

Mr. Easton Ehlers  
Community Development Agency  
3501 Civic Center Drive  
San Rafael, CA 94903

August 21, 2024

Dear Mr. Ehlers,

I live on Corte Balboa in Greenbrae, and I am writing in regards to the Marin Catholic High School Design Review / Use Permit (P1123), which is now in the merits review phase. Along with dozens of my Greenbrae neighbors, I have serious concerns about this project, and about the lasting damage it will do to our community.

Marin Catholic has been in its current location for several decades now, and daytime use of its athletic fields has always been accepted by our community, including Saturday use. The school's academic, athletic and social life has flourished under this arrangement. But once again, Marin Catholic is seeking to undo these long-time friendly relations—solely for its own purposes and benefit.

The installation of the lights will significantly change the use of its campus, and night-time use will be fundamentally detrimental to the quality of life in our community. Neighbors of MC already experience practice and game noise during the daytime all week. Permanent lights would of course result in far more extensive use, and create a nightly din that would stretch well beyond the time when many younger children have gone to bed.

The MC lighted stadium proposal is also antithetical to several key points and goals in the Kentfield Greenbrae Community Plan (KGCP), as well as the Marin Countywide Plan (MCP). To cite just a few from the KGCP:

- *“Views from the surrounding single-family neighborhoods, Creekside Park, and the Corte Madera bicycle path should be protected.”*<sup>1</sup> The project will undeniably and permanently obstruct the views of many of the homes in Greenbrae.
- *“The land use section of the Plan attempts to reinforce the existing residential character of the community . . .”*<sup>2</sup> The proposed stadium is smack in the middle of a densely populated residential area. Its existence would not only fail to preserve the residential character of Greenbrae, it would significantly diminish it.
- *“Measures to reduce peak period traffic are encouraged.”*<sup>3</sup> The proposed stadium would seat 1,500 spectators, nearly all of whom would be traveling from outside of the local area by car. Even with the recent upgrade of Sir Francis Drake corridor, traffic still rates a grade of “C,” and the proposed nighttime games would significantly worsen congestion at peak hours.

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<sup>1</sup> Kentfield Greenbrae Community Plan, III-48

<sup>2</sup> Kentfield Greenbrae Community Plan, III-71

<sup>3</sup> Kentfield Greenbrae Community Plan, IV-1

Similarly, the Marin Countywide Plan lists several goals and points of importance for which a lighted MC stadium would not be in compliance:

➤ **GOAL: DES-4 Protection of Scenic Resources**

*Minimize visual impacts of development and preserve vistas of important natural features. Policy DES-4.1 Preserve Visual Quality. Protect scenic quality and views of the natural environment 3.5-13<sup>4</sup>*

The proposed project would significantly degrade the views of many if not most of the Greenbrae hillside homes. Daytime views of Mt. Tamalpais would be marred by the four, 80 foot metal poles, and nighttime views would be all but eliminated when the stadium is in use.

➤ **DES-4.c Regulate Mass and Scale**

*Ensure that the mass and scale of new structures respect environmental site constraints and character of the surrounding neighborhood (see Program DES-3.b).<sup>5</sup>*

The proposed project does not reflect respect for the character of the surrounding neighborhood in any way. On the contrary, the physical presence of the 80 foot poles, the added traffic congestion, the view-obscuring light pollution, and the stentorian late night crowd cheers would all detract from its character.

➤ **Riparian Conservation**

*Protect and, where possible, restore the natural structure and function of riparian systems. 2.4-22<sup>6</sup>*

The biological site assessment failed to consider any negative cumulative impacts, which would be required for an environmental report. Marin Catholic's suggestion that the environmental impact of four, 80-foot light towers and hundreds of night events annually would be "minimal" should itself raise a red flag.

Other Marin Countywide Plan goals would pose general challenges for the proposed project, including<sup>7</sup>:

- A Preserved and Restored Natural Environment
- A Reduced Ecological Footprint
- Less Traffic Congestion

Approximately 85 percent of MC students do not live in the local area, so Marin Catholic is not a community school. The sole beneficiary of this field lighting proposal is a private, parochial, non-tax paying school, not the community. Despite meeting with overwhelming opposition from the community on each of its previous failed attempts for stadium lights, the school continues to try to force this project on its neighbors, all the while calling itself a "good neighbor" and a "community school."

In an attempt to defend the proposal in the past, Marin Catholic has said that youth sports participation

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<sup>4</sup> Marin Countywide Plan, Community Design, 3.5-13

<sup>5</sup> Marin Countywide Plan, Community Design, 3.5-14

<sup>6</sup> Marin Countywide Plan, GOAL BIO-4, Biological Resources, 2.4-22

<sup>7</sup> Marin Countywide Plan, Framework 1.3-12

should be encouraged, not “politicized and demonized.” The opposition to this project has nothing whatsoever to do with youth sports and the ability of young people to participate in them, and I am in complete agreement that all youth sports should be encouraged. I deeply believe that the benefits of youth sports are many and lifelong.

On the contrary, my opposition to this project arises from three core concerns:

1. **Failure to comply with CEQA**

There is insufficient data and research to comply with CEQA regulations. A project of this magnitude and environmental impact is not exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”). Among those requirements is a detailed study of the cumulative impacts of the project on the immediate environment, a study which is critical in this case.

2. **Failure to comply with the KGCP and MCP**

The proposed project does not comply with several important components of the Kentfield Greenbrae Community Plan and the Marin Countywide Plan, as noted above. Chief among these is the general but fundamental principal of preserving the character of this neighborhood. The proposed project would do the opposite.

3. **An entitled approach completely inconsistent with our community**

Contrary to its claims, Marin Catholic has demonstrated that it is not a good neighbor. It is unyielding in its pursuit of projects that benefit MC, and pays mere lip service to the genuine concerns of its neighbors. Even if the “improvements” in lighting technology they describe are ultimately proven to diminish some light spillage, MC knows full well—like its neighbors in Greenbrae—that the central issue here is noise. No existing technology will diminish that, and that noise will be an unwelcome and permanent intruder into the homes of every Greenbrae hillside resident from the moment those 80-foot light towers are installed. MC has a goal that it wants to achieve at any cost, even if it means the degradation of its neighbors’ quality of life.

Aside from the critical aforementioned issues, the topography of the environment MC inhabits is particularly ill-suited for a lighted stadium, suggesting an even stronger case for the need to comply with CEQA. The MC field borders densely-populated, rising hills on two sides, creating a natural amphitheater effect, and wetlands harboring protected species on a third side. It would be difficult to conceive of a location more poorly suited to a lighted stadium than the MC property. It is simply the wrong place for a lighted stadium.

The fact that MC has illegally used temporary lights in the past is also not an immaterial detail, the most recent complaint for which was filed earlier this year. Because MC cannot be trusted to abide by legal and approved use of temporary lights, I and many other Greenbrae residents share serious concerns about their ability to abide by any imposed limits on permanent light usage. It is possible if indeed not likely that the mere fact of permanence will embolden MC to push limits in ways they only began to do with temporary lights.

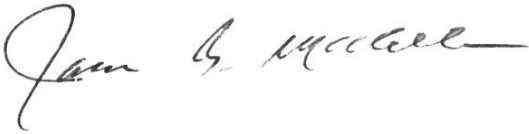
If permanent lights are installed, there needs to be a clear usage enforcement mechanism; one that goes well beyond a simple collection of names by the sheriff’s office. I have serious questions about whether such an enforcement mechanism is even possible.

In summary, long-term, tax-paying residents should not be asked to sacrifice their ability to enjoy peaceful evenings in their own homes just because a private school decided it now needs a lighted stadium. It is not a project that will benefit the community in any way; rather, it will serve Marin Catholic's private needs and desires only. A private school like MC should not be able to impose its will on our neighborhood in this way.

The proposal is completely contrary to the premises defined in the Marin Countywide Plan, the Kentfield/Greenbrae Community Plan and the residential character of Marin County in general.

I urge the county to deny the project.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim McClellan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jim McClellan