

Compromise Proposal on Sports Lights Released by Selectman Richards & Neighbors of DHS

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At Monday night's Darien Board of Selectmen meeting, Selectman Rob Richards released a letter saying that neighbors of Darien High School were willing to accept permanent lighting for sports, provided use of the lights was closely regulated.

Richards said he had been talking with neighbors to see what kind of compromise proposal might be worked out with them, the school district and others supporting more lighting, particularly for night sports games.

— *See also:* "[Superintendent Brenner Recommends Permanent Stadium Lights at DHS](#)" (March 14)

Here's the statement Richards, one of two Democrats on the five-member board, read near the end of the meeting, and the text of a proposal signed by 14 neighbors living in eight homes near the high school:

Richards' statement

Dear BoS, BoE, P&Z, community leaders, and the people of Darien,

Last November I suggested the Board of Selectmen take a leadership roll in regard to DHS Lights. The suggestion was welcome by a group of neighbors who have opposed the lights. They invited me to discuss the issue with them back in January. For the past several months the neighbors and I have been working on a solution.

My plan was to present a solution with the neighbors blessing before the Board of Selectmen. However, I did not anticipate Superintendent Brenner's proclamation on the need for lights happening so soon. Therefore in an attempt to expedite things and pave the way for a conversation between the neighbors, the BoE, and P&Z, I am making this announcement.

On behalf of the neighbors, we are releasing a letter to the community stating the neighbor's are willing to say "yes" to permanent lights at the Darien High School but subject to reasonable guidelines for use. I still urge the Board of Selectmen to take a leadership role by reviewing and endorsing the guidelines so that we may move forward as a community cooperatively and with positive momentum.

With that said, I willingly present these guidelines to the community as reasonable and fair and I hope we can move forward with mutual neighborly respect for each other.

Thank you,
Rob Richards

The Neighbors' Proposal

Neighbors Willing to Say "Yes" to Permanent Lights at Darien High School Subject to Reasonable Guidelines for Use

April 4, 2016

At a recent Board of Selectmen meeting, it was suggested by Selectman Rob Richards that the Board of Selectmen take a leadership role regarding whether permanent lights should be installed at the Darien High School to permit evening sporting events.

A group of Darien High School neighbors who have been opposed to lights welcomed this suggestion and invited Selectman Richards for a meeting to consider the issue of DHS lights.

We recognize that the primary responsibility for approvals will lie with the Board of Education and the Planning & Zoning Commission in their specialized roles. However, the Selectmen, charged with the general governance and well-being of the whole Town, are in the best position to address and balance the needs, desires, concerns and rights of all constituencies, including athletic supporters, students, DHS neighbors, neighbors of other Darien parks and schools, and the community at large.

While this small group does not claim to represent all DHS neighbors (and certainly does not claim to represent neighbors of other Town properties with athletic fields), we believe our concerns and perspectives are shared by many. We also have years of experience with the lights issue, have studied other towns' arrangements, and have interviewed neighbors of lighted stadiums in Greenwich, Wilton and Westport.

As a result of our deliberations and as active concerned neighbors, we have reached the decision to endorse permanent DHS lights, subject to adoption of specific guidelines that are responsible, accountable and fair.

The following guidelines are based on certain principles, beliefs and understandings about what is in the best interest of our Town and the community at large. We believe these guidelines represent both a reasonable path forward for our DHS varsity teams to play under "Friday Night Lights" and a significant compromise by those who will be most impacted.

Although we were surprised by the recent recommendation of stadium lights by Darien's Superintendent of Schools, we were encouraged to hear Dr. Brenner recognize the unique DHS neighborhood situation and explain that lights are principally intended for (1) a prescribed number of home games to be played by varsity teams in the evening and (2) playoff games involving DHS teams in the fall season. The following guidelines are consistent with Dr. Brenner's explanation.

Principles, Beliefs and Understandings

o Enhancing Community Spirit. We are willing to support permanent lights at DHS principally because we believe that evening sporting events involving DHS varsity teams can make a positive contribution to community spirit. We also recognize that the topic of lights has divided our community and has the potential to create further unhealthy division unless a solution with clear expectations and accountability is implemented that addresses lights not only at DHS but also at other Town properties. While we believe evening DHS varsity games provide an opportunity to enhance community spirit, the phenomenal success of our DHS teams is evidence that lights are not needed for our athletes and coaches to succeed and even excel. In fact, it would be a disservice to our athletes and coaches to suggest that they need lights to succeed.

o Being Good Neighbors. Because the Town suffers from a shortage of open space, the practical reality is that installation of permanent lights must occur at an existing Town property. Unlike other towns in Fairfield County, we do not have a property that is isolated from surrounding residential neighborhoods. DHS is located in the middle of an existing residential neighborhood and at the edge of protected wetlands. This reality brings with it an implicit trust and a need for heightened sensitivity and prudence when establishing rules for the use of lights. We also recognize that the discussion of lights at DHS has caused concern among

neighbors of other Town properties about what is next. We do not believe it is in the long-term interest of Darien's reputation as a desirable residential community (1) to be known as one that is willing to sacrifice a neighborhood's right to a peaceful residential environment and their property values simply to satisfy a desire of others in our community or (2) for there to be uncertainty as to the possibility of lights in other neighborhoods.

o Being a Leader in Responsible Government. In accepting the installation of permanent lights and establishing fair and appropriate rules and restrictions for their use, we have taken into consideration in our evaluation of the lights issue the approaches of other nearby towns (particularly Greenwich, which we believe has the most comparable stadium situation to Darien) that have installed lights to learn best practices, recognizing the uniquely residential location of DHS. But we also believe that Darien should do more than follow—we should be a leader in protecting and promoting:

- The safety and health of our community, particularly children
- Family values
- The residential character of our Town
- Responsible, open, accountable and fair governance

Suggested Guidelines

Based upon our willingness to help promote community spirit, our review of the best practices of other communities, and our recognition of the foregoing principles, beliefs and understandings, we would be willing to support permanent lights at DHS provided that any approval and implementation is in line with the following guidelines:

o Prioritize Safety, Health and Families.

• Parking Restrictions

§ Prohibit parking on surrounding streets, which are unlit and narrow or very busy § Ensure accessibility of all homes to emergency vehicles

§ Enforce parking only in designated DHS parking spots

§ Utilize offsite parking with shuttle buses

• Traffic Control

§ We must prevent pedestrian accidents (children are particularly vulnerable with unusual traffic, and unfamiliar drivers, in their neighborhood)

§ Single DHS entrance and exit with traffic control

§ No activity scheduled for DHS on same night as light use for a game • Police Coverage § Strict enforcement of existing prohibition of alcohol and drug use by all participants, including adult spectators

§ Adequate police coverage for enforcement of parking and alcohol/drug restrictions as well as crowd and traffic control

• **Health and Families**

§ Lights use only for Darien school athletes

§ Only DHS varsity games at night

§ No youth games under lights and no youth practices under lights past 7 p.m.

§ No Sunday use of lights

• **Environment**

§ Conduct an environmental study to ensure no harmful impact on wetlands/wildlife

§ Early morning after any night game, public works crews clean up any mess from DHS, surrounding streets and neighbor lawns

o **Develop a Focused and Balanced Solution**

• **DHS Varsity Sports Focus**

§ Commit to no other school or Town property having temporary or permanent lighting of athletic fields, other than Town Hall temporary lights after Daylight Savings Time (DST) consistent with past practice

§ Lights only for DHS varsity sporting events (and DHS and youth sports practices in fall after DST ends)

§ No concerts, band practices or other events

§ Lights only for games involving DHS varsity teams

• **Games and Practices**

§ Limit number of games under lights to 10 per year

§ Only Monday-Friday use except Saturday playoff games

§ Monday–Friday practices permitted only in fall after DST ends

§ No consecutive Friday/Saturday events

o DHS to be a Good Neighbor

• Minimize Light Impact

§ No light bulbs facing neighboring properties (only facing school building)

§ LED light technology for less spillage

§ Maximum shielding of lights

§ Adequate screening around DHS property so that lights and field are not visible from neighboring properties at ground level

§ Practice lights off at 7 p.m. (consistent with current practice)

§ Game lights off by 10 p.m.

§ Conduct light study to minimize light impact (including glare, light trespass and skyglow)

• Minimize Sound Impact

§ No amplified sound after halftime

§ No band music after halftime

§ No amplified sound or band music during practices

§ No speakers aimed at neighboring properties (only facing home bleachers)

§ Conduct sound study to minimize noise impact

• Impose No Unfair Economic Burden

§ Appropriately adjust appraised values (and assessed values) of properties adversely impacted

o Move Forward in Good Faith with Clear Expectations and Accountability

• Include neighbors on a Committee with Town officials to monitor compliance with these guidelines

- Use retractable light poles that come down when each season is over
- Board of Education bears all costs for DHS use, including police/traffic coverage
- Youth sports to cover all costs for youth practices
- Make all guidelines enforceable by any Darien property owner
- Make all guidelines permanent and enforceable for 15 years

WE RESPECTFULLY REQUEST THE DARIEN BOARD OF SELECTMEN TO TAKE A LEADERSHIP ROLE BY ENDORSING THESE GUIDELINES FOR ANY LIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION.

- Albertus & Patricia van den Broek (15 Linda Lane)
- Dan & Ronnie Carey (207 Leroy Avenue)
- Lennis & Rose Marie Koontz (373 Middlesex Road)
- Janice Lockhart (11 High School Lane)
- Paul & Lisa Michalski (371 Middlesex Road)
- Walter Raleigh (369 Middlesex Road)
- Scott & Susan Richter (60 Hanson Avenue)
- David & Priscilla Shepherd (22 Linda Lane)