

MINUTES HARDING TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING – May 20, 2008

Mr. Lanzerotti, Chair, called the special meeting of the Harding Township Committee to order at 7:10 P.M and announced that adequate notice for this meeting had been given as required by law.

ROLL CALL: Present – Mr. Lanzerotti, Mr. Bartlett, Mr. Murray, Mr. Rybka and Mr. Ward
Absent – none
Also Present – Ms. McKane, Township Administrator, Ms. Nergaard, Township Attorney,
Christine Gatti, Deputy Township Clerk
Number of members of the public present: approx. 125

ANNOUNCEMENTS/REPORTS/PRESENTATIONS

Proposed Mt. Kemble Recreation Facility

Mr. Lanzerotti indicated the Township Committee believed it was important for them and the public to meet with Morris Township to get a better understanding of Morris Township's current proposal on Block 23.02, Lot 5. He noted that everyone would then have the same information base from which to draw conclusions. Mr. Lanzerotti indicated that a decision will be made at the Harding Township Committee meeting tomorrow night.

Mayor Nace, Mayor of Morris Township, presented a slide show of the proposed recreation complex. The presentation included:

- Site plan
- Purchase details with contingencies
- Annexation
- Project objectives and benefits
- Project history
- Project misconceptions
- Groundwater maintenance
- Turf fields
- Lighting would not impact Harding Township residents
- Sound amplification will not leave property boundaries
- Field use; run seven days a week, lights off at 10 P.M. and facility will close at 10:30 P.M.
- Current plan meets DEP requirements
- Importance of regional cooperation

Mayor Nace introduced John Mills, Morris Township Attorney, Rick Watson, Morris Township Deputy Mayor, Dave Hanson, Morris Township Assistant Engineer, Tom Kenny, Morris Township Special Projects Coordinator, William Foelsch, Recreation Director and Fred Rossi, Morris Township Administrator. Mayor Nace added that he would like to have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) drafted and executed with Harding Township.

Louis Allesandrino, resident of Blackwell Avenue, and Norb Gambuzza, resident of Sand Spring Road, presented a side show in opposition to the proposed Mt. Kemble project. They spoke on behalf of themselves, John Williams, resident of Blackwell Avenue, Steve Cullis, resident of Sand Spring Road, Kristie Dietsch, resident of Blackwell Avenue and Barbara Brennan, resident of Sand Spring Road. Mr. Allesandrino stated that he moved to Harding Township because of its vast open space and good neighbors. He maintained this facility is not in the best interest of Harding Township. Both Mr. Allesandrino and Mr. Gambuzza reviewed the following and asked the Township Committee to consider all variables and vote in the interest of Harding Township residents:

- Increased traffic
- Noise (crowd and PA system)
- Negative impact on Harding Township's quality of life (security concerns, change of landscape personality in Harding Township, loss of control of land)
- Morris Township's constant change of plans for the facility
- Harding Land Trust's withdrawal of support

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- 90% of residents expressing opinions were in opposition to the project
- Project has no benefit to Harding Township
- Issues with turf field

Chris Allyn, Environmental Commission Chair, presented the following on behalf of the Environmental Commission:

“I am Chris Allyn, Harding Township Chair of the Harding Township Environmental Commission. Thank you for this opportunity to provide some comments on the Morris Township proposal.

The Commission has discussed the proposal (such as we understood it) at a recent meeting and over the past week. We understand that Morris Township desires to develop two athletic fields and associated infrastructure on Block 23.02, Lot 5 (a parcel that lies in Harding Township on the Border with Morris Township). The parcel is currently undeveloped and lies downhill of a large parking area and between the parking area and Route 287. It is within the one-year well-head protection area of the SEMCMUA well at Sand Spring Road and Rt. 287. That means that ground water under the site can be expected to move to the well within a year.

From our perspective, the primary environmental concern for the project is stormwater runoff. The site currently serves as a buffer/recharge area for the runoff from the parking area. Development should be sensitive to this role and should provide for no additional site-specific stormwater runoff. In the case of the proposed use there are two aspects of runoff management that should be addressed: quantity and quality.

Stormwater runoff quantity is an issue because the proposed use of athletic fields can be expected to produce more runoff and less infiltration than the undeveloped land. Management of the additional runoff requires provision for slowing it and recapturing it to groundwater (for example by a system of “french drains” and drywells at the perimeter of the fields).

Because the project is so close (hydrologically) to the large well, stormwater quality assumes additional importance. Here, choice of the particular design for the athletic fields poses some additional challenges. If the fields are to be conventional natural turf, then the quality issues come down to what is put on the fields in the course turf management (fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides). Here the requirement to slow and infiltrate stormwater on-site appears similar to a septic system in function and could be expected to handle the organic runoff from turf management provided that it is well thought out and executed.

In the case of artificial turf surfaces, the runoff from the fields may contain additional non-organic contaminants. Some studies show occasional leaching of numerous metal contaminants from particular examples of artificial turf materials. Again, because of the proximity to the large well, the infiltration required for stormwater runoff control poses particular concerns for inorganic contaminants. In addition, treatment of other artificial-turf-specific conditions, such as algae growth, may pose additional chemical challenges. The wide variety of test results on the breadth of artificial turf applications clearly demonstrates variety in the quality of starting materials. It may be possible to pre-test a particular supplier to qualify the material as contaminant-free (or appropriate specifications may be developed to qualify starting material) which would address the contaminant concern.

Other environmental impacts of the proposed project include noise, lighting, and traffic. In comparison to the noise and lights from the adjacent Route 287, these impacts would seem to be comparatively modest (or at least subject to reasonable design minimizations).

This sight would seem to be appropriate for active recreational use because of its isolation from nearby residences and proximity to Route 287. It currently serves to recharge some of the runoff from the adjacent commercial parking area and it should be developed to continue such function without significant additional environmental degradation. The key environmental issue is stormwater runoff management. Because of the proximity to the large well on Sand Spring Road, the design choices for the composition of the fields take on magnified importance. Natural turf poses well-understood problems for the organic runoff from the turf

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management. A choice of artificial turf poses additional design and development challenges concerning choice and characterization of starting materials to minimize inorganic contamination. Here the immaturity of the artificial turf industry exacerbates these challenges.”

Vincent DaSilva, resident of Jenks Road, indicated that he is opposed to Morris Township’s plans for the fields and stated that Harding Township should not be giving land away when they are getting nothing in return. He added that he was at a Long Hill Township Committee meeting which Fred Rossi attended. Mr. DaSilva remarked that Mr. Rossi expressed his opposition to similar fields in his back yard, and Harding Township citizens feel the same way.

John Cox, resident of Morris Township on Fredrick Place, stated that he is opposed to the fields and believes it to be a quality of life issue.

David Budd, representative of the Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA), reviewed the environmental sensitivity of the land and added that the GSWA would like the wetlands protected. He indicated that the GSWA has no objection to the fields, but there are concerns pertaining to storm water run off from this site. Mr. Budd stated that Morris Township has reached out to the GSWA and the Association requests that Morris Township keep their environmental interests in mind.

Blaine Rothhauser, representative of GSWA, echoed Mr. Budd’s statement. He added that artificial turf would be an environmental issue. She stated that the GSWA has not seen a site or management plan from Morris Township and the Township should exceed the regulated standards. Mr. Rothhauser indicated that information is available on the GSWA website for the public and Township Committee to view.

Gene Witt, resident of the Town of Morristown, commented on using the property for homes and the purchase price of the property. He questioned why the price of the property was so high. Mr. Witt commented that she does not see this project as a good plan.

Ella Filippone, resident of Basking Ridge, indicated that she has worked to develop many soccer fields and noted that more information is needed. She reviewed the issues of mold when using artificial turf and noted that she did not hear any information about sanitary facilities. Ms. Filippone reviewed the importance of public hygiene and added that there are still so many unanswered questions concerning this project.

Peter McGratty, resident of Blackwell Avenue, asked the Township Committee to keep in mind that Harding Township has no need for these fields and is getting nothing in return. He stated that there are serious risks and Harding Township residents do not want the fields and asks the Township Committee to not approve the project.

Judie Ward, resident of Tempe Wick Road, opined that once the property is annexed to Morris Township then Harding Township will have no say on what is done with the property and it is out of the Township’s control.

Christopher Yates, resident of Bailey’s Mill Road, indicated that he agrees with Ms. Ward and added that it is a mistake to cede the land to Morris Township.

Jim and Donna Silver, residents of Morris Township on Fredrick Place, commented that they are concerned with the quality of life if these fields go through. They reviewed the issues of traffic, noise and lights. Mr. Silver commented that the plans seem to change every time Morris Township speaks. He asked for an analysis on current field usage. Mr. Silver asked Harding Township to say no to the rezoning and annexation of this property.

Lisa Bothwell, resident of Bernardsville, recommended to the Township Committee that more research be done on turf fields before they make the decision to have these fields in Harding Township. She briefly reviewed her concerns with artificial turf, and stated that discussions of turf fields in Bernardsville “had torn the community apart”.

Ed McGratty, resident of Anthony Wayne Road, indicated that he has been a Harding Township resident for 35 years and urged the Township Committee to reject Morris Township’s request for athletic fields.

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Terry Gallagher, resident of Long Hill Road, stated that there are trees that border this property and added that there does not seem to be any impact to nearby residents.

Steve Cullis, resident of Sand Spring Road, asserted that there is an impact to residents in the area; and he is concerned about noise. Mr. Cullis stated that he is opposed to this project.

Kevin Dietsch, resident of Blackwell Avenue, indicated that he is opposed to the sports complex and since Morris Township stated that their terms were not negotiable, then Harding Township should walk away from the table. He stated his concerns regarding lighting and noise.

Kris Dietsch, resident of Blackwell Avenue, commented that she is opposed to the sports complex. She indicated that the fields are not in the best interest of Harding Township and asked the Township Committee to take the residents' concerns into consideration while making a decision.

Tom MacCowatt, resident of Featherbed Lane and President of Harding Land Trust, commented the Harding Land Trust has withdrawn their support because of the quality and quantity of the project.

Tom Brennan, resident of Sand Spring Road, pointed out that more studies need to be done on artificial turf before it is allowed in the area.

Scott Rosenbach, Morris Township Committee Member, commented that he is appreciative of Harding Township to give Morris Township this type of forum to discuss this project. He indicated that it is true Harding Township would lose control over the property, but Morris Township initially approached Harding Township to rezone the land and indicated that other options are available. Mr. Rosenbach stated that a MOU could be drafted in order for Harding Township to maintain control. He noted that the land borders Route 287 and an office park, and it is difficult to find another area like this for playing fields. Mr. Rosenbach stated that the lights will be shut off at night unlike the office park lights, which are on all the time. He maintained the use of the fields can be restricted, and the traffic will mostly be coming from Route 202. Mr. Rosenbach stressed that the water quality issue and environmental concerns will be addressed.

Elliot Ruga, resident of Village Road and representative of the Highlands Coalition, reviewed artificial turf issues and environmental concerns.

Mr. Murray stated that he would like research done on the maintenance of the fields and the issues of artificial turf. He indicated that there are also safety and noise issues that are a concern. He questioned the scheduling procedure and shut down policy for the fields. Mr. Lanzerotti added that he has not reviewed the MOU, and it should address Mr. Murray's concerns.

Mayor Nace commented that the MOU is a way to put controls and guarantees on how the fields will be governed and the basic concept of the field has not changed. He acknowledged that some changes have occurred because of research, which would be reflected in the MOU.

Mr. Hanson stated that DEP regulations would require the Township to regulate the environmental issues. He briefly reviewed the plan for artificial turf fields and the storm water management.

Mr. Foelsch indicated that Morris Township has a full-time maintenance division in order to keep the facilities clean. He advised that there would be bathrooms and no locker rooms. Mr. Foelsch commented the maintenance of the facility would be minimal because it would be a water only facility. He explained the lighting will be controlled by a computer timer and the facility would be locked down by the police. Mr. Foelsch pointed out that the need for the 600 person bleachers is for spectators of football games. He reviewed the analysis of the fields, which would be at 95% use in peak seasons, which is very high. Mr. Foelsch stated that these fields would fill the void for locally based associations.

Mr. Lanzerotti asked how many of the fields in Morris Township currently have artificial turf. Mr. Foelsch replied that there are currently no artificial turf fields in the Township. Mr. Lanzerotti questioned how many fields currently

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have lights similar to what is proposed. Mr. Foelsch stated that there are similar lights at a tennis court in Morris Township although they are not as large.

Mr. Yates suggested that the Township Committee make their decision during open session. He questioned whose idea it was to have the property annexed to Morris Township.

Mr. Bartlett explained that the 600 person bleachers would count towards the Township's COAH obligation and the sewer connection would need to be hooked up through Morris Township because Harding Township does not want to expand its sewer connection. He stated that he believes it is best to annex the land for the sports complex and keep control with a binding contract rather than keep the land in Harding Township with a sports complex.

Mr. Budd, representative from the GSWA, presented a slide show which reviewed environmental concerns and the effects of water quality long term. He indicated that the GSWA is concerned about the big picture, which is the quality of Harding Township drinking water. Mr. Budd reviewed water run off issues. He examined endangered species that are reliant on clean water, and the GSWA wants to be sure that there is an adequate pretreatment design and no water run off.

Deputy Mayor Watson thanked Harding Township, the GSWA and the public. He anticipates that all traffic will leave by Mt. Kemble Avenue and Route 202. Mr. Watson advised that the cost for the property has been evaluated by two appraisals. He opined that most of the problems with artificial turf stem from old technology, and the safety concerns need to be researched by scientists. Mr. Watson noted that no state has banned artificial turf. He stressed that Harding Township would maintain control through an MOU and the Township Committees can dialogue if needed. Mr. Watson pointed out that if homes are constructed on this property, then Harding Township would then have to provide police and fire, and it would also impact school – with fields on this property, all neighboring municipalities would get use out of them. Mr. Watson concluded that if the property is annexed, then Harding Township will not be affected by COAH issues and will receive good will from a neighboring town.

Mr. Allesandrino asked the Township Committee to consider that Harding Township residents are clearly opposed to his project. He pointed out that Morris Township has never maintained artificial turf and does not have lights of this size. Mr. Allesandrino added that it seems Morris Township is experimenting in Harding Township. He concluded that this project will have a negative environmental issue.

Mr. Lanzerotti thanked Morris Township and the public for their input and indicated that action will take place at the Harding Township Committee meeting tomorrow night at 7:30 P.M.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Murray and seconded by Mr. Rybka to adjourn the meeting at 10:20 p.m. Vote: All Ayes

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine A. Gatti,
Harding Township Deputy Clerk