

MERION COMMUNITY COALITION

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MERION COMMUNITY COALITION APPLAUDS LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP ZONING HEARING BOARD'S DENIAL OF SAINT JOSEPH'S UNIVERSITY'S APPEAL

MERION, PA (March 31, 2009) –The Merion Community Coalition (MCC) today expressed its satisfaction following the Lower Merion Township Zoning Hearing Board's (ZHB) decision last Thursday evening (March 26), which ruled Saint Joseph's University's (SJU) plans to upgrade the sports fields on its newly acquired Maguire Campus would require additional zoning approval. The decision validates MCC's position that the University's latest plans, which include many modifications to the existing sports fields, represent an expanded use and are not covered by the ZHB's previous decision in March 2006. At that time, the University was in the process of purchasing the property and stated publicly that it would not require any construction or physical changes.

The MCC today also reiterated its support for the use of the sports fields by SJU students as long as the use is similar to that of Episcopal Academy, as the University represented in its original application to the ZHB in 2005. The opposition to the University's plans stemmed from the proposed increase in use and scope, and from the addition of three public address (PA) sound systems, increased traffic, larger crowds of spectators and significantly more weekend games.

Since its formation last July, the MCC has raised a number of legitimate concerns to SJU and to Lower Merion Township officials, asking the University to take them into consideration and to revise its plans.

"We thank our many neighbors and friends who have shown overwhelming support," said Lauren Wylonis, MCC board member. "The Zoning Hearing Board upheld that the law applies equally to all neighbors, even institutional ones. There are no 'stealth special exceptions.' We are hopeful St. Joseph's will come to the table and begin to work with us."

The MCC, representing more than 375 individuals, has attempted to engage in a dialogue with SJU to present neighbors' concerns. The University organized a number of neighborhood meetings in 2008 during which it presented its plans, but never addressed the neighbors' main concerns: the PA systems, the crowds and weekend games. With one exception in September, neighbors or MCC representatives did not have the opportunity to sit face-to-face and discuss its concerns with University representatives.

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