

New soccer fields proposed along Polo Grounds Road
written by Newspark Team | June 17, 2012

Pat Reilly hopes his patience with Albemarle County's development review process will pay off when the Planning Commission meets on Tuesday. County staff are recommending approval of a plan to add a four-field soccer complex on Polo Grounds Road.

It would give Reilly's Monticello United Soccer Club its first long-term home for its youth league. The club president first submitted his application for a special-use permit to create soccer fields along the flood plain of the South Fork Rivanna River in October 2010.

"We want to get some fields for our club," Reilly said. "There is a shortage of fields in this community and it's always difficult to get them with scheduling."

Reilly has worked out a lease with the owners of an almost 80-acre parcel between U.S. 29 and the entrance to the Montgomery Ridge neighborhood. Farther down Polo Grounds Road is the Soccer Organization of Charlottesville-Albemarle's South Fork Soccer Complex.

"They are nice local people that we know," Reilly said, referring to the Crockett Corp., which owns the land being leased. "There are only two things you can do with the property, either farming or recreation, and we think that is the perfect thing to do on it."

Residents of nearby Montgomery Ridge have mixed opinions about the project, said neighborhood association president Joseph Kulbok.

"This is a big topic in the neighborhood," Kulbok said. "The biggest problem the neighborhood sees is traffic on Polo Grounds Road."

In response to the concerns, Reilly said the project has been scaled back from seven fields and 168 parking spaces to four fields and 96 parking spaces. There will be no structures built on the site, no lighting and no amplified sound.

While surrounded by Albemarle's urban area, the riverside parcel is in the county's designated rural area. Albemarle staff said a key factor behind their recommendation for approval is that everything is easily reversible and the fields can be returned to a natural state.

"I don't support it now," Kulbok said, speaking for himself. "If the Comprehensive Plan is as important as our elected officials say it is, then our rural areas need to be protected."

"I see the need for soccer, but the ultimate issue is it is located in a rural area supported by a rural road which isn't designed to handle game-day traffic," Kulbock said. "We know with SOCA that on a game day some people feel like they are trapped here. You can spend 20 minutes trying to get through the light at Polo Grounds and Route 29."

Dan Pribus has coached and refereed for both MONU and SOCA. He said the fields in town take a lot of abuse.

"Anytime we can have a group or an entity willing to add fields at no cost to the city or the county, and maintain those fields, it seems like a good thing to me," Pribus said. "I know there are some concerns

about the traffic. My feeling is MONU is a much smaller club. When they release people from an event it will have a much smaller impact than SOCA does.”

County parks and recreation staff say the additional fields would be a great benefit, especially if they are privately owned and maintained.

“As far as scheduling goes, soccer is pretty much a year-round sport,” said Tim Hughes, the county’s athletics and program supervisor. “In the fall we are having difficulty scheduling soccer, field hockey and football on those rectangular fields. In spring we have soccer and girls and boys lacrosse competing for those fields.”

Hughes said the only rest fields get is a couple of months in the summer and in December and January.

“That’s not a time conducive to growing grass,” Hughes noted. “Anytime we can add to the inventory, it gives us an opportunity to take a field out of service so we can refurbish it.”

Reilly sees it as a simple request and says his club over the past decade has never had more than 130 players at a time.

“We are literally planting grass and letting kids run around on it. We are not building anything or hooking up to water,” Reilly said. “From our perspective, it’s not really anything more than a small group looking for a place to play. It’s a rural piece of property we want to keep rural.”

The Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on the project at 6 p.m. Tuesday in Lane Auditorium at the Albemarle County Office Building-McIntire.