

Planners in Walkertown delay action on seven-classroom pod

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JOURNAL REPORTER

Thursday, April 12, 2007

The principal at Walkertown Middle School said she is looking forward to a seven-classroom pod that could help relieve overcrowding, but the town's planning board postponed action on the request last week because of concerns about the pod's location.

Planning-board members questioned the placement of the pod close to the football field and asked if students would be at risk if they decided to walk across the parking lot and bus lane to get to the main part of the school.

The planning board wants school officials to explain how the pod will fit on the site during its May meeting, but school officials cautioned this week that time is slipping by to get the pod ready in time for school next fall.

"We could go behind the building and put it back there but it would cost \$50,000 in fire hydrants and roads and everything else," said Gene Miller, the superintendent of operations for Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools. "In a couple years, everything is going to be redone because a high school will go in there. I hate to throw away \$50,000 of the taxpayers' money."

The site beside the football field is level, but the one behind the school would have to be graded, school officials said. They see placing the pod near the field as a cost-saving advantage.

Some planning-board members said that the pod looked too close to the field or actually on part of it according to the drawing. Piper Hendrix, the principal of the school, said she had been assured that the pod would not interfere with the football field.

The pod placement would require the elimination of a softball field, Piper said, but the field is used mostly for practice. While the pod would be close to the football field nearby, play could still take place.

The school uses the football field for its physical-education classes. The Walkertown Wolfpack, a Pop Warner team, plays games on the field.

Dorez Thomas, a team official, said he was told that the pod placement would not prevent games being played on the field.

Hendrix said that the school is used to dealing with the concerns for student safety, and she is not concerned about moving the children in and out of the pod.

Students will use a sidewalk between the gymnasium and the cafeteria to get to the pod and won't be walking across the parking lot, she said. When it rains, the students will walk through the gym.

"They won't walk across the lot," she said. "We have eight trailers now and kids can go in all kinds of directions, but they don't because we are watching," Hendrix said. "All of that can be managed."

Students would stay in the pod most of the day, coming out for lunch and elective classes, she said.

Miller said that school officials will try again in May to get the board to approve the pod.

"If they wait much longer, we won't be able to get it set up in time," he said.

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