



CONSERVATION BOARD
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TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMON COUNCIL

FROM: ROBERT A. ROSTON CHAIRMAN, CONSERVATION BOARD

PROJECT: FRENCH AMERICAN SCHOOL OF NEW YORK
400 RIDGEWAY (131.10, BLOCK 3, LOT 43)
336 RIDGEWAY (SECTION 131.14, BLOCK 9, LOT 3)
213-223 BRYANT AVENUE (SECTION 131.10, BLOCK 1, LOT 6)
0 GEDNEY ESPLANADE (SECTION 131.14, BLOCK 2, LOT 3)

SUBJECTS: 1. REQUEST FOR SPECIAL PERMIT
2. REQUEST FOR SITE PLAN APPROVAL

DATE: JULY 21, 2014

Background:

The French American School of New York (FASNY) has submitted to the City of White Plains: 1. A request for a special zoning permit to construct and operate a private elementary, middle and high school for 950 (previously noted as 1200) students and a staff of 250, and 2. A site plan proposal to construct a 45.88 acre campus on the property that formerly served as the Ridgeway Country Club.

This project was referred to the Conservation Board because the 129.69 acre site is on the White Plains Open Space Inventory and because it includes numerous environmentally sensitive characteristics.

Current situation:

At its September 6, 2011 meeting, the White Plains Common Council determined that : 1. the project may have a significant impact on the environment; 2. determined that a Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement ("DEIS" and "FEIS") to systematically assess potential impacts, determine which impacts are significant adverse impacts and assess alternatives and measures to

mitigate potential significant adverse impacts of the Proposed Action, 3. scheduled a public scoping session to receive comments regarding issues that should be addressed in the DEIS and FEIS, 4. Prepared an FEIS and schedule public meeting and 5. Prepared a revised site plan pursuant to comments on DEIS and FEIS.

Representatives of the Conservation Board have reviewed the revised site plan submitted subsequent to the DEIS and FEIS review process.

Conservation Board Comments on the Revised Site Plan:

The review of the revised site plan and design have responded to several prior Board's prior concerns while raises new ones given the new site plan and proposed discontinuance of Hathaway Lane.

The Mass and Density of the Campus:

The Conservation Board believes the Applicant has not submitted sufficient analysis of whether the mass and density of the FASNY Campus may be potentially in conflict with the criteria of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan which specifies that a desirable alternative to a public or private golf course would be the lowest density housing per White Plains zoning regulations. The 45.88 acre campus with a proposed student-staff population of 950 is far denser than the density of the housing envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan.

The revised site plan decreases the student population from the original design from 1200 to 950 student. However, it appears that the square footage of the proposed school building remains somewhat unchanged. The Applicant should submit a comparison between the prior design and the new "Reduced Size" Site Plan design. Included with an overall summary should be the sum square footages of each of the individual buildings and their footprint on the site.

The revised application should include analysis of the relationship of the size of the buildings to the homes in the surrounding area and the locale's visual environment.

The Conservation Board has reviewed the effective height of the gymnasium and performing arts buildings. The height of these buildings are greater than shown because the plans indicate that the existing grade is to be raised by nearly 10 feet. This in effect raises the height and appearance of the 35 foot structures to 45 feet, which is well above the height allowed to single family homes in the area. This manipulation of the average grade suggests the need to closely examine such terrain alterations and the resultant impact on the surrounding areas.

The Conservation Board believes the Architectural design and material selection are not in keeping of major institutional campus surrounded by residential neighborhoods. The degree to which it would, potentially, produce an institutional environment should be studied. More residential roof lines and massing will be evident when the site plan includes the necessary facilities for the following: equipment storage (for all grounds keeping equipment including those required for snow removal), a service garage, a trash storage and removal site, a commercial loading and delivery site. Fuel storage should be located away from residential areas and should not be accessible from Ridgeway.

To ensure a realistic understanding of the scope and magnitude of the FASNY Campus, the revised application should include renderings to show what the campus look like from key view corridors along Ridgeway, Hathaway Lane, Gedney Esplanade, Hotel Drive and Murchison Place.

Parking requirements:

The Conservation Board believes that the 428 parking spots proposed to meet the needs of the FASNY Campus be (comprised of 177 existing spaces and 251 additional spaces) is a significant impact as it will create a significant amount of impervious surface which will require implementation of water quality system requiring constant maintenance and inspection for compliance with capturing oil and chemical pollution run-off for the extensive roadway network and parking areas.

Traffic congestion:

The Conservation Board requests the traffic studies and dates that data were collected so that they may be further reviewed as we cannot determine that the data collected is representative of typical school days (days which do not include holidays, pre and post holidays, superintendent days, early release days, etc., which have reduced or limited activity). The Board believes that the potential impact on local traffic patterns and congestion will be significant. The available streets such as Ridgeway are narrow single lane, neighborhood streets and may not be appropriate for handling the traffic that would be produced by the FASNY Campus. In the case of North Street, there will be a significant increase in traffic as a result of the new North Street entrance which is currently heavily congested during school hours. In addition to the backups at the key Ridgeway intersections such as Mamaroneck Avenue/Ridgeway and North Street /Ridgeway, lesser neighborhood streets and the intersection of Bryant Ave/Hathaway could see greater traffic volume. This may potentially create impacts such as noise, congestion and safety.

The noise, exhaust and light pollution that may result from the traffic generated by the FASNY campus and the-proposed road network to meet the immediate and long-term access needs of a large-scale campus will be significant with lasting impacts. The proposed roadway running from the North Street entry will run across the site's most sensitive environmental areas as noted in the DEIS and FEIS. It is not clear how the potential impact to these features and adjacent properties will be mitigated. Assurance should also be provided that buses will not be stored on the property.

Noise and light pollution:

More significant buffers and lighting controls need to be added for potential impacts from noise and light generated from the campus on the local neighborhoods during the day, after hours and weekends when there are sporting, educational and social events.

Construction phase pollution:

The Conservation Board is concerned about potential noise, traffic, and other pollution during the construction phase on North Street, Ridgeway, Bryant Ave. and the Gedney Farms neighborhood. By any measure, and even with the construction management protocols scrupulously followed, the

construction of the FASNY Campus represents a major undertaking with potential impacts on the surrounding area. The Site Plan does not communicate how these construction impacts will be managed and mitigated over the several year period of construction which will have a lasting impact on the environment, inhabitants and property values which ultimately may impact on the neighborhood's sustainability.

Infrastructure:

The Conservation Board raises concern that the infrastructure not be adequate for handling the needs of the FASNY Campus. This includes police, fire and emergency medical services, sewer and water, storm drainage, solid waste, traffic as well as electrical and gas delivery systems.

We request that the Applicant specify the funding required for infrastructure improvements necessary for the FASNY Campus.

Wetlands, watercourses, basins, rock outcroppings, and steep slopes:

The Conservation Board raises concern regarding potential impacts to wetlands, above and below watercourses, basins, rock outcroppings, and steep slopes. The Applicant's site plan delineates the wetlands but does not assess downstream potential impact of changes to the Ridgeway property and the underlying drainage system.

The Applicant should examine, further design and submit for review use of storm water management basins some of which are near main roads and abutting yards and assess the potential impacts to adjacent properties in terms of safety, appearance and intrusiveness.

Discontinuance of Hathaway Lane

Hathaway Lane is a major neighborhood connector road providing the appropriate connectivity for multi-modes of access within and through the Gedney neighborhood. The Conservation Board feels the impact of removing this city street may create several negative impacts and unintended consequences such as greater traffic (also cars may tend to drive faster without this intersection) along Ridgeway and Bryant and other neighborhood intersections by diverting such vehicle trips throughout Gedney Farms. By eliminating this neighborhood "access path", it may create other potential impacts on pedestrian safety, quality of life as well as diminish access for fire life safety vehicles.

The discontinuance of Hathaway Lane also raises questions of process and public policy. Should the roadway be discontinued if adjacent property owners object? If the roadway is discontinued, should the de-mapped street be designated for public benefit as a "public way"? Such an important neighborhood connector should not be de-mapped as part of the "quid pro quo."

The Campus' potential inconsistency with the Comprehensive Plan:

While the applicant's documentation says:

"The Application is also fully consistent with the City of White Plains Comprehensive Plan.... The Comprehensive Plan provides, for example, '[i]f ever developed, [a developer

should] use cluster techniques to preserve steep slopes, wetlands, and water bodies, with a linear open space system with connection to nearby streets and community facilities.” (Zarin & Steinmetz, July 15, 2011)

The Conservation Board wishes to point out that the Comprehensive Plan put forth this principle relative to the lowest possible density housing not institutions and Campuses. The following quotation from the DEIS scoping document makes the point:

“If the (golf) courses cannot be maintained as private courses, although clearly not a preferred scenario, the Plan envisions residential development at the City’s lowest residential density, clustered to preserve open space and environmental features and providing public access to public and quasi-public areas including trail ways linked to the City’s open space network.” (City Scoping Document, May 20, 2011)

Conclusion:

Previously, in its letter of September 20, 2011, the Conservation Board expressed its concerns about the proposed FASNY project. The Board’s current review of the revised Site Plan and proposed discontinuance of Hathaway Lane have not lessened those concerns. Because one of the Conservation Board’s missions is to preserve open space, it regrets the loss of any and all open areas especially the vast acreage of the former Ridgeway Country Club.

As stated in its previous letter, the Conservation Board continues to be concerned that constructing and operating such a sizable campus and commercial enterprise on the Ridgeway Country Club site is contrary to White Plains’ Comprehensive Plan and its stated purposes of protecting open space and the unique character of its neighborhoods.

In summary, the Board is concerned that the current Site Plan document fails to project the actual, real-time impact of FASNY Campus on the surrounding area including the character and daily life of affected neighborhoods. It is important that all impacts be evaluated, not just in a piecemeal way, but in aggregate to confirm how FASNY will change conditions on the broadest possible scale. This confirmation will serve to eliminate unintended and negative consequences.

Respectfully,

ROBERT A. ROSTON

Robert A. Roston
Chairman
White Plains Conservation Board