

# RECOMMENDATION ON THE SPECIAL EXCEPTION APPLICATION OF

## Secaucus Board of Education/Middle/High School

### Additions & Special Exception

FILE: 14-477

#### I. INTRODUCTION

An application for one (1) special exception has been filed with the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC) by Remington, Vernick & Arango Engineers, Inc., on behalf of the Secaucus Board of Education, for the premises identified as 11 Mill Ridge Road, Block 226, Lot 17.01, in the Town of Secaucus, New Jersey. Said premises are located in the Commission's Parks and Recreation zone. The special exception is sought in connection with the applicant's construction of five building additions with associated site improvements on the subject premises.

Specifically, the applicant is requesting special exception use approval pursuant to the following:

1. N.J.A.C. 19:4-5.15(a)2, where primary and secondary schools are listed as a special exception use.

Notice was given to the public and all interested parties as required by law. The public notice was published in The Jersey Journal. No written objections were submitted to the Division of Land Use Management. A public hearing was held in the Office of the Commission on Tuesday, October 7, 2014. All information submitted to the Division of Land Use Management relative to this application is made part of the record of this decision.

#### II. GENERAL INFORMATION

##### A. Existing and Proposed Use

The property in question consists of approximately 28.2 acres. The site fronts Mill Ridge Road and is bordered by single-family residential lots to the

south, a multi-unit residential use to the west, and the Hackensack River to the north. An environmental conservation area borders the property in question to the east. Wetlands have been identified along the easterly property line, as well as to the north along the banks of the Hackensack River.

The easterly portion of the subject property is developed with an approximately 128,000-square foot brick building used as a secondary school, which varies in height from one to two-stories. In addition to classroom space, the existing structure houses a gymnasium, auditorium and administrative offices. The western portion of the site contains associated at-grade parking, tennis courts and athletic fields.

Five building additions will be constructed with a total footprint of 57,485 square feet. The first building addition with a footprint of 11,765 square feet will be constructed primarily over an existing paved parking area on the southeasterly portion of the site and will contain classrooms and staff offices. A second addition with a footprint of 35,560 square feet will be constructed at the site of an existing greenhouse and over previously paved areas on the easterly and northerly portions of the subject property and will contain a new gymnasium with associated weight and locker rooms, classrooms, laboratories and staff offices. A third building addition with a footprint of 885 square feet will be constructed over an existing paved area on the northerly portion of the subject property and will contain staff offices and athletic locker rooms. A fourth addition with a footprint of 1,975 square feet will be constructed over landscaped open space on the westerly portion of the existing building adjacent to the existing performing arts center and will contain space for scenery construction. A fifth building addition with a footprint of 7,300 square feet will be constructed over landscaped open space on the westerly side of the existing building and will contain classrooms and staff offices. An emergency generator is proposed on the southerly portion of the site in conjunction with the proposed school expansion.

The Secaucus Board of Education is seeking special exception approval to expand the existing secondary school at this location.

**B. Response to the Public Notice**

No written comments were submitted to this Office regarding this application prior to the public hearing.

**III. PUBLIC HEARING (October 7, 2014)**

A public hearing was held on Tuesday, October 7, 2014. NJMC staff in attendance were Sara J. Sundell, P.E., P.P., Director of Land Use Management and Chief Engineer; Sharon Mascaró, P.E., Deputy Director of Land Use Management and Deputy Chief Engineer; Mia Petrou, P.P., AICP, and Ronald Seelogy, P.E., P.P., Senior Engineer.

**A. Exhibits**

The following is a list of the exhibits submitted at the public hearing and marked for identification as follows:

<u>Number</u>	<u>Description</u>
A-1	"Existing Topographic Conditions Plan," Sheet No. C1.1, prepared by Remington, Vernick & Arango Engineers, dated September 2, 2014.
A-2	"Overall Plan," Sheet No. C3.2, prepared by Remington, Vernick & Arango Engineers, dated September 2, 2014, revised September 5, 2014.
A-3	"Site Plan," Sheet No. C3.1, prepared by Remington, Vernick & Arango Engineers, dated September 2, 2014, revised September 5, 2014.

- A-4 "Landscape & Lighting Plan," Sheet No. C7.1, prepared by Remington, Vernick & Arango Engineers, dated September 2, 2014, revised September 5, 2014.
- A-5 "Overall First Floor Plan," Sheet No. A1.1, prepared by Di Cara Rubino Architects, dated January 18, 2013, revised through September 22, 2014.
- A-6 "Overall Second Floor Plan," Sheet No. A1.2, prepared by Di Cara Rubino Architects, dated January 18, 2013, revised through September 22, 2014.
- A-7 Exterior elevations of the proposed structures entitled, "Secaucus Board of Education Building Additions and Interior Renovations at Secaucus Middle High School," prepared by Di Cara Rubino Architects, dated August 15, 2014.

**B. Testimony**

Jane Gallina Mecca, Esq., of the firm Fogarty & Hara, represented the applicant at the hearing. The following three witnesses testified in support of the application:

1. Michael Galante, P.E., P.P., Remington, Vernick & Arango Engineers.
2. Germano Rubino, AIA, Di Cara Rubino Architects.
3. Robert Presuto, Superintendent, Secaucus Board of Education.

Staff findings and recommendations are based on the entire record. A transcript of the public hearing was prepared and transcribed by Beth Calderone, Certified Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public.

**C. Public Comment**

No objections were raised during the public hearing as no members of the public were present.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATION

##### A. Standards for the Granting of a Special Exception to permit a secondary school in the Parks and Recreation zone as per N.J.A.C. 19:4-5.15(a)2.

The NJMC Zoning Regulations at N.J.A.C. 19:4-4.13(e) state in part that, *a special exception use shall not be granted unless specific written findings are made based upon the evidence presented that supports the following conclusions:*

1. *The proposed special exception use at the specified location will contribute to and promote the welfare or convenience of the public.*

The expansion of the existing secondary school, a special exception use in the Parks and Recreation zone, will contribute to and promote the welfare or convenience of the public by providing additional classroom and gymnasium space to address an increase in student enrollment. Currently, there are no other public secondary schools located within the Town of Secaucus. The additional classroom space will allow sixth graders, who are presently housed in two elementary schools, to be brought on site. This move will provide concurrence with the State Department of Education's Facility Efficiency Standard Model requiring Kindergarten through fifth grade at the elementary school level and sixth through eighth grade at the middle school level. By nature of its use, the secondary school will benefit residents of the Town of Secaucus and will further enhance the area.

2. *The proposed special exception use will not cause substantial injury to the value of other property in the neighborhood.*

The secondary school use, a special exception, is compatible with the surrounding land uses and will not cause substantial injury to the value of other properties in the surrounding neighborhood. Single-family and multi-unit residential structures border the site to the south and west respectively. The secondary school expansion will have no adverse effect on the values of these properties. There will be a minimal increase in traffic generated by the secondary school additions. However, existing site access points and the existing and proposed on-site circulation routes, drive aisle widths, and required parking are adequate to serve the secondary school and the proposed additions. The expansion is screened from view from the adjacent properties to the south by existing plantings. Screening is not necessary adjacent to the multi-unit residential use located to the west due to the fact that the secondary school additions are located on the far eastern portion of the site and are buffered by athletic fields.

3. *The special exception use will not dominate the immediate neighborhood in a manner that could prevent development and use of neighboring properties in accordance with the applicable regulations, in consideration of the following:*

- i. *The location and size of the special exception use;*

The location and size of the expanded secondary school will not dominate the site or immediate neighborhood in a manner that could prevent the development and use of neighboring properties.

After construction of the five (5) building additions, the special exception use will occupy only 15% of the subject property. The majority of the remainder of the site consists of pervious surfaces such as athletic fields and open space. The site, building, on-site parking and other site attributes will not substantially change as a result of the proposed school additions. With the exception of the proposed gymnasium building addition, the proposed additions will be one story in height. The proposed gymnasium, which will be two stories in height, will be constructed at a lower elevation than a typical high school gymnasium in order to obtain compatibility with the heights of the existing school building and neighboring residential structures. Thirty-three (33) parking spaces will be constructed, primarily on the northerly portion of the site, to address the increase in parking demand created by the proposed expansion. Testimony was provided indicating that one to three additional school buses would be required to transport approximately 183 sixth grade students. However, it is anticipated that the minor increase in vehicular traffic will not create a burden on existing roadways in the neighborhood.

*ii. The nature and intensity of the operation of the special exception use;*

The existing secondary school has been in operation on site for nearly 50 years. Aside from being used for community or civic events, the proposed expansion will be utilized during normal school hours. The overall operation of a secondary school at this location complements the surrounding area and functions in a manner that will not be out of character or scale with other neighboring land uses.

*iii. The location of the site with respect to access and circulation;*

The existing secondary school building and the proposed additions on the subject premises are immediately accessible from Mill Ridge Road via an access drive. The additions will not decrease the utility of these roadways. The existing site access points will be maintained and the proposed on-site circulation routes, drive aisle widths, and parking areas are adequate to serve the secondary school along with the proposed additions. The design proposes to separate school bus traffic from pedestrian drop-offs. Even though new classroom space is proposed, the use will not increase the burden on existing roadways in the neighborhood due to the proposed on-site vehicular access and circulation improvements.

*iv. The location, nature, and height of structures, walls and fences on the site; and*

The location, nature, and height of the proposed building additions will not dominate the immediate neighborhood in a manner that could prevent the development and use of neighboring properties. The building heights of the proposed additions are compatible with the existing school building. Located on the easternmost portion of the site and buffered by athletic fields and open space, landscaped screening would not be required for the existing school building and additions as it is a sizable distance from the multi-unit residential buildings to the west. Single-family residential homes to the south front along Meadow Lane and Mill Ridge Road. The rear yards of the residential properties are sufficiently screened by the existing fence and landscaping located on the school property.

However, additional landscaping will be provided to further buffer existing residential uses and enhance the aesthetics of the site. No retaining walls or new fencing will be required for the new additions.

*v. The nature and extent of landscaping and screening on the site.*

The site is presently well maintained and landscaped in an appropriate manner. The construction of the performing arts building addition required the existing landscaping buffer along the southern portion of the site to be expanded with supplemental plantings to provide additional screening for adjacent residential uses. New landscaping will be provided throughout the site to provide additional screening of the proposed expansion. The proposed emergency generator, to be located on the southerly portion of the site, will be screened by landscaping and a solid and continuous fence.

*4. Adequate utilities, drainage and other necessary facilities have been or will be provided.*

The subject property is fully developed and has existing utility connections with sufficient capacity to handle the proposed building expansion. With regards to drainage, the secondary school additions do not affect the ability of the existing drainage system to perform in a safe and efficient manner. Surface runoff from new impervious surfaces will be conveyed via a proposed stormwater drainage system to Garrett's Reach, a tidal tributary to the Hackensack River. In order

to comply with N.J.A.C. 7:8, the Stormwater Management Rules, an Imbrium Jellyfish unit will be installed for water quality purposes.

5. *Adequate access roads and drive aisles have been or will be provided and shall be designed to prevent traffic hazards and minimize traffic congestion.*

Access to the expanded secondary school will be from Mill Ridge Road, as currently exists for the site. Although the intensity of the use will increase due to new classroom space, additional traffic generated by the secondary school additions will be *de minimis*. Existing and proposed drive aisles are of a satisfactory width and are designed to prevent traffic hazards and minimize traffic congestion.

6. *The special exception use will not have a substantial adverse environmental impact.*

The special exception use will not result in any adverse environmental impacts. Any and all solid waste generated by the expanded facility will be securely stored within a dumpster enclosure. NJMC environmental performance standards will not be exceeded for noise, vibration, glare, air emissions, and hazardous or radioactive materials. Stormwater runoff water quality will be increased due to the installation of an Imbrium Jellyfish unit. The proposed bus turnaround has been modified to limit new impervious surfaces located within the NJDEP's 50 foot wide riparian buffer to less than 600 square feet in area, as per NJDEP requirements. Lastly, no environmentally sensitive areas will be disturbed as a result of the additions.

V. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

A. Standards for the Granting of a Special Exception to permit a secondary school in the Parks and Recreation zone as per N.J.A.C. 19:4-5.15(a)2.

Based on the record in this matter, the special exception application for the expansion of an existing secondary school on the subject premises is hereby recommended for APPROVAL.

APPROVAL  
Recommendation on  
Special Exception Request

10.27.14  
Date

  
Sara J. Sundell, P.E., P.P.  
Director of Land Use Management

Approval  
Recommendation on  
Special Exception Request

10-28-14  
Date

  
Marcia A. Karrow  
Executive Director