

Widener University Presentation
February 8, 2011

Jim Harris, President of Widener University gave a presentation at an open regular scheduled planning meeting prior to the Upland Borough Council Meeting on February 8, 2011.

Mr. Harris noted over the years they have had several people approach them regarding purchasing the former estate of Senator Clarence Bell. However, Widener decided not to sell the property because it is a very nice piece of property and they were trying to decide how to use it.

About a year ago Mr. Harris was talking to a donor of Widener's about his contribution to the campaign they are having right now and he indicated that his only interest is in soccer as he played soccer when he attended Widener and he would really like to help with the soccer team. He wanted a grass, not turf field.

In the last three years Widener had some new partnerships, one being with the new Philadelphia Union who was looking for a new place to put their practice facility for the team and decided to do that on the riverfront.

At this time Mr. Harris spoke to the CEO of the Philadelphia Union to see if there was something they could do to work together on youth soccer and some other things for the community. Mr. Harris mentioned he has a donor who might be interested in helping us create a new soccer facility and to please think about that.

About five or six years ago Widener's soccer coaches created a soccer league for the Chester youth and this has been passed on to the Philadelphia Union. There are about 500 children involved in the program.

Mr. Harris noted that Council President Ed Mitchell told him Upland does not have such a program.

Mr. Harris proposed that Widener and Upland work together and go to the U.S. Soccer Foundation.

The U.S. Soccer Foundation earned 100 million dollars when the United States hosted the last World Cup back in the 1990's, and the way the foundation works is that they will donate \$ 200,000.00 to develop a field. They have done this all over the country mostly in suburban areas and they would like to do more in urban areas like Upland and Chester.

Mr. Harris went to Washington to meet with the President of the U.S. Soccer Foundation and they pledged \$ 400,000.00 to build two fields and Widener proposed the former estate of Senator Clarence Bell.

Mr. Harris met with the President and Vice President of Council along with the Mayor of Upland to see how they felt about this idea and also mentioned he was pleased Council passed Resolution No. 1 supporting Widener's soccer project.

At this time Mr. Harris showed pictures of the estate and the armory and pointed out the place where a grass field would be and the area where they would put the stadium and two artificial turf fields and a small grass area for the small children. They would use the back of the stadium grand stand for locker rooms.

The project would be done in phases as the estimate for the entire project is three to five million dollars and at this time they only have \$ 400,000.00.

Hopefully, the donor previously mentioned will be willing to donate a large sum of money.

The ways they envision this facility being used is for an Upland Youth Soccer League, Chester-Upland School District children playing there and Widener playing home games for both men and women's soccer which usually attract about 200 people so they do not believe traffic would create any problems.

According to the Philadelphia Union, there is the potential to host tournaments at the facility.

The Philadelphia Union would create a practice field at their facility; Widener has the turf fields where they currently play soccer, and the proposed three fields on the Bell Estate would give us a total of six fields.

Upland would become a destination for soccer tournaments, and potentially this may lead to food establishments opening up to serve the fans coming into Upland for these tournaments.

Mr. Harris reminded Council they have a K through 5 Elementary Charter School and the Charter is the highest performing school in the district. They provide many services including mental health professionals, medical care and tutoring.

However, it was noted there is no Charter School for the middle school aged children.

Since Council is still deciding how to use the armory for the Upland residents, Widener is asking Council if there is some way they could rent the armory or pay for the facility from the Borough and put the middle school in the armory.

Another option is to bring some of Widener's services, (i.e. blood pressure screenings) to the armory since the school and soccer fields would be there.

There is no funding for this as of yet, however Widener wanted to propose this to Council before they proceed.

President Mitchell stated he feels this is a tremendous opportunity and this offers a well-rounded complex for what Council had planned for the building. Council wants something better in the educational aspect and President Mitchell noted that most of our population cannot afford to go outside of the community and Our Lady of Charity is getting ready to close.

It was noted about 26% of the students at the Widener's Charter School are from Upland and President Mitchell stated he hopes to influence Widener to increase that number. Mr. Harris said the Borough could help with that by encouraging parents to apply.

President Mitchell also wants to also include the Police Athletic League in the plans as it would be an after school program to keep the youth busy and on course.

Mr. Harris wanted Council to know that over the last two years Widener had over 1,000 students working in the Chester-Upland School District mentoring and tutoring, and one of Widener's frustrations is they created a program called Widener Cares which offers these services by Widener Students who are trained by the University and then the Superintendent changes his mind and the Widener Students have nowhere to go.

If Widener had a center this close to the campus they could send the Widener Students over in their minivan instead of busing them all over Chester to different sites. If they had a common location it would benefit approximately 1,100 children.

Mr. Harris also pointed out that Upland Borough and Widener University could work together to obtain Federal Funding.

Mr. Peden asked what the time frame would be to have the center up and running. Mr. Mitchell noted the armory should be available November of 2011. Mr. Harris said it would depend on how quickly they could get the building retro-filled.

Mr. Harris said if the school is not feasible the center could still be used as mentoring and tutoring center staffed by the Widener University students.

There was some discussion regarding the University working with the Borough through our Planning Commission which will give the community the opportunity to get involved.

There was some discussion on the controversial aspects of the project such as lighting. Widener feels that some of the turf fields should be lighted as they will get the most use, and the lighting must conform to the rules of the Borough. There was also the mention of

parking in the event of a championship match, which could draw as many as 1,000 people but only happens once or twice a year and they would have to look into the possibility of renting a parking lot. Regular soccer matches typically draw 100 to 200 people.

Mrs. Peterson asked if this facility would be fenced in, and Mr. Harris replied that it probably would be.

Mr. O'Connor wanted to know what the next step would be. Mr. Harris indicated the next step would be to find the funding through various agencies and suppliers.

Mr. Harris asked if anyone had any questions and there were none.

This concluded Widener's presentation.

Council thanked Widener for their presentation.