications." Mr. Gokorsch asked if that is still the plan. Ms. Akins stated that it was not, but they proposed to tie in to the city waterline in Hunting Valley that is at the intersection of County Line Road and Fairmount Road. This is required for fire suppression, since the amount of water needed for a sprinkler system is not possible with a well. Ms. Pellerano said they have discussed the waterline with the Russell Township Board of Trustees, and are now waiting for the Hunting Valley loop to be completed, as required by Cuyahoga County, before they will be permitted to tie in. The new building is contingent on obtaining that waterline. Ms. Akins confirmed there has been no change with regard to the 2000 condition, "Any on site wastewater treatment facility is limited to the capacity of 10,000 gallons per day and the exclusive use of Laurel School."

Mrs. Richard DeBacco, 7492 Fairmount Road, expressed concern that the original vision for the property to keep it natural and for environmental education has changed. She was concerned that the site will continue to be developed and that the proposed building is very large and not in keeping with the original focus.

The Board agreed that the following issues need to be addressed:

- 1) The Board would like to see written approval of the plans from the Russell safety forces. This should include a review of the dimensions of the driveway at the location where the buses are parked to determine if there is room for ingress and egress of large safety vehicles.
- 2) The proposed sign at the entrance must conform to the requirements of Section 4.11 of the Zoning Resolution.
- 3) A detailed lighting plan is required for all proposed exterior lighting, including the driveway, building and sign.
- 4) Although the waterline and the wastewater treatment facility are under the purview of Geauga County, the Board would like further information on the change in water supply and treatment.
- 5) The number of additional parking spaces being proposed should be submitted in writing.
- 6) The zoning requires one parking space for every five students; the Board would like the current capacity of the entire campus to be verified.

Mr. Cuffari made the motion to continue the public hearing to a further meeting, to be set by the Chairman, within the next 90 days, Mr. Galemmo seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Asked about a timetable for groundbreaking, Ms. Akins said there are two scenarios, either November 2008 or they will wait until spring 2009. Mr. Palmer asked for a site inspection of his property with regard to its proximity to the wastewater treatment plant.

MINUTES OF JUNE 30, 2008 – *Dr. Lerner made the motion to approve the minutes as mailed out, Mr. Downing seconded and the motion passed unanimously by 4-0. Mr. Cuffari abstained due to his absence from that meeting.*

