



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

Ord. No. 2022-019: To authorize the special use of the property known as 729 St. Christopher's Road for the purpose of athletic fields illuminated by lighting structures in excess of 35 feet in height, upon certain terms and conditions.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: February 7, 2022

PETITIONER

St. Christopher's School represented by Jennifer Mullen, Esq.

LOCATION

729 St. Christopher's Road

PURPOSE

To authorize the special use of the property known as 729 St. Christopher's Road for the purpose of athletic fields illuminated by lighting structures in excess of 35 feet in height, upon certain terms and conditions.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The subject property is located in the R-4 Single-Family Residential zoning district and stadium lighting is a permitted use. However, Section 30-408.7 of the zoning ordinance states that no building or structure shall exceed 35 feet in height. The proposed lighting plans call for lighting structures that exceed 35 feet in height. Therefore a special use permit is necessary for this request.

Staff finds the use of the property would remain consistent with the recommendations of the Richmond 300 master plan where the primary uses include institutional, cultural, government and open space.

Staff notes that the lighting of the athletic fields is a permitted use in the R-4 zoning district. However, the applicant wishes to use lighting towers that exceed 35 feet in height in order to provide field lighting utilizing fewer tower structures.

Staff finds the proposed development would not alter the availability of on-street parking in the area.

Staff finds that with the ordinance conditions the safeguards contained within the City Charter, relative to the granting of Special Use Permits, are met. Specifically, staff finds that the proposed use would not be detrimental to the general welfare of the community involved and would not create additional congestion in the streets in the area involved.

Therefore, staff recommends approval of the Special Use Permit.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Site Description

The 27 acre subject property is located in the Three Chopt neighborhood and is bounded by St. Christopher's Road to the west; Wesley and Ferguson Roads to the south; Maple Street to the east; and Henri Street to the north.

Proposed Use of the Property

The property is a school containing fields currently used for athletic events and practice. The lighting of the fields will allow greater flexibility for scheduling events, and accommodating weather delays. Sporting events that utilize lighting shall be limited to 15 sporting events per calendar year which includes a maximum of five football games per year.

The proposed lighting of the athletic fields does not introduce a new use for the properties. Sporting events and practices that currently occur as permitted uses today shall continue with the approval of the requested special use permit.

Master Plan

The City's Richmond 300 Master Plan designates the property for Institutional uses. These uses typically are public and quasi-public entities, such as local, state, and federal government, hospitals, universities, schools, and religious institutions.

Development Style: Several buildings owned by an institution are often connected by an engaging character that creates a campus-like environment.

Mobility: Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access are prioritized and accommodated. Bike parking is provided. New driveway entrances are prohibited on priority and principal street frontages and minimal driveway entrances are allowed on secondary streets. Ground floor parking is prohibited on principal street frontages.

Intensity: Varies.

Primary Uses: Institutional, cultural, government, and open space.

Secondary Uses: Retail/office/personal service and multi-family.

Zoning and Ordinance Conditions

The Property is currently located within the R-4 Single-Family Residential District.

Zoning Administration noted the following:

The subject property is zoned R-4 Single-Family Residential district. This proposal is to install new athletic field lighting at an existing private school. The proposed heights of the lighting structures exceed 35' and a Special Use Permit is required to be adopted by City Council to authorize this use

If adopted, the Special Use Permit would impose the following conditions on the properties:

- (a) The Special Use of the Property shall be as athletic fields illuminated by lighting structures in excess of 35 feet in height, substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (b) The Owner shall not operate the Special Use past 8:00 p.m., except in the case of interscholastic sports competitions.
- (c) The Owner shall not operate the Special Use past 8:00 p.m. for more than 15 interscholastic sports competitions per calendar year and no more than five such competitions may be football competitions.
- (d) No football competition involving the Special Use shall begin later than 7:00 p.m.
- (e) The Owner shall post on the calendar on the St. Christopher's School website the varsity fall athletics schedule by June 15 and the varsity spring athletics schedule by January 15 each year.
- (f) All building materials, elevations, and site improvements, including landscaping, shall be substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (g) Wireless communications equipment may be co-located on the lighting structures, subject to the applicable provisions of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended. [Note: Wireless communications equipment would not need a special use permit to be installed on the Property. This condition would allow such equipment to be located above 35' in height, provided all other City requirements are met.]
- (h) All ground-level mechanical equipment pertaining to the Special Use and not affixed to the lighting structures shall be located or screened so as not to be visible from any public right-of-way.

Surrounding Area

Properties in the surrounding area generally contain single-family dwellings.

Neighborhood Participation

Staff notified area residents and property owners as well as the Westhampton Citizens association and the Westhampton Merchants Association. A number of letters in support and in opposition have been received.

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