

August 7, 2019

Mr. Thomas P. West
Planning and Development Officer
City of Lewes
114 E. Third Street
Lewes, DE 19958

Dear Tom,

As a resident of Highland Acres since 2006, I am enthusiastic about the redevelopment of the historic Lewes School. Restoring the front façade of the Lewes School to its original appearance, removal of the outdated additions and structures, and the construction of a well-designed addition will be a wonderful esthetic improvement to this stretch of Savannah Road and to Sussex Drive.

Big projects offer big opportunities if they are recognized and planned for—this project has the potential to truly bring Highland Acres esthetically into the city. **Specifically--to make Sussex Drive a safe, residential street, esthetically comparable to DeVries Circle, instead of the badly maintained institutional extension of the schools' driveway and parking infrastructure that presently exists.**

The annexation of Highland Acres into the city was conditional—to be annexed, the residents of Highland Acres had to financially commit to bring our streets and utilities up to City of Lewes standards. For some neighbors, this was a formidable challenge, but having come together and done that, it is now time for the city to use this redevelopment opportunity to bring Sussex Drive up to the standards of other residential streets in Lewes from the intersection at Savannah Road, to the entrance of Highland Acres.

For many decades, the city had little reason to concern itself with Sussex Drive. The control of the street in the first two blocks was basically left to Cape Henlopen School District; the University of Delaware Residence Complex occupies and manages their development behind Shields; and then, there was Highland Acres, which was not part of the city, but was unincorporated Sussex County.

Under this arrangement, Cape Henlopen School District has used Sussex Drive as a school driveway and overflow parking lot. For some part of every day, the residents of Highland Acres regularly must run a gauntlet of open car doors, double parked vehicles, children darting from behind vehicles, and parents standing in the street having conversations, unaware of where their children are.

At peak demand, there is no orderliness to the parking, with some people parking parallel, some diagonally, and some double parked. During big events, people park on the grass at the entry of Highland Acres on private property. It is a dangerous situation, but these are all problems that can be successfully addressed as the city reviews the development of the project site plan, and, in concert with the police department, evaluates the parking needs and traffic flow.

There are other impacts to Sussex Drive as well; the athletic fields are heavily scheduled spring, summer and fall for community teams, youth programs, school teams and marching band practice, and for major regional sports events. Sussex Drive is also used for staging city parades, and by the Historic Lewes Farmers Market on inclement weekends and every weekend from September through the close of the Market just before Thanksgiving.

I love that Sussex Drive is a busy vibrant place. Our connectivity to town through the path across the school property, our connection to Blockhouse Pond and the Farmers Market, our hospitality to parades and school and community teams-all these should be preserved-but we have the opportunity to address the aesthetic, landscaping and traffic and safety issues and solve the problems that compromise safety and quality of life so that Sussex Drive can be brought up to the standards of DeVries Circle and other residential streets in Lewes.

Here are some specific, actionable suggestions for how this might be accomplished:

1. Develop a landscape plan for Sussex Drive between Savannah Road and the UD Housing to enhance and connect the Lewes community of Highland Acres to Savannah Road and the City of Lewes.
 - a. *Soften and beautify the roadside landscaping to the standards found on other residential streets in Lewes* instead of the commercial, unkempt appearance it currently has. By using small native trees as were selected for the median landscaping on DeVries Circle several years ago (Fringe tree, Sweet Bay Magnolias, etc) we can bring shade and beauty to this streetscape without interfering with power lines or other utilities.
 - b. *Encourage legal parking by keeping vehicles off of the landscaped verge* on each side of the road-this would improve safety for drivers on Sussex Drive and students and visitors using the athletic fields.

2. The Site Plan should include:
 - a. *A well designed and constructed sidewalk on the Lewes School side of Sussex Drive so that pedestrians have a safe place to walk to access the back athletic fields and the path to Blockhouse Pond and Dupont Avenue*
 - b. *Sufficient onsite parking to address current unmet parking needs for buses and cars, and to accommodate visitors and participants for events and athletic games and team practice using the athletic fields.*
 - c. *A dedicated bicycle/pedestrian path, as presently exists, between Sussex Drive Dupont Avenue, and Blockhouse Pond for school students, UD students/residents, Farmers Market visitors and the Highland Acres community to maintain connectivity to downtown Lewes.*
 - d. *Design all exterior lighting to illuminate downward to prevent night sky lighting and eliminate illumination into homes that back up to the athletic fields.*
3. Work with the police department to plan for and apply the same standards for parking and enforcement that is applied on all other streets in Lewes. This would alleviate the current problem of illegal parking and make the street safer for all users.
 - a. *Prohibit the parking of school buses on Sussex Drive overnight, weekends and during the summer months.*
 - b. *Prohibit vehicle access onto the dedicated ped/bike path and athletic fields.* In recent years, some people have been driving their vehicles off of Sussex Drive or Dupont Avenue onto the pedestrian/bike path to park next to the playing fields. This blocks access to the thru pathway and brings vehicles into an area where children and athletes are not expecting to have to watch for traffic-a conflict of use that compromises safety.
 - c. *Require shuttle service for organizers of major events held on the athletic fields to relieve parking demand.* Some major events use multiple fields/locations. Organizers should be required to run shuttle service between locations to reduce traffic and improve safety on Savannah Road and Sussex Drive.

I know that others in Highland Acres would also like to work with the city and the school district to make Sussex Drive a safe, welcoming place.

Thank you so much for your attention to these concerns and opportunities.

Respectfully,

Sally Boswell
69 Sussex Drive
Lewes, Delaware

cc Theodore W. Becker, Mayor
Ann Marie Townshend, City Manager