

Development Activities Meeting Report (Version: 06/24/2020)

This report created by the Neighborhood Planner and included with staff reports to City Boards and/or Commissions.

Logistics	Stakeholders
Project Name/Address: Environmental Charter School Middle School Field Site Improvements / 5525 Columbo St	Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident): Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation nearby residents living on Columbo St and N Fairmount St
Parcel Number(s): 83-E-116	
ZDR Application Number: DCP-ZDR-2020-13392	
Meeting Location: virtual, via Zoom	
Date: February 4, 2021	
Meeting Start Time: 6:00 PM	
Applicant: Environmental Charter School, with Ethos Collaborative	Approx. Number of Attendees: 22
Boards and/or Commissions Request(s): Zoning Board of Adjustment	

How did the meeting inform the community about the development project?

Ex: Community engagement to-date, location and history of the site, demolition needs, building footprint and overall square footage, uses and activities (particularly on the ground floor), transportation needs and parking proposed, building materials, design, and other aesthetic elements of the project, community uses, amenities and programs.

- The project team was represented at the meeting by James Doyle (Chief Operating Officer of the Environmental Charter School), Nikole Sheaffer (Chief Innovation and Outreach Officer of the Environmental Charter School), Damon Weiss (principal at Ethos Collaborative), and Barton Kirk (principal at Ethos Collaborative).
- J. Doyle began the presentation by talking about the ECS system and about the Rogers School building at 5525 Columbo St, where the middle school (grades 6-9) is now located. He discussed the organizational mission of the school, its core values, and a day in the life of an ECS middle schooler, and how expanding the school's recreational and outdoor learning area fits with these concepts. He also touched on how the curriculum and identity of the school revolves around outdoor study and that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought that into greater focus. Additionally, he mentioned that he used to live across the street before he began working for ECS.
- D. Weiss introduced the master planning project involving the field site improvements. He explained that the upper field, where the improvements would be taking place, was right now a deteriorating and unused parking area, which was unusable for the school right now, in that the students are not able to engage in recreation there. The nature of the improvements would be to maximize space for outdoor play; to provide planted areas for buffering, screening, and stormwater management; and to provide a managed overflow parking area. The goal of the improvements is to have an educational space that is ecologically friendly and adds to ECS's mission.
- Especially since the pandemic, the students have become used to the outdoor way of learning, so opportunities to expand the classroom to the outdoors would be part of the scope of the project.
- The site as it exists has been stripped of trees, good soils, and vegetation, which will be restored as part of the improvements. D. Weiss mentioned that planting new trees would reduce noise, screen the field site from its surroundings, clean the air, and provide a lesson in food forests and native plantings as part of the educational and recreational regimen for the students.
- It was mentioned that the current unmaintained parking area is twice the size of what is needed by the school. The parking lot footprint would be reduced, and porous asphalt will be used to reduce the noise of bouncing balls and

to manage stormwater. D. Weiss compared a historical aerial image of the site with the project team’s proposed plan, showing that the existing parking area had been there for 50 to 60 years and covered most of the site. He was unsure whether the previous iteration of the school (as the Rogers School) ever had students playing in that space, but he mentioned that overall the new plan would not represent a big change from the historical use.

- D. Weiss then briefly went over the grading plan and the landscape plan.
- D. Weiss explained the reasons why the project team was seeking two special exceptions from the Zoning Board of Adjustment (as per 916.09), citing the following specific residential compatibility standards: 1) 916.02A.2(a), which specifies that the front yard setback has to match the side yard setbacks of the adjacent properties in the first 50 feet adjacent to the residentially zoned lots (applies to the proposed parking lot’s extension into this setback to achieve the desired number of parking stalls), and 2) 916.04.A, in which a playground area cannot be within 50 feet of residentially zoned property. (The subject property is located in the R2-H subdistrict and abuts residential properties in both R2-H and R3-M. The edge of the perimeter recreational path around the field site would encroach within 50 feet of residential properties.)

Input and Responses

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
Basically, what you’ve designed is a soccer field on site.	It will be used for soccer and other ball play. It won’t be formally striped; it just looks like that in the site plan to present the master plan vision.
So, its not exclusively for soccer or any one sport; is it going to be lighted for nighttime use?	We’ve been asked to look at it, but the plan as presented does not have lighting.
The number of parking spaces seems rather low compared to the number of staff working at the school. How did you come up with the parking proportion?	When the school was renovated, there was an entire parking lot at the bottom of the hill that was previously approved by the City as part of the renovations and occupancy of the site. The new upper hill parking lot is more of an overflow parking lot.
ECS would like to allow the community to hold events in the building and may need to have people parking on the streets, so I’m curious as how you arrived at the number of spaces.	We looked at it as more of bonus overflow parking. The existing unmaintained parking lot was really not part of the previous parking count.
Is the playground open to the community ? I might have missed this part	The ultimate goal is to be an asset to the community; we would like to make available to the community during non-school hours.
<p>the plan for the new parking lot seems fine. I appreciate the idea of plantings and landscaping. My question has more to do with the street being blocked by buses at dismissal. Does developing this portion of the parcel provide opportunity to consider and solve that (significant) issue. Thank you.</p> <p>perhaps a (2) bus pull off can be cut in along Columbo immediately below the proposed parking area? and can a couple of buses pull into the upper field while they wait?</p>	We can’t have a turning radius in this layout for buses to pull into this space. If there’s a fire drill, the upper parking lot could be a place for folks to queue to get out of the way of emergency responders, but we have not talked to the school any more about the bus situation beyond that.

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
<p>I live in one of the houses on Fairmount. After a night soccer game at the field, how will you control people hanging out there late at night, students or whomever? Will there be a fence there to control the traffic in the back?</p>	<p>The plan as it stands has a gate at the front entrance. The site is fenced on three sides but not along Columbo. With ECS policies and enforcement, I imagine they would not want to keep it open to the public at night. Whether that's by posting signs or looking at any more intensive interventions, I'm not sure, but it's not part of the plan right now.</p> <p>We'd love to have the space to have a regulation soccer field or even one that could host games, but this is more of a play surface where students will be able to do drills and games during the day but really won't be suitable for competitive play.</p>
<p>Even with your parking spaces, there's cars in the parking lot at the school yard. Even in the evening, there's traffic back there. Once you put the field, even though it's not going to be a big field, you're still going to increase the traffic there at the lower playground. So, what preventative measures are you going to put in place so that it's not a lot more traffic at the back of my house?</p>	<p>We'll see if we can figure out any additional solutions.</p> <p>Part of this goes into the lighting of the upper lot space; that's still an outstanding question we're looking at. This plan would be for uses specifically limited to the school day and immediately after school. We're not really looking on our side that there will be much traffic for this space. The balance is that we can look at exploring a fence along the Columbo side, but we also recognize that we want this to be a resource for the community. We can look at it to see if we can balance everyone's needs.</p>
<p>Sounds good. I just don't want kids hanging out around there at night causing issues.</p>	<p>Thanks for bringing that to our attention, and it's something we'll definitely bake into our final plans for this.</p>
<p>There was not discussion about the dismissal bus solution opportunity?</p>	
<p>Yes, I have major concerns about the buses and parking</p>	
<p>Also, the drivers need to understand that people live on the street and need to get by. Many of the drivers block the street and do not even attempt to move over.</p>	
<p>It is more than 1 bus</p>	

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
<p>The neighbors have really expressed to me about the bus worry. This does seem to be a moment to address that. What other options are being considered if the upper hill is not suitable for bus pull-off?</p>	<p>It's something we can definitely look at. We even considered having buses on Black St instead of Columbo when we first started this school; we can explore moving buses there. My concern/fear is that it might be the same, if not more. There are not a lot of pull-offs on Black St due to some new development; a 72-passenger bus would not really be a fit there, even though we have some smaller vans pulling off on that side.</p> <p>Unfortunately, due to COVID, we haven't been able to gather data to see what traffic flow and the buses look like. There are also some relationship and behavior changes that we can do with our bus companies and drivers. We can look at both infrastructure solutions and timing, to make things better at both dismissal and arrival times.</p> <p>There is some space that would be suitable for a bus in terms of dimensions, but it's a fairly steep grade and may not be a safe place for bus staging. Formalization of this space means that there may be some queueing of students there to allow buses to unload concurrently rather than one at a time.</p>
<p>buses could back into upper lot</p>	<p>Yeah, this is the upper lot here.</p>
<p>thank you. Ross</p>	
<p>Thank you all. Have to run to another meeting. I'll catch up with Nina and Rick. Best, Ross K</p>	
<p>Will the residential side be palnted with trees even though you are applying for the variance set back?</p> <p>Can you make sure to use only native plants in your plantings?</p>	<p>The variance setback really applies to the parking limits and the recreational use. The zoning code pretty much allows trees and landscaping to be included in the buffer spaces; they would be used to separate and buffer different spaces.</p> <p>We actually will have tree plantings throughout the entire property. Unfortunately, a planting with Tree Pittsburgh has been rescheduled a number of times due to the pandemic. There will be upwards of 30 new trees that will be embedded in the property. They were meant to be there in the fall, but we will be planting them this spring potentially instead. They will be all native trees; we're also looking at some low-maintenance fruit trees.</p>

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
<p>Big fan of eliminating the old pavement and reducing the size of the old existing lot. The more trees and grass, the better. Columbo Street doesn't have many street trees, so please plant as many as you can :)</p>	
<p>I would have some concerns about full size of plantings shading and defoliating on my yard. Might I interact with landscape designer to choose mutually acceptable plantings?</p>	
<p>I live about a block away. I still have concerns about the bus parking. Is there a way to move the curb to allow buses to stage? Residents have to wait for the buses to be able to get in and out of their homes on this one-way street.</p>	<p>Whether the sidewalk can be reduced in width, I'd have to take a look at how wide the sidewalks are right now. The City may limit what you can do on a block. I definitely understand the concerns. We'll have to take a closer look at this and talk with the City about it.</p>
<p>Where will the staff park? Where will parents park when they come to the school for events, etc.? The parking inside on the Black street side does not seem to be enough. Please clarify.</p>	
<p>I live on Columbo and am a former neighbor of James. I love the idea and concept, but my concerns are if the parking lot is no longer the parking lot, is #17 on the diagram really sufficient for staff and guests? When it was Rogers, people parked up and down our street. It was very difficult, since most people don't have off-street parking. As much as I love the field, I have concerns about where will staff park and where parents will park when they come to visit. When people park in front of my driveway or when I have to take my kids to school, how will I get out? I would hate for the upper level to just become a parking lot, but I also don't like the situation either. Just very concerned that it was rough-going before already.</p>	<p>The existing parking lot that was there wasn't really a functional parking lot. It was breaking up pavement. This does provide some overflow parking for those folks, but the land development for the City is really focused on this upper lot; the remainder of the school is not really part of the project, so I'm having a hard time answering some of those questions.</p>
<p>Staff cannot park on Columbo. I don't know if that helps It was a rule when we started there</p>	<p>Knowing how difficult Columbo is having lived there myself, we've been very clear with staff and guests that no one is to park on Columbo because it's a one-way street and residents can only park on one side. I can say very clearly that we will double or triple down on our emphasis that staff and guests are not to park along Columbo St, and we will utilize existing spaces and street parking elsewhere.</p>
<p>You don't have as many parent events as the old school, but if we can find a place for the buses to get out of the way...it's not fair to tell people who live there that they can't park in front of their own homes because buses need to park. We need to find a solution; it's a bigger thing that needs to be addressed.</p>	<p>I don't want anyone to think that we don't think this is an issue. It's just a reflection that I'm a bit more flat-footed and unable to provide an answer on that part. Kim, we'll definitely talk to ECS to see if there are solutions to both problems overall.</p>
<p>You look great KIM !</p>	

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
<p>Please make sure the trees allow for maximum forage for all wildlife, for example tulip poplar is pretty but it hosts far less caterpillars, birds, and mammals than say an oak tree which is considered the grocery store of the forest. Really all plants you choose I hope follow these guidelines. Doug Tallamy's book <i>Bringing Nature Home</i> is a great resource on his topic. Also light pollution greatly affects the possibility of creating a healthy wildlife corridor.</p>	<p>The food forest idea was an original part of this concept. I would love to make sure the trees meet both of those criteria.</p> <p>Thanks for this recommendation!</p>
<p>I own and operate a Native plant landscaping business please contact me if you want any help choosing plants. mayapplegardening@gmail.com Have to log into a 7pm class now. Also even though I live on the other side of the neighborhood I support all of the concerns of the people living on Fairmont and Columbo.</p> <p>have a great night thank you so much for all your work!</p> <p>Nina can you fill me on any responses to my comments questions later? thank you!!</p>	
<p>Is the basketball court open to the community at this time?</p>	<p>There's a temporary portable one right now. The technical answer is that it's open now; there's no fence there, so anyone can technically use it. As we've talked about, though, there are hours on it, so we don't necessarily permit it during evening time.</p>
<p>I live behind it. I'm fine with it being used.. I live behind it and was just curious.</p>	
<p>I would hope that there be no evening light pollution. Are you planning on having evening lighting?</p>	
<p>What rules has ECS set for neighbors use of site amenities? Are times regulated?</p> <p>This is a former neighborhood school, and there is a tradition of people using this site, so it behooves ECS to come up with hours of use provisions. What's to prevent someone to create a nuisance after-hours for neighbors? So, it's probably of value for ECS to have some discussions about the public use of the property.</p>	<p>We have not yet set official ECS policy, so I can't give a clear-cut answer until that's finalized. That includes the other things we've talked about like the lighting.</p>
<p>You guys had removed the yellow poles on the sidewalk. You might want to put them back; they were there because of accidents. A lot of people speed up Columbo and people hit them. I've lived here for 14 years and I've seen quite a few accidents. I'm concerned for your school, so I want to make sure people don't run into your beautiful entry.</p>	<p>That was before my time on the project.</p> <p>We pulled them out for the creation of the ramp, but there are some other designs out there in other cities that can serve the same feature but are better looking. It's definitely part of the next phase of making that a safer entryway.</p>

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
Thank you, just was worried	
What dates will your hearings be held?	We haven't heard back on dates but will circle back and email the entire group.
What is the total number of students you plan to service?	We will cap out at 312 or so. Class sizes will be around 104 students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.
How many if any are from the area?	We serve about 30 different ZIP codes around the city, from pretty much every neighborhood in the city, as part of charter school system.
We would definitely like to know this kind of data in the future. Just interested in this — how many of the kids are from Garfield?	I can get you this information by tomorrow.
We'll put this video online. People can also email me with any additional comments to pass on to the team.	
Thank you	

Other Notes

Text

Planner completing report: Phillip Wu