

Proposed BEVS practice field update: Traffic study, storm water, pedestrian access, design details

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By Paula Pyzik Scott

The Bluffton Schools presented plans for a 1.2 acre artificial turf practice field to the Village of Bluffton Planning Commission on July 22. According to Superintendent Greg Denecker, Village of Bluffton public meetings are how the public will learn about the project. The schools are requesting Village permissions for the closure of Vine St., council approval of the project and application for variances on elements such as light posts and fence heights.

To date, school board meetings have addressed the purchase of two residential properties and the demolition of two houses, which took place earlier this year. A budget for the project has not been announced.

A July 28 public hearing on the vacation of Vine St. before the Village of Bluffton council has been scheduled for 7:05 p.m. at Bluffton Town Hall.

The July 22 meeting was attended by some 14 individuals who were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments. This included two Bluffton School Board members, Alice Basinger and Brad Dailey.

The discussion picked up threads from prior public meetings regarding traffic impacts, storm water runoff and pedestrian access from Lawn to Jackson near Vine St. The planning commission received information suggesting that all three of these functions could be managed with the proposed design.

Also discussed were the impact of introducing a large athletic field to central Bluffton and the benefit of having Bluffton Schools centrally located.

Consulting engineer Dean Frederick and School Superintendent Greg Denecker also provided information about chain link and privacy fencing, a section of higher screen to block soccer balls from a neighboring property, lighting of the field and general plans for use before or after school by athletic teams and the marching band.

Denecker said that the facility would not be used for games and that it would not have a sound system. Lights would be turned off by 9:00 p.m.

The members of the Planning Commission, Roger Edwards, Tim Essinger and Mitch Kingsley, were provided with several pages of large format designs. These plans are available for public viewing at Bluffton Town Hall.

TRAFFIC STUDY

At the Village's request, a traffic study was conducted by Lima Allen County Regional Planning (LACRP) while school was in session, May 15-20, 2025. A count malfunction did not provide a result for Lawn Ave. An average of 159 vehicles/day was counted on Vine St. LACRP found that this number of cars could easily be absorbed by other streets.

Public comment included the observation that traffic on Lawn is heavy compared to other Bluffton streets. Alice Basinger asked if removing access to Lawn via Vine St. would actually reduce traffic there.

STORM WATER DRAINAGE

Consulting engineer Dean Frederick provided information on how the field design would work during heavy rainfall when water currently flows down Vine St. toward Lawn Ave. The proposed design includes a 1-foot curb where Vine St. would end at mid-field. The curb will be 1 foot higher than the two catch basins at that part of the road and water will go onto the field if it is higher than the curb.

The 1.2 acre field would have a base of 10 inches of aggregate (stone) that Fredericks said is "like Swiss cheese" and holds some water. The field would include a 12" perforated trench drain with a 6" outlet to catch basins on Lawn Ave. The overall impact of the field was expected to be an improvement over current storm water management because it reduces the amount of impermeable surface that makes up Vine St.

Public comment included questions about how well the aging storm drains in the project area are functioning and whether they need to be upgraded.

PEDESTRIAN IMPACTS

The proposed field would create a .2 mile long block from Franklin to Elm St. and eliminate direct pedestrian access currently provided by Vine St. Superintendent Denecker said that pedestrians would be able to use a walkway through the school playground from Lawn to Vine when students are not outside for recess or other activities, about 3.5 hours per day. The walkway gate would be closed at these times.

Public comment included the observation that lighting of the field and noise are serious concerns for neighbors. The lighting design is for practice field levels, which are not as bright as for games, and light pole height has been calculated to reduce glare from the field.

ADDITIONAL APPROVAL PROCESSES

Village Administrator and Zoning Officer Jesse Blackburn said that several aspects of the design would require approval of variances from Bluffton ordinances:

- Permanent structures required to be 25 feet away from other lots

- Height regulation of 30 feet; light poles design is 34 feet
- Extension of 6 foot fence; code requires 4 foot
- 20 x 8 foot ball screen on northeast side of field (similar to Steinmetz field)

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