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South Middleton Planning Commission tables soccer field vote amid concerns over traffic, access

Christine Musser For The Sentinel

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Pictured are the new proposed plans for a soccer field complex off York and Springville Roads in South Middleton Township. Christine Musser, For The Sentinel

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The planning commission on June 20 voted to table its decision on the conditional use application for the Wolf farm soccer complex. The decision gives the applicant, staff and township solicitor time to negotiate conditions based on public comments and questions, as well as previous conditions from the February planning meeting.

The applicant will present the recommendations at the next planning meeting on July 18 at 6 p.m., which is when the commission will vote.

The applicant provided a parking analysis, traffic study, stormwater management narrative, groundwater study and an alternate plan that reflects the original layout.

The revised proposed plan shows they relocated the driveway on Springville Road to meet the access spacing requirements of the township and created that as its single access point, removing the access easement on South Ridge Road to meet ordinance requirements.

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The project proposes nine soccer fields over a three-phase project with no set dates to when phases 2 and 3 would occur. It is on an as-needed basis and the availability of funds, according to Sean Cochran, executive director of Keystone FC.

Phase 1 will consist of three soccer fields with teams rotating the fields and no games planned to occur at the same time. Fields will be used in the spring, summer and fall for camps, practices and tournaments. Camps and practices will occur during the week, and tournaments will be on Saturdays.



Soccer complex conditional use application withdrawn in South Middleton

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Traffic concerns

The main concerns that the township planning commission and the public had with the plan was traffic congestion and the safety of those traveling within the area of York, Shughart, South Ridge and Springville roads, which are within a 55 mph speed zone.

To help prevent traffic congestion, the applicant will move the driveway farther away from York Road to allow cars to park more quickly, as suggested by planning commissioner Barb Wilson. The revised plan has the driveway 800 feet from York Road.

The Event Management Plan designed by the applicant will dictate when there are tournaments and at what capacity. The insurance policy for the events will be held by the applicant and paid solely by them, according to Jarred Neal, engineer with Traffic, Planning and Design Inc., which completed the traffic study for Keystone FC.

Members of the public and the planning commission still had some concerns with the new plan and studies offered up by the applicant.

The applicant's intent is to use certified traffic flaggers within the complex and on the roads, including York Road, to keep the traffic moving, but commission members questioned the safety of the flaggers on a 55 mph road, and township solicitor Bryan Salzman said the township will not take on liability of putting flaggers on a public road.

With 89% of predicted traffic for the soccer complex using York Road and turning onto Springville Road to access the fields, members of the public worried about plans for the traffic light.

Neal said the applicant is willing to financially contribute their share for the payment of the traffic light, but a traffic study had no planned left-turn lane for the intersection. Though practices will be scheduled to occur in off-peak times, which was believed to be between 3:30 and 4:30 p.m. weekdays, residents who live in the area dispute the study.

"I can sit on my front porch every night and watch the stacking and the turning and the near misses every single night, and they're not T-boned, necessarily, but where people are pulling out, they can't see," said Tracey Clemens, who lives adjacent to the land where the soccer fields are proposed. "There are people coming from the south and the north on York who don't slow down for the traffic that has stopped, and if you're going to add stacking on Springville, that's going to put more stacking on York Road. You're going to have more of that and like I said, I just think another traffic study should be required of these people."

Emergency access

No emergency access or egress points were added to the new plan because the site wouldn't meet the access spacing requirement by the township, and Jason Doty, engineer with Frederick, Seibert and Associates, pointed out that none of South Middleton's parks have an emergency

access point.

However, planning commissioners saw that there is a need with this facility to have another access point for emergency crews, and Cochran estimated that 280 people could be at the facility attending or playing in games.

“That’s why we see it as seeing the need for an emergency egress. It’s not just a park,” said Tony Gonzalez, chair of the planning commission. “I want to make sure that when this is fully developed that we will have a way to get emergency services in and out.”

Community Development Director Tim Doerr said the township’s fire code requires an emergency access and egress point, and township engineer Brian O’Neill said that fire code requirement would justify the waiver request for the applicant, despite the lack of required space.

The applicant will meet with the fire companies annually to discuss the tournament schedule and the event management plan.

Cost

Another concern is the cost to the township to align Shughart and Springville roads. The Georgetown and Wheatstone developments have already contributed their share for the intersection alignment, which will include a traffic light. Keystone is offering to contribute \$341,000 toward the project, an increase from their first offer of \$116,000.

But the problem, according to the township’s planning commission members, is there is no certainty on how much the realignment will cost or if they may need to purchase land for the improvement.

The Wheatstone and Georgetown developments did not warrant a signal light, nor the alignment of Shughart and York roads. The soccer complex does warrant the alignment and the light.

Commission members were unsure that the financial contribution would cover intersection improvements. Two conditions from the February planning commission meeting were to have a right-of-way dedication for the intersection and an offer for land on the northwest corner for future intersection improvements. Neither were included with the revised plan.

