

Decision on new soccer fields deferred  
written by Newspark Team | June 19, 2012

The Albemarle Planning Commission said at its meeting Tuesday that it needs more information before it can make a decision on a special-use permit that would allow four new soccer fields and a parking area off Polo Grounds Road.

The Monticello United Soccer Club requested a deferral on its application after a lengthy public hearing.

The club 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.

"We are trying to put four soccer fields on this property," said Dan Ivory, a MONU board member and director of coaching. "We simply want to grow grass, put up some soccer goals and let kids play."

"Local residents will be able to use the property," Ivory added. "We are not opposed to allowing others to use the fields when MONU doesn't have events taking place."

Seventeen residents spoke at the commission's public hearing, with only a handful offering support for the project. Some neighbors of the proposal's site said they were concerned about the project bringing more traffic and about the location on a flood plain in Albemarle's designated rural area.

Joseph Kulbok is president of the Montgomery Ridge neighborhood association.

"Montgomery Ridge has about 60 families and we have large houses and a lot of children — a lot of soccer players — and we support soccer," Kulbok said. "However, the No. 1 problem is traffic, and people are very concerned about it. To put additional facilities there without changes to the road will cause gridlock."

Ray Caddell, a local Realtor who lives near the site in Carrsbrook, said he was opposed to the soccer complex because it is a private facility and requires special approval to be there in the first place.

"We throw too many of these special-use permits around," Caddell said in an interview. "From a real estate perspective, people have to be able to count on the zoning to remain as it is."

"I met with staff about the project, and it's not wonderful for the children of Albemarle," Caddell added. "It's private, so it's wonderful for 130 kids."

Cathy O'Hara is both a Montgomery Ridge resident and a MONU parent who supports the new fields and said the additional traffic would only be a minor inconvenience.

"Recreational facilities in our county are woefully inadequate for our children," O'Hara said. "We love everything about Albemarle except for the limited places for our children to play safely."

Planning Commissioner Calvin Morris said traffic was among his primary concerns.

"The majority of time, the maximum number of cars I see that can make the turn onto Route 29 is between five and six. How can we handle this?" Morris asked. "I can just see Polo Grounds Road

turning into a parking lot.”

Joel Denunzio, an engineer with the Virginia Department of Transportation, responded that “traffic will be able to move in and out of the site without delay.” However, he agreed some new technology VDOT is trying on Pantops may be helpful.

“There is something new known as ‘adaptive technology’ which looks at side streets and runs the whole system,” Denunzio said. “It allows the side streets to clear when there are gaps in traffic. I know they are looking at doing that on 29. That would be a big help.”

In response to resident concerns, MONU’s president, Pat Reilly, said in an interview that 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.

Albemarle County also proposed several other conditions on the permit that would limit when the fields can be used. Games and practices would only occur during seven specific months in spring and fall and on weekends in those months, activities cannot begin before 11 a.m. and must conclude before 6 p.m.

“My view is this is a positive thing, but there is data missing,” Commissioner Tom Loach said. “[We need more] data on the traffic and the level of service on 29.”

“I think the use is appropriate, but the special-use permit is in place to let us look at the impacts,” said Commissioner Don Franco. “Noise and traffic are the two big ones.”

“I’d prefer we ask the applicant to defer until we have more data available,” said Loach.

VDOT’s Denunzio responded there was a limit to the additional information he could provide.

“I can provide existing level of service data; we don’t identify mitigation measures,” Denunzio said. “It is typically up to the applicant to do a traffic analysis to show what would work.”

“From what I have heard tonight, a lot of the impacts are possibly due to another soccer field,” Denunzio added, referring to the SOCA complex. “I am not sure the data I have is going to capture those events.”

MONU’s Reilly came before the commission at the end of the public hearing and agreed to defer his request until his group, VDOT and planning staff could provide more information on traffic and noise concerns.

County staff said the earliest the project could be reviewed again would be at the commission’s July 31 meeting.