

Laurelton plan on hold for a year

By Karen Blackledge
The Daily Item

LAURELTON — The Hartley Township supervisors unanimously approved a conditional use for the first phase of Woodward Camp's expansion to Laurelton Center.

The supervisors voted following a hearing attended by about 30 Thursday night.

Chairman Stephen Buttorff, vice chairman Dale Zechman and supervisor Eugene Kahley approved a temporary conditional use for one year for 19 buildings, building an outdoor swimming pool and repaving streets.

The applicant, Sports Management Inc., would need to seek additional approvals for other phases for an action sports prep school and a public golf course.

Gary Ream, camp director and one of the owners, hoped to open the expansion this year at Laurelton, but the earliest the camp could open would be next year.

"We don't have to change hardly anything at Laurelton to be an unbelievable camp," he said.

Architect Robert Lack said Laurelton Center will sound, smell, feel and taste the same when campers are there.

"It's a tremendous fit that you can change so little and use it so well," he said.

The first phase would involve 19 buildings, 110 students and 90 staff mem-

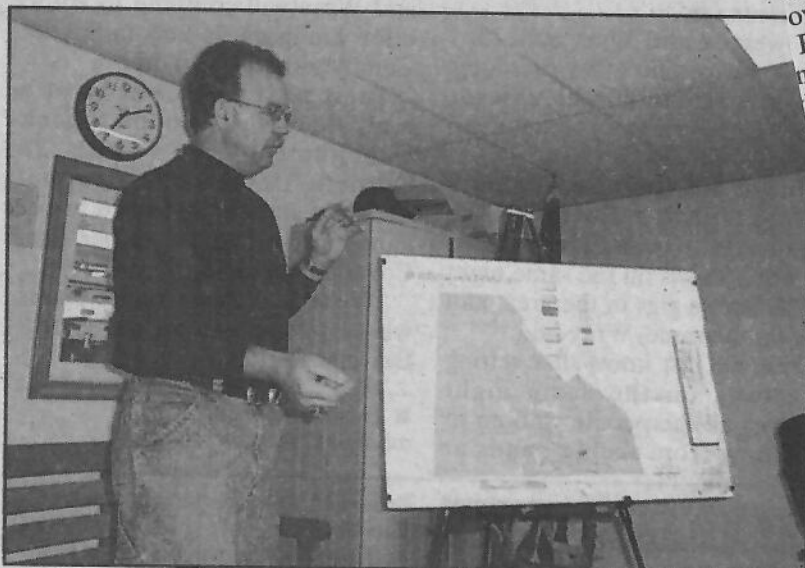


Photo by Karen Blackledge/The Daily Item

Woodward Camp Director Gary Ream explains plans for expanding the camp to Laurelton Center.

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Ream said the owners will not acquire the property until all conditional uses are met. The camp signed an agreement in February 2002 and received the paperwork Nov. 1 from the state.

"It's not anybody's fault — it's a thing called time," he said of the steps involved along the way.

Two to three weeks ago, the camp signed an agreement with the area sewage authority. This was required before the conditional use hearing could be held.

Woodward Camp operates a 14-week summer sports camp that last year drew 10,000 students from 48 states and 23 countries. The camp enrolled 714 students a week and employed 750,

including 110 from the area. Founded in 1970, Woodward began with gymnastics and expanded to BMX biking, skateboarding and in-line skating. Woodward has a camp in Wisconsin and in a couple of weeks will open a camp near Los Angeles.

During the rest of the year, Woodward offers lodging for families to use skate park buildings.

Ream said Woodward plans to change Brown Hall at Laurelton to a skate park on the first floor. In the future, he hopes the hospital can be converted to Woodward Lodge.

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Housing for students would need some plumbing upgrades. Moyer Hall, with its auditorium, basketball court and gymnasium, would need to be updated. The Houser building would remain the same. Staff members would stay in the Newman building.

Of the senior center, Ream said, "We have no plans to change that on the short- or long-term."

With three-quarters of Woodward clientele on bikes, skateboards and skates, he said stop sign and speed limit signs will be installed.

Campers would be shuttled back and forth by bus from Woodward to Laurelton.

Woodward has hosted special events since 1997. The 200 to 300 hours of TV special events will still take place with no plans in the near future for them at Laurelton. "I like the idea of these events bringing positive notoriety to the area," Lack said.

Regarding injuries at these world-class facilities, Ream said hospitals, helicopters and dentists are on call at Woodward. If a camper needs to be hospitalized, a surgeon, for example, would meet the patient at the hospital. A similar system would be set up at Laurelton.

He said there is an ample water supply with full enrollment at Woodward using 3.8 million gallons. When Laurelton was operat-

ing at capacity, it used 9 million gallons, Lack said.

Traffic impact with 800 campers is projected at 342 vehicles in and out from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. Saturdays and Sundays with 95 percent of traffic from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. "It's a very in and out type system," he said. The figures include golf course traffic.

For the second year of the camp at Laurelton, a 100,000 square-foot athletic center would be needed and would probably be built in stages for gymnastics and action sports. Basketball, volleyball and soccer could be added. It is planned between Jolly and Johnston buildings.

Woodward hopes to partner with an action sports prep school for 150 students from September through May. The school would probably start the third year.

Resident Shirley Bingman questioned the impact of the school on the community. Ream said students would be supervised. Woodward has an adult staff that would be part in the community, he said.

The leased golf course would wrap around the property with Ream saying it is rated 9-plus for natural terrain. With this, Woodward could offer golf.

Eventually, Woodward Lodge and the Glover building would be used for golfers' lodging.

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