



# Williamsburg Civic Association Newsletter

JANUARY 2011

[WWW.WCA-ARLINGTON.ORG](http://WWW.WCA-ARLINGTON.ORG)

## WCA President's Message

Dear Neighbors:

Happy New Year!

We're devoting the majority of this month's newsletter to the Bishop O'Connell athletic field issue. As those of you who attended our October meeting will recall, the school is interested in renovating its athletic fields and installing lights.

O'Connell filed a Special Use Permit application with Arlington County that originally was to be voted on in late September. But it did so without first engaging the community in any kind of discussion. Once the County Board learned that input had not been sought, the vote was postponed. It now is scheduled to be voted on Saturday, Jan. 22.

Over the past couple of months, a working group comprised of representatives from Bishop O'Connell, Arlington County, and the Williamsburg and Arlington-East Falls Church Civic Associations has been meeting. The goal was to share views on the proposal and to better understand each other's position.

Unfortunately, attempts by the civic association representatives to offer reasonable compromises to the Memorandum of Understanding prepared by Bishop O'Connell have thus far been rejected. Moreover, many community residents do not believe that any conditions on use can adequately preserve their quiet neighborhood.

In addition, we have learned that uses of the fields are being planned not only for O'Connell, but also for Marymount University, which reportedly has offered to pay half of the renovation and lighting costs. Arlington County also appears to be interested in using the fields for its recreational leagues. What is not known is how many nights these events will take place,

## General Membership Meeting

**Tuesday, January 11**

**7:30 – 9:00 PM**

(Please arrive by 7:00 to pay your membership dues)

**Nottingham Elementary School**

**In the Library**

**5900 Little Falls Road**

**Arlington, VA 22207**

**Topic:**

**Bishop O'Connell Athletic  
Fields Renovation and Lighting Update**

**WCA Member Vote on  
Special Use Permit**

until what time, and the number of additional cars that will drive through our neighborhoods and park on our streets.

Please read the information in this newsletter carefully and take any action you deem necessary to support or oppose the Special Use Permit application. Letters to the County Board ([countyboard@arlingtonva.us](mailto:countyboard@arlingtonva.us)) and County Manager ([countymanager@arlingtonva.us](mailto:countymanager@arlingtonva.us)) are strongly encouraged.

We also encourage you to attend the January 11 general membership meeting to hear an update from both O'Connell and WCA reps on the proposal and to cast your vote in support or opposition. With an official vote, WCA can take a position that is reflective of its members' views. We plan to send a letter to Arlington County prior to the January 22 hearing.

Thank you for being a part of this important process that has the potential to significantly affect the quality of life of those living in our community.

## BRIEFS:

**WCA Resident Organizes Snow Brigade:** It's no longer an option to avoid shoveling the snow and ice from the sidewalk adjacent to your house as a result of a new countywide Snow Removal Ordinance. To help those in the WCA who are *physically unable* to shovel their snow, WCA resident Ellen Jones has volunteered to organize a "snow brigade." Please contact her at [ellenjones6@starpower.net](mailto:ellenjones6@starpower.net) of 703-536-7626 if you are in need of help or if you are someone who'd be willing to help and she will do her best to match you up. For those unfamiliar with the requirements, keep in mind that all property owners must remove the snow or ice from the entire width of the sidewalk up to 3 feet wide to accommodate wheelchairs, strollers, and adults with children in hand. The snow must be removed within 24 hours after the snow stops falling when accumulations are less than 6 inches, and within 36 hours when 6 or more inches of snow accumulate. Noncompliance could result in a civil penalty of \$50 to \$100. To learn more about the Ordinance, visit <http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/Communications/PressReleases/page77111.aspx>

**Median on Sycamore Street to be Submitted as No. 1 Neighborhood Conservation Project:** WCA Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee representative Paul Cullen reports that he will be submitting to the NC Committee a proposal to build a median strip on Sycamore Street between 26<sup>th</sup> Street and the Williamsburg Circle in order to help with calming traffic. This was the No. 1 neighborhood conservation project WCA members voted on when surveyed by Paul last year. Stay tuned for further developments.

**ISO WCA VP and Secretary:** Two positions are open on the WCA executive committee: VP and Secretary. The VP position was formerly held by Coral Gundlach, who resigned after 3 years to spend more time with her family. Jim Finley, our former secretary, recently moved out of the neighborhood. To inquire or express interest in either of the positions, please email Sonia McCormick at [sonia.b.mccormick@gmail.com](mailto:sonia.b.mccormick@gmail.com)

**WCA ListServ:** Keep up with breaking news affecting our community by joining the WCA listserv. Access to the Yahoo group is available via [www.wca-arlington.org](http://www.wca-arlington.org).

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# O'Connell Plan Faces Neighborhood Opposition

By Bill Adair & John Seymour, WCA representatives to the Bishop O'Connell Working Group

As many WCA residents know, Bishop O'Connell High School has asked Arlington County for approval to install lights on its athletic fields.

The school has said the lights would be part of an effort to modernize and expand its athletic facilities.

The proposal has sparked the biggest controversy in the WCA since the proposal to install a cellular tower on Minor Hill. Many residents have urged the County Board to vote against the plan because of concerns about light pollution, noise, traffic safety and parking issues, and the general "commotion" that the lights would bring. They have collected more than 300 signatures against the plan from residents of the WCA and the Arlington East Falls Church Civic Association.

O'Connell officials met with residents in the fall and said the lights were necessary for the school to have a modern athletic facility. They said the lights will provide their teams with more practice and playing time. They said they plan to expand the football stadium from 1,100 to 1,200 seats but will position the lights and speakers to reduce their impacts on nearby residents.

They have been talking with Marymount University about allowing its teams to use the high school's fields, although they have not provided many details.

The WCA-AEFCCA residents against the lights cite several reasons for their opposition:

- **Impact on property values.** The residents surveyed Arlington real estate agents and found that a substantial majority of agents believe that homes within a block of O'Connell will decline in value by about 9 percent, or about \$60,000 per home.
- **Traffic and parking.** They conducted a study of parking and found that O'Connell does not have sufficient parking for events in the football stadium, which will force more than 400 cars to seek parking on neighborhood streets.

- **Noise and light pollution.** Residents who have studied O'Connell's estimates of light spillage say they are concerned that levels at some homes are excessive and that O'Connell estimates may not accurately state the impact of the lights. Residents are also concerned about excessive crowd noise levels in the evening.
- **Little community benefit.** Although O'Connell officials have said they might open the facility to the neighborhood, there will be so many restrictions that the use will be very limited. And since only 10 to 15 percent of O'Connell students are from Arlington, the vast majority of the overall benefit will not be to Arlington residents.

O'Connell officials have said the improvements are necessary so the school will be competitive with other schools. They say modern high schools need lights for their athletic fields.

But the residents against the proposal have researched the fields at the other schools in O'Connell's athletic conference and found that most of them (five of the other seven schools) do not have lights.

O'Connell officials and residents who are against the proposal met separately with County Board members in late December. The Board is scheduled to consider the issue at its meeting January 22.

Beyond the issues listed above, many residents have been most concerned about the serious "procedural shortcomings" or "shortcuts" in the O'Connell proposal. O'Connell submitted its use permit application in July and the proposal was scheduled for a September Board hearing. Many residents received no notice of the proposal and were wholly unaware of the application prior to the originally scheduled hearing. In the use permit application itself, in response to the County's request that O'Connell indicate whether it had received "letters in support" from the civic associations, O'Connell simply checked "not applicable."

*Continued on Page 4*

Despite the very significant renovation/re-construction of its fields and the construction of supporting infrastructure (including lights), O'Connell characterized its application as a "minor modification" of its existing permit. Even more significant to community residents, O'Connell described its permit as seeking simply to "light existing fields" for "high school uses." It later became clear -- after questions were raised by community residents -- that O'Connell was "partnering" with Marymount University and the County Department of Parks and Recreation for collegiate use of its new fields, and for use by youth and adult leagues. Even more recently, O'Connell has conceded that it is lighting the fields for NCAA events, which requires higher levels of illuminance than for high school programs. Thus, O'Connell has grudgingly acknowledged that it is proposing not to light its fields for high school uses, but to re-construct, re-orient and enlarge its fields, and light them for evening events throughout the year by a variety of user groups.

Despite the fact that O'Connell's proposal will have profound implications for the quality of life of residents living near the school, O'Connell did not approach this issue like a good neighbor, which would have involved seeking their views and undertaking a careful examination of the proposal's potential adverse effects and ways to mitigate them. In taking the approach it did, O'Connell sacrificed a considerable measure of trust.

That trust has not been restored through O'Connell's belated invitation to the civic associations to meet with O'Connell to discuss neighborhood concerns. Although O'Connell has prepared a draft memorandum of understanding to limit, to some extent, some of the more egregious effects of its original proposal, O'Connell still has failed to propose or produce for community review careful studies that fully examine potential effects of the proposal on traffic safety, light and noise pollution, among others.

To learn more, visit:  
<http://noadverseimpact.blogspot.com/>

## Realtors Predict Decline in Home Values

By Bill Adair

To determine the impact of the O'Connell plan on home values, neighbors of the private school turned to the group that would know best: Arlington real estate agents.

We recently conducted a survey of Arlington real estate agents (46 responded to our survey) and asked them if the O'Connell proposal for lights and stadium expansion would increase, decrease or have no effect on our home values.

The results surprised us. Not only did an overwhelming majority of agents (80 percent) say the values would decline for the first row of homes that are adjacent to the private school, but a strong majority (65 percent) said the values will decline for all homes in the first block.

And a substantial number of agents believe the impact will be even broader. Thirty-five percent said homes within three blocks will decline.

The agents expect significant declines in home prices. On average, they expect that prices for the first row homes will decline by 11 percent, which works out to about \$72,000 for a typical home.

Homes in the first block will decline by 9 percent, or slightly more than \$60,000.

The full study can be read at  
<http://noadverseimpact.blogspot.com/>

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# Bishop O'Connell's Fact Sheet on Athletic Fields Renovation Project

A four-page fact sheet outlining the athletic fields renovation project is posted on Bishop O'Connell's website. The following are excerpts. To read the full document, visit [www.bishopoconnell.org](http://www.bishopoconnell.org).

The renovation project, in partnership with Marymount University, includes the following:

- Redevelopment of the current rectangular field to include a new synthetic turf playing surface.
- Enlargement of the current rectangular field to provide regulation width for soccer.
- Construction of a new six-lane competition track including a six-lane straight away, to replace the existing asphalt track.
- Installation of a new bleacher system to replace current bleachers – capacity 1200.
- Permit request for installation of 4 light poles for the rectangular field, all within the 25' setback.
- Reorientation of the baseball field to reduce offsite baseball infringements and to improve play orientation for safety purposes. The baseball field will also include synthetic turf surface.
- Installation of new bleachers for baseball – capacity 246.
- Permit request for installation of 7 light poles for the baseball field, all within the 25' setback.

## Athletic Field Lighting

High quality lighting will be installed in order to take advantage of the latest advances in reducing glare and light trespass into surrounding areas. The lighting will also be designed and constructed to control sky glow and glare with the use of external shielding. There will be separate lighting controls for each field. Field lighting will only be turned on for a particular field if there is a scheduled activity.

Hours of use of lights:

- Regardless of season, lights will not be turned on Sunday nights.
- Use of the rectangular field will be scheduled to end at 9:30 pm Mon through Thurs and 10:30 pm Fri and Sat.
- Use of the baseball field will be scheduled to end at 9:00 pm Mon through Thurs and 10:00 pm Fri & Sat from Sept 21 through March 20.

- Use of the baseball field will be scheduled to end at 10:00 pm Mon through Thurs and 10:30 pm Fri and Sat March 21 through Sept. 20.

## Athletic Field Sound System

The new sound system will consist of directional, low output and low dispersion speakers that will be positioned to control sound levels at the bleachers and reduce sound travel to neighboring properties. The sound level will be set so that it cannot exceed the levels permitted by the Arlington County Noise Ordinance. To the extent possible, the PA system will not be used after 9:00 pm, Mon through Thurs nor after 10:30 pm Fri and Sat.

## Landscaping & Decorative Fencing

Bishop O'Connell will plant extensive landscaping on Trinidad and 26<sup>th</sup> Street adjacent to the renovated fields in a more aesthetically pleasing manner than currently exists. Decorative fencing will be installed around the perimeter of the property on 26<sup>th</sup> Street and Underwood Street and along the north side of the fields.

## Parking Management Plan

To address parking at high attendance field events at the school, attendees will be discouraged from parking on 27<sup>th</sup> Street, Underwood, Trinidad or 26<sup>th</sup> Street. Students will be encouraged to park on campus.

## Community Use

The track will remain open to the general public while the fields are in use from 7 am until field activity has ended, including Sundays, except for daytime use when school is in session and unless the activity on the rectangular field is deemed dangerous for track users.

Quarterly meeting will be convened with neighbors to share information and discuss concerns for the first year and longer if needed. For information, please contact:

- Katy Prebble, President, 703-237-1400, [kprebble@bishopoconnell.org](mailto:kprebble@bishopoconnell.org)
- Joe Vorbach, Principal, 703-237-1400, [jvorbach@bishopoconnell.org](mailto:jvorbach@bishopoconnell.org)

## O'Connell Plan Likely to Cause Parking Shortage

As part of its plan to install lights and create a larger sports complex to host NCAA events with Marymount University, Bishop O'Connell High School plans to enlarge its stadium and shrink its parking lot.

So residents of the neighborhood have recently conducted a study that calculates the parking impact. The study finds that the expanded stadium will bring hundreds of cars to nighttime events, overwhelming the school's limited parking lots and forcing more than 400 cars to seek parking on our streets.

With O'Connell expanding the stadium, the study finds that 850 cars will come to the school for a typical nighttime football game. But O'Connell's lots -- which will lose about 50 spaces because of the expansion -- will only hold 447 cars. So the remaining 403 cars will seek parking on neighborhood streets.

The study shows that even if people attending O'Connell events take every available parking space on the streets near the school, there will still be such a shortage that they will have to park in the outer ring of streets far from the school.

The parking shortage could have a domino effect. As O'Connell events clog neighborhood streets, many residents will be unable to find a place to park near their home. That could make them likely to seek further parking restrictions (the current zone protections end at 5 p.m.). But that in turn could cause attendees for the O'Connell events to park on streets farther and farther away.

### How Are Neighbors Reacting?

Former WCA President Ellen Jones has been going door to door speaking with residents about the O'Connell proposal and has found that neighbors are just as concerned about traffic, parking, pedestrian safety, and noise as they were 10 years ago when she conducted a survey of residents as part of the WCA Neighborhood Conservation Plan. Then, and now, WCA members have expressed how much they prize a quiet neighborhood. Here's what she reports:

- Many residents she spoke with had been unaware of O'Connell's plans, and others who had heard about it felt they needed more information.

*Cont'd on Page 7*

## Why I am Against the O'Connell Lights

*By John Seymour*

I have lived with my family on North 27<sup>th</sup> Street, within one-half block of the O'Connell High School, for more than 20 years. For us, the neighborhood has been a haven of peace and quiet, particularly in the night-time. O'Connell's proposal to light its sports fields, and to partner with Marymount University (for college practices and games) and potentially with the County Department of Parks and Recreation (for youth and adult leagues), will change our quality of life markedly for the worse.

Light pollution from the 11 tall light poles and noise pollution from the enlarged bleachers and enhanced public address system are expected to be substantial -- particularly for close-in neighbors. Numerous studies have shown that noise and light pollution cause sleep disturbances and learning delays in children. A parking study conducted by residents confirmed that the proposal will bring in many more vehicles and that parking problems on neighborhood streets will worsen dramatically. Traffic during the evening hours will also increase significantly, presenting real safety hazards to neighborhood children. The "traffic calming" measures recently introduced in the neighborhood to address day-time traffic problems originating (in large part) with O'Connell students will be overwhelmed by the new volume of cars.

In return for a significant and irreversible decline in the quality of life of neighborhood residents and a substantial financial sacrifice, two private institutions (O'Connell and Marymount) receive modestly enhanced sports experiences for their students. To most of us, that does not appear to be sensible public policy, or fair treatment of long-term neighborhood residents.

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*Continued from Page 6*

- Some residents who expressed support for the O'Connell project or who said they were neutral did not think that their homes would be immediately affected. One resident expressed the hope that O'Connell would open up their fields to community sports teams.
  - Not surprisingly, opposition to the O'Connell proposal was strongest closer to the school. Neighbors three or four blocks away from the school are worried about noise and parking issues. The parking impact study, showing that the school's plan will cause parking shortages on neighboring streets during game times, has increased that concern.
  - Some residents she spoke with who live more than three blocks from the school feel they won't be directly affected by the light from the new stadium. However, they are concerned about what would come with the lights and the expanded sports facilities: traffic, noise, and parking problems.
  - Marymount University's involvement in the athletic field expansion came as a surprise to some residents. Many residents she spoke with who have no major objection to Friday night high school football games are opposed to sharing their neighborhood with a college sports facility, primarily because the college's involvement would greatly increase use of the fields and the associated traffic, pedestrian safety, and parking problems.
  - Another concern that surfaced during the petition drive was a sense that Arlington County officials are getting ready to make a decision about O'Connell's plans without doing the kind of detailed impact studies that were required for the renovation of Yorktown High School's fields.
- In short, Ellen found that while many Williamsburg neighbors are sympathetic with the school's desire to improve its athletic fields, they feel that the school's needs should not outweigh the community's interest in maintaining its quality of life.

**WCA Officers:**

President: Sonia McCormick  
Vice President: VACANT  
Treasurer: Jim Toronto  
Secretary: VACANT  
Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee (NCAC) Representative: Paul Cullen  
Immediate Past President, Webmaster and Representative to the EFC Planning Committee: Mark Moran

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**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FOR WILLIAMSBURG CIVIC ASSOCIATION**

The purpose of the Williamsburg Civic Association is to promote the welfare of our community and its residents. We do this by holding meetings, issuing this newsletter, and interacting with the Arlington County Civic Federation, Arlington County Board, and a variety of local and regional organizations. You can support our efforts by paying your annual dues of only \$10 per household. Please tear off this sheet and mail it along with your check (made payable to Williamsburg Civic Association) to our treasurer, Jim Toronto, at 3577 Powhatan St., N., Arlington, VA 22213. You also can pay at the general membership meeting. **(Note: You must be current on your dues to vote.)**

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- Working on conservation plan projects
- Organizing social events
- Helping with the newsletter