

COMMUNITY DESIGN COMMISSION**SUMMARY OF
CONCEPT PLAN REVIEW****Montessori Community School
October 29, 2002****OVERVIEW**

Prior to submittal of a formal development application, all major development proposals are required to be reviewed while they are still at a "conceptual" stage. In particular, it is the intent of the "Concept Plan" review process that citizens and members of the Community Design Commission have an opportunity to review a site analysis and a conceptual plan in order to evaluate the impact of a major development proposal on the character of the area in which it is proposed to be located. This process is intended to take into consideration the general form of the land before and after development as well as the spatial relationships of the proposed structures, open spaces, landscaped areas, and general access and circulation patterns as they relate to the proposed development and the surrounding area.

BACKGROUND

The Community Design Commission conducted a Concept Plan Review for this potential development on Tuesday, October 29, 2002. The existing Montessori School is located on the west side of Pope Road, between Newton Drive and Fountain Ridge Road. The school is situated on a 9.4-acre site that is located at 4512 Pope Road. The existing school includes 13,750 square feet of floor area and 78 parking spaces. The applicant is proposing to construct 17,250 square feet of new floor area (for a total of 35,000 square feet of floor area on the site) and to reduce parking to a total of 75 parking spaces. The new floor area would be for a new middle school building, a new music/art building, and an expansion of the existing half-court gym to a full-size gymnasium.

The site is located in the Office/Institutional-2 (OI-2) zoning district. The site is located in Durham County and is identified as Durham Triangle Township Tax Map 481, Block 7, Lot 7A. This proposal would require Council approval of a Special Use Permit application.

CITIZEN COMMENTS ON CONCEPT PLAN

Several citizens spoke on this Concept Plan at the meeting. The issues raised by these citizens at the meeting are as follows:

- One citizen expressed the opinion that this proposal cannot fulfill the 3rd Finding of approval for a Special Use Permit application, which requires that a development shall maintain the value of contiguous property; unless the development constitutes a public

necessity. The citizen did not believe that the school was a public necessity; and, he did not believe that the school could successfully argue that expansion would maintain the value of contiguous properties.

- Many citizens expressed concern about stormwater-related problems in this area. In particular, several citizens noted problems with flooding on their properties and flooding under their homes.
- Several citizens expressed concern that mold and mildew are very problematic issues for homeowners in this area. One citizen noted a belief that the excess moisture and storm drainage from the school site has created foundation problems for his home.
- A couple of citizens expressed concerns regarding traffic in this area. One citizen believed that left turns onto Ephesus Church Road and Pope Road are very difficult, and that sight distances along Pope Road are too short to be safe for a school.
- Several citizens who reside immediately north of the school site, expressed their belief that the pond and associated dam on the northern edge of the school site pose a threat to their homes. One citizen believed that the school should have to provide insurance coverage that would cover the neighbors in the event of a problem.
- One citizen expressed the opinion that the school has “40-acre aspirations on their 9-acre site.”
- A citizen who resides on Colony Woods Drive, east of this site, expressed frustration that the Town of Chapel Hill had not enlarged a storm drain underneath Colony Woods Drive. The citizen noted his belief that the existing storm drain, which has a pipe that is too small, backs water up under his house during heavy rains. The citizen was concerned that any further development on the school site, and related increase in impervious surface, would make this situation worse.
- Several citizens expressed personal frustration with regard to the inadequate buffer provided along the school’s southern boundary. One citizen recommended that all existing vegetation should be retained and supplemented with additional plantings.

CONCEPT PLAN REVIEW

The Community Design Commission reviewed the conceptual development plan submittal and discussed the following topics:

1. Several Commission members recommended that the applicant take steps to significantly improve stormwater runoff from the site. Many members encouraged the applicant to consult with the Town’s Stormwater Engineer prior to submitting a formal development application for this site.
2. One Commission member expressed the opinion that the applicant was proposing too much development on the site, given the size of the site.

3. A couple of Commission members emphasized the need to provide full-width, vegetated buffers. Several members echoed that alternative buffers would not be appropriate for this development.
4. One Commission member noted her belief that many of the existing buffer plantings are not in good shape. In particular, she felt that the existing buffers are insensitive to the surrounding neighbors.
5. A Commission member expressed the opinion that it is not prudent for the school to move forward with its proposal without seeking to upgrade the old, antiquated drainage infrastructure in the adjacent neighborhood.
6. Several Commission members expressed concern with regard to the increased traffic impact that a larger school would have on Pope Road. One member noted that it is very difficult to make left turns from the school onto Pope Road.
7. A Commission member believed that the applicant's proposal did not provide enough stacking room for vehicles departing the site.
8. Several Commission members noted their belief that there is a structure which interferes with the site triangle of vehicles departing the site onto Pope Road.
9. A couple of Commission members believed that the proposed buildings would not look good on the site; and, they encouraged the applicant to pursue higher quality architecture for the buildings.
10. One Commission member requested that the applicant move the southern detention pond away from the buffers.
11. A Commission member expressed concern regarding the proposed grass fire access, and noted his belief that this proposal would not work.
12. One Commission member expressed concern regarding mosquitoes, due to standing water in the area.
13. A Commission member noted that the design of the wetlands would be important, as poorly designed facilities could lead to a "wash-out" of surrounding homes.
14. One Commission member expressed the belief that the northern detention pond has a breach, and that the dam needs to be repaired immediately. The member also expressed the opinion that the channel on the site is badly eroded, and needs to be stabilized.

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