

**To** Wayland Zoning Board of Appeals

**From:** John Sax - President of the Willow Brook Condominium Association

**Date:** February 22, 2021

**Subject: Comments on the Weston and Sampson February 26 2019 submission to the ZBA on 198-501.2 and 198-606.2 compliance for the Loker turf field project (ZBA case 18-27).**

In their submission dated February 26, 2019, Weston and Sampson makes a number of inaccurate claims about the Loker field project's compliance with By-Law 198-501.2 Signs and Exterior Lighting and By-Law 198-606.21-606.210. These claims are an attempt to hide the dramatically destructive effect the project will have on the property and the surrounding neighborhood. In addition to the inaccuracies which are described below, the letter makes an assumption that that there are no limits that could be placed on the field project that would allow the project to conform to the By-Law regulations.

The most important limit the ZBA could impose is a smaller standard field size. The proposed field size of 110 yards by 63 yards does not conform to a standard soccer field size for any age group. It is simply the field size that will fit at Loker without impinging on the no-go zone of the conservation land. The proposed dimensions are closest to the 91 meters by 55 meters (99.518 yards 60.148 yards) for the U15/U16 age group. Reducing the proposed field size to the standard for U15/U16 age group size would significantly reduce the adverse impact of the project (see map in figure 1). Specifically, it would:

- Significantly reduce tree and vegetation removal
- Significantly reduce soil movement and removal
- Better protect the wetlands by avoiding the wetlands buffer zone. Doing so will protect the habitat of a Vernal Pool in the north of the property
- Improve scenic views by leaving some of the larger trees as a visual barrier to screen views from adjacent properties
- Minimize the loss of open space
- Make it possible to use the Rice Road property entrance for emergency vehicles. The current single access road is quite narrow (see photograph of figures 2 and 3). Crowding during peak traffic periods in the current design will make it extremely difficult for emergency vehicles to get to the field or the parking lot. Confusion caused by children walking around in the dark makes a serious accident dangerously likely. (see comments in the section **Standard(5)** below.)

Detailed comments on sections of the By-Laws can be found below:

#### **By-Law 198-501.2 Signs and Exterior Lighting**

While the lighting is designed to minimize the effect on the surrounding property, adding stadium lights to an area of a single residence neighborhood that is now unlit, will dramatically change the night time environment of the property. In addition, the trees that might have limited the visibility of the stadium lights will be cut down to make room for the field. The effect will be dramatic for neighboring properties because the night view of the property will change from complete darkness where trees on the property are only barely visible to a lit athletic field with almost no trees to screen the view of the field. There will also be a dramatic effect on the wildlife that now thrives in the conservation land particularly in the area around the Vernal Pool.

## **By-Law 198-606.21-606.210**

### **A. Minimize use of wetlands, steep slopes, flood plains and hilltops**

As proposed the project will dramatically change the landscape of the property. Currently there is a grassy area on the Rice Road side of the property with a somewhat steep but walkable slope to a parking area. The configuration of the field will extend the elevated area much closer to the parking lot and create a very steep 15-foot slope to the parking lot. The slope will not be walkable and will require a retaining wall in some places. In addition, the parking lot will be extended to the east in an area which now has a much lower elevation than the parking lot. This will create a very steep drop on the east side of the parking lot.

The removal of trees on the north side of the field will destroy a Vernal Pool on the north side of the property because the fauna that breed in the Vernal Pool live in the wooded area provided by those trees. Removing the trees will destroy their habitat. The two Conservation Commission denials for the project in 2019 were in part because of the destruction of the Vernal Pool habitat.

Reducing the field size to 91 meters by 55 meters of a U15/U16 standard field will result in slopes that are less steep and limit damage to the wetlands on the property by reducing the number of trees that need to be removed. Reducing the parking lot eastward extension would eliminate a steep slope as well as save a number of trees.

### **C. Maximize the retention of open space**

Contrary to the claim made by Weston and Sampson, the footprints of the field and the parking lot are as large as they could possibly be without building on conservation land. The field and parking lot both overlap the conservation land buffer zone. The claim that the field has to be the size it is to be a regulation field is inaccurate. The proposed field size of 110 yards by 63 yards does not conform to a standard soccer field size for any age group. It is simply the field size that will fit at Loker without impinging on conservation land.

The proposed field and the parking lot size will leave so little open space that it will be impossible to replace all of the trees that must be cut down on conservation land as required by town By-Laws.

The project design is so crammed into the designated recreation area that there is no space left at the proposed field for the safe placement of spectator seating, equipment storage or portable toilets. It is unacceptable for the applicant to omit such standard features in the current site plan and then after project construction seek to add them.

The proposed dimensions are closest to the 91 meters by 55 meters for the U15/U16 age group. Reducing the proposed field size to the standard for U15/U16 age groups would significantly reduce the adverse impact of the project (see map in figure 1).

### **D. Preserve Scenic views**

The removal of 391 trees as well as the addition of stadium light towers will completely destroy the scenic view on the Commonwealth Avenue side of the property. The removal of trees on the Rice road side of the property will leave a very thin stand of trees between the field and the road. The

Town Planner has stated publicly that the field will be clearly visible to anyone from Rice road. A smaller field would preserve more screening trees on the property.

**E. Minimize tree, vegetation and soil removal, blasting and grade change.**

Weston and Sampson's claim that only some of the trees to be cut down have 24-inch diameter breast height ((DBH) obfuscates the fact that these larger trees are on the periphery of the proposed field. These trees currently screen the grassy area from view on both Rice Road and Commonwealth Avenue. Many of these larger trees would not have to be removed if the field size were reduced.

Construction of the field and the parking lot will require a significant amount of excavation in some areas and the addition of fill-in others. The profile of the landscape will change dramatically. The view of the field from the parking lot will be comparable to the view a behind the recycling transfer station at the town dump. While pedestrians can now climb the hill between the parking lot and the top of the grassy area, the slope will become so steep that a stairway has to be added in addition to a long winding walkway because it will be too difficult to climb the hill. The slope at the northeast corner of the field is so steep it will require a retaining wall to keep it in place.

Weston and Sampson fails to mention that the large amount of ledge on the property may require blasting. A blasting budget was originally included in the project cost estimate. It was dropped to reduce projected cost at the same time the lighting along the access road was dropped from the design.

**F. Screen objectionable features from adjacent properties**

While claiming that some trees on the Commonwealth Avenue side of the property will remain, Weston and Sampson fails to mention that the trees that actually screen the view are at the top of the hill on the edge of the field and will be removed. The trees that are left on the Commonwealth Road side are at a much lower elevation and will therefore not hide the field from view. There will also be so few trees left on the Rice Road side of the field to obscure the view of the field on that side.

**Standard (3): Prevent pollution of surface water, groundwater and minimize erosion and sedimentation. Maximize groundwater recharge and prevent any increase in the rate of volume and runoff.**

The Conservation Commission hired BSC Group to act as a consultant on storm water management issues for the Loker project. As stated in the August 11, 2018 and September 26 2018 letters by BSC Group, the proposed storm water infusion system does not meet Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) requirements. There is no evidence that the soil depth below the storm water diffusion system is sufficient for proper operation. In addition, the July 16 2019 DEP denial of an appeal of a Conservation Commission denial for chapter 193 permit request for the 24 School Street 40B housing project provides another data point on what the DEP regulations require for a storm water management system design at Loker.

The DEP's decision on the 24 School Street project appeal by the developer cites the failure to prove that it is possible to have a 2 foot soil depth and 6 inches of gravel under the storm water diffusion system as a reason for the appeal denial. It also cites the fact that the location of the storm water diffusion system under the driveway of the 24 School Street property is not compliant because static

and dynamic load from traffic on the driveway will damage the storm water diffusion chambers. The proposed Loker field design has the same compliance problem because it places the storm water diffusion system under the parking lot which will carry much more traffic than a driveway. It is clear from the BSC letters and the DEP appeal denial for the 24 School Street project that the proposed Loker storm water management system must be redesigned to be compliant with DEP regulations. At the very least the design should include several feet of gravel above the diffusion chambers to dampen vibrations in addition to the required the soil and gravel depth under the chambers. This would require that ledge be at least 10 feet below the current surface of the parking lot. Since all of the test holes dug by Weston and Sampson hit ledge at depth between 4 and 6 feet it is very unlikely that a DEP compliant storm water management system could be built at loker.

**Standard (5): Provide safe vehicular and pedestrian movement with the site and adjacent ways.**

While the traffic model tool used to assess the field's impact on traffic meets legal guidelines for traffic analysis, it does not accurately measure the impact of the Loker field traffic to the surrounding roads. It therefore misses some seriously dangerous conditions. Based on my experience creating discrete even traffic simulation software for the U.S. Department of Transportation, I believe the simplistic model used by Weston and Sampson does not accurately measure the effect of the narrow winding access road from Commonwealth Avenue up to the parking lot.

As shown in the picture in figures 2 and 3 the access road is barely wide enough for two cars and would not accommodate two-way traffic if one of the vehicles is a bus, minibus, ambulance or fire truck. The narrow winding access road will force cars to move very slowly to and from the parking lot. This will result in a significant backup on the access road during peak traffic periods. In addition, drivers coming from the west on Commonwealth Avenue will have to cross a lane of rush hour traffic to pull into the access road. Since cars will come in clusters around game time, traffic will back up on Commonwealth Avenue as Loker bound cars wait to enter the congested access road. The speed of east-moving traffic on Commonwealth Avenue will approach the speed of cars moving up the access road to the parking lot.

On bad traffic days this will result in gridlock at the Rice Road intersection which will back Commonwealth Avenue traffic up for miles in both directions.

**With that kind of congestion, it is likely that some parents will try to avoid being late for a game by dropping off their children in locations along the side of the roads or on the access road. The lack of a sidewalk will force the children to walk up the narrow access road as cars move to and from the parking lot. This would be particularly hazardous at night because there is no of lighting on the access road.**

**As shown in figure 3, peak traffic congestion on the narrow access road will also make it very difficult for an emergency vehicle the size of an ambulance or a fire truck to reach the field or parking lot. There is not enough room for cars to pull over to the side on the access road to get out of the path of a firetruck or ambulance. To get out of the way cars would have to move to the parking lot assuming there is enough room there. Some cars moving down the road will have to back up the hill around a sharp turn to get out of the way. The confusion caused by children walking around on the unlit access road as drivers rush to make way for an emergency vehicle makes a serious accident a likely possibility.**

**As shown on the map in Figure 1 a smaller field would allow the use of the Rice Road exit for emergency vehicles. That would eliminate the possibility of cars and pedestrians blocking access to emergency vehicles.**

Figure 1

Proposed Turf field 110yds by 63yds

Smaller Field 100yds by 60yds

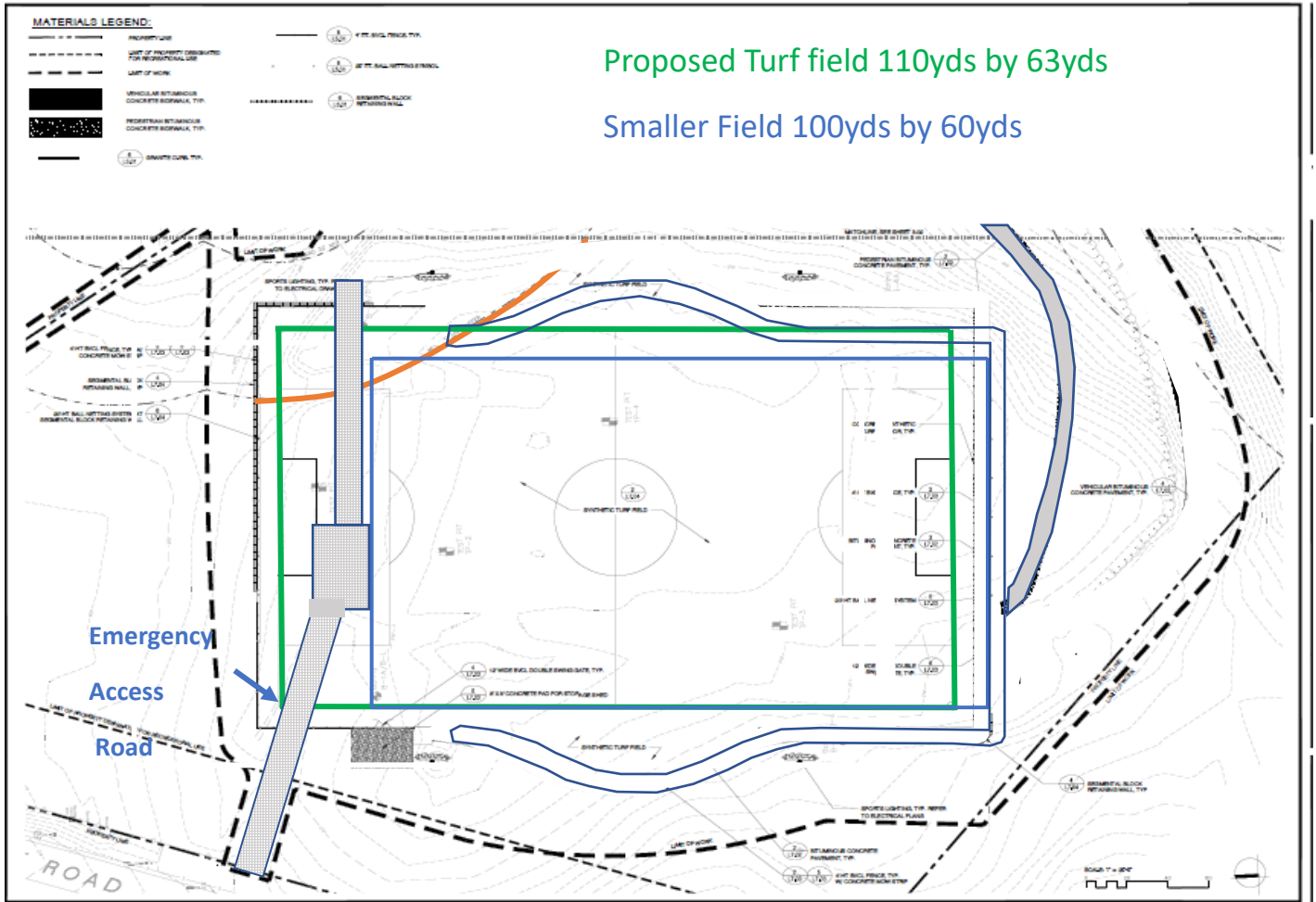
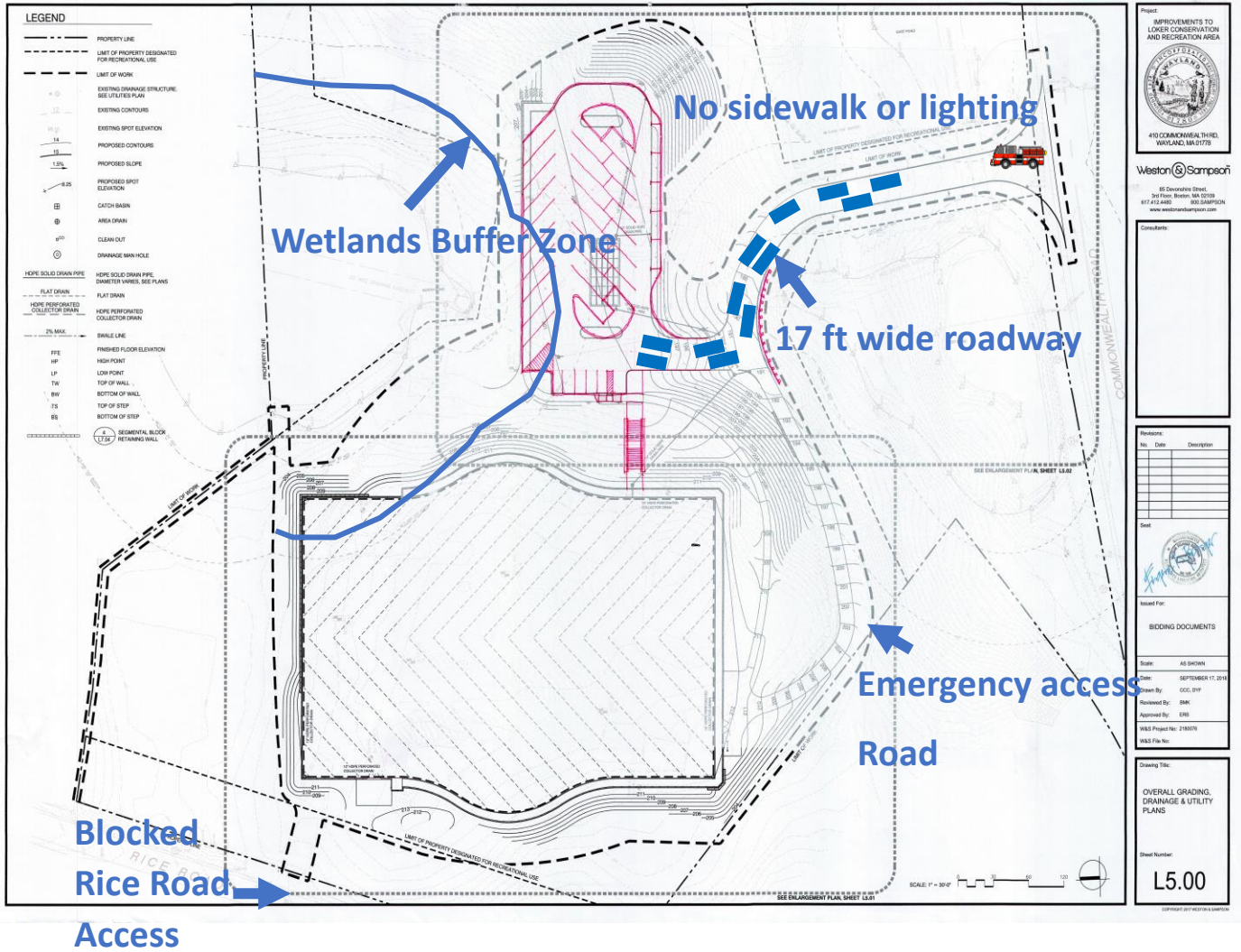


Figure 2



Figure 3



Project: IMPROVEMENTS TO LOWER CONSERVATION AND RECREATION AREA

410 COMMINGALE THIRD, WYLAND, MD 21778

Weston & Sampson

85 Severnside Street, 2nd Floor, Bethesda, MD 20814  
 410 COMMINGALE THIRD, WYLAND, MD 21778  
 410 COMMINGALE THIRD, WYLAND, MD 21778  
 410 COMMINGALE THIRD, WYLAND, MD 21778

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