



MKA unveils field overhaul



Montclair Kimberley Academy's plans to reconfigure its fields next to the middle school were unveiled last week.

COURTESY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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Montclair Kimberley Academy's plans to reconfigure and upgrade its baseball and softball fields have been met with concerns from neighbors, primarily over the height of fencing and temporary screening.

The MKA Middle School on Valley Road applied for a use variance with the Board of Adjustment to reconfigure

the multipurpose playing fields at two corner lots, between Central Avenue, Brunswick Road and Valley Road. Several other variances are needed for the location of new dugouts, and heights of goal posts and proposed fencing.

“We have no choice with the location of the dugouts and the fencing is needed for safety,” said MKA’s attorney Alan Trembulak.

“Currently the fields overlap. This would make it so that the teams can play at the same time. Another improvement, that would also benefit the neighbors, would be improvements to the drainage,” said Trembulak.

The 8.82-acre property contains the MKA middle school, a parking lot and playing fields including tennis courts and other recreation areas.

The property has about 597 feet of frontage along Valley Road, 609 feet of frontage along Brunswick Road and 554 feet of frontage along Central Avenue. The baseball and softball fields are used by both the MKA upper school’s teams as well as the middle school’s. The fields are also used for middle school football and soccer games in the fall.

In addition, new dugouts, fencing and artificial turf will be added. The drainage issues will also be corrected. Last spring, the fields could not be used 33 out of the 56 planned days due to flooding, said MKA CFO Katherine Davidson. New lighting will not be added.

The property is in a one-family zone district, but private schools are a permitted conditional use in the zone. MKA requests a conditional use variance to locate an outdoor play area less than the minimum 50-foot setback from the property line and a setback of eight feet from the property line to the outdoor play area.

MKA also requires a variance to locate accessory structures within the front yard. The applicant proposes to locate the football goal posts and the baseball dugouts in the front yard along Central Avenue.

In the way of fencing, the applicant requires relief of the maximum permitted height of six feet for fencing on a school property for the following fence installations: Three sections of 10-foot chain link fencing, one along the proposed softball field and two along the proposed baseball field; and four sections of safety screen removable fencing supported by permanent posts, one 20-foot section and three 30-foot sections.

In addition, the fencing for the two proposed backstops at the baseball and softball fields will have a height of 15.5 feet and 14.5 feet, respectively. The applicant also proposes to install a 4.5-foot fence atop a two-foot retaining wall.

Resident David Parker voiced concerns over the fencing contending “the change to the aerial landscape would affect the views for all the neighbors.”

The applicant requests a variance of maximum permitted height of an accessory structure of 15 feet in order to install the two football goal posts, which are planned to be 30 feet in height.

Due to the height proposed of both the temporary and proposed stationary fencing, the board suggested that the applicant re-notice and come back before the board at its next meeting Wednesday, Feb. 5. They also suggested that some sort of sound test be conducted since two games could be played at once with the proposed plan.