

Staff Editorial: Students need a say in Maguire use

By The Hawk Staff

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For almost two years, Saint Joseph's University administrators and members of the Merion Community Coalition (MCC) have duked it out over the proper use of Maguire Campus. The former Episcopal Academy campus is home to 38 acres of land, perfect for classrooms, student spaces, and athletic fields.

Well, that was the plan at least.

St. Joe's argues that the fields on Maguire Campus—particularly the baseball field located by Latches Lane and Raynham Road—will be used in a similar manner to those once used by Episcopal Academy (EA). Neighbors, led by the MCC, say that renovated fields with bleachers and a sound system would be an egregious departure from EA's use in years prior.

Something's been missing amidst all of the prolonged zoning hearings, heated exchanges, and legal jargon, though: the voice of students.

It's not just student athletes that have been affected by the battle over Maguire Campus' use. All of us should have a say in how Maguire Campus is utilized—after all, it's our tuition dollars (as well as a gift from James Maguire) that helped us procure the property from EA.

In March of 2009, Lauren Wylonis, a member of the MCC, talked about the lack of involvement on the part of Saint Joseph's students. "It's not rocket science. I bet if I got together a group of 20 St. Joe's students, they could figure out a solution to this in a week," Wylonis said. "[The students] would do a better job than the administration and I'd take them to negotiate with any day. It's just about being reasonable. There's a reasonable middle ground where everybody can come out benefiting."

We're not siding with the MCC in any way—there's been unreasonableness on both sides of this suburban battle—but we agree with Wylonis' sentiment that students should be consulted in these negotiations. Zoning board hearings held in Lower Merion may be open to the public, but they're far from engaging for anyone—especially students.

A middle ground must exist. Neighbors need to understand that St. Joe's has good intentions with these athletic fields. Any Division 1 baseball program needs a proper field, and one without speakers would be an oddity to say the least. But there also needs to be greater sympathy for the concerns of neighbors. In this tough economy, every little factor can make a difference in the value of people's homes. Neighbors should be concerned about a loud speaker system, but they shouldn't deny the university the right to have one at all. Limited hours of use with lower decibels might be an option that has gone previously unconsidered.

Moving forward, it would be wise for both sides—neighbors and university officials—to turn to the students who will ultimately make use of these contested 38 acres. Increased dialogue between these groups and Saint Joseph's students should become a high priority moving forward.

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