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Neighbors take a dim view of Folsom stadium lights

By **Walter Yost** - Bee Staff Writer

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In an upscale Folsom neighborhood, homeowners who paid a premium of \$100,000 for a view of Folsom Lake are up in arms that their vista will be obscured by football stadium lights at the city's new high school.

Ultimately the controversy is about more than glaring light -- it pits neighbors with expectations of peace and quiet against that great American tradition: Friday night football.

This isn't the first time night football has caused a ruckus in the region. In recent years, John F. Kennedy High School in Sacramento and Del Campo High in Fair Oaks also grappled with neighborhood opposition when they proposed installing lights at their stadiums.

Lights were eventually installed at Kennedy, but not at Del Campo, although the matter is still being discussed.

Taking it a step further, some neighbors fought improvements that were made to a football field at Rio Americano High in Sacramento County, even though no lights were added. Their objections? Noise, traffic and the usual impacts from teenagers gathering in large numbers.

Wednesday, on a cold, blustery night in Folsom, school officials flipped on the lights at Vista del Lago High School's football field to gauge their impact. Several dozen neighbors, joined by Folsom city leaders, gathered outdoors for the demonstration.

There were conflicting opinions as the lights around the field gradually came on.

"We didn't think the lights would affect us at all. But it was so bright I had to bring out my sunglasses," said Gayle McKenzie, who lives downhill from the stadium.

Teresa Stanley, a member of the local school board, said of the illuminated football stadium, "I think it looks gorgeous."

For homeowners like Janelle Pfiester, whose street looks down on the stadium, the lights and the possibility of night football games is a betrayal.

Pfiester said that when she and her husband looked at buying their home on Caversham Way two years ago, they met twice with school district officials.

"We knew the high school would be here when we moved in," Pfiester said. "A majority of (us) specifically asked about stadium lights and were told there would be no lights and no Friday night football games."

If they'd believed otherwise, Pfiester said, she and her neighbors never would have paid a premium for a view of Folsom Lake.

In 2005, the selling prices for homes on Caversham ranged from \$600,000 to \$850,000, she said.

As she looked at the light poles, Michelle Wilde, who also lives on Caversham Way, said, "The bottom line is this is not what we were sold."

Another neighbor, Eric Tumacder, said he doesn't have a problem with the lights. But he fears his street will become the site of tailgating parties if Vista del Lago plays Friday night games.

Pfiester shares his concern. "I don't believe only Friday night football games will draw crowds," she

said.

There currently are no parking restrictions on Caversham Way and the street provides a panoramic view of the football field.

Last month, Vista del Lago High -- which in Spanish means "View of the Lake" -- opened its doors with only freshmen and sophomores.

Neighbors, Pfiester said, were under the impression that the football team, which won't field a varsity squad until next season, would play its night games at Folsom High School.

Pfiester said she and her husband, Ron, were on vacation when the four light poles were installed. Upon their return, they were shocked to see 90-foot-tall light poles partially obscuring their view.

Pfiester also expressed concern that the school will build bleachers and a press box on the south side of the football field adjacent to Caversham Way, further blocking the view.

Pfiester and other homeowners have taken their complaints to the Folsom Cordova Unified school board and Superintendent Pat Godwin.

Godwin agreed that the light towers are "ugly," but said they are necessary for a competitive football program.

Godwin said lights were always envisioned at the high school and the district never promised that no night football games would be played there.

"What we have said is we do not foresee varsity football games there in the foreseeable future," he said.

Godwin said there are ways the light poles can be "camouflaged" to minimize their visual impact. As for the lights themselves, he said, they could be run at less than full power for football practices, soccer matches and track meets, which require less light than varsity football games.

He also said that, despite homeowners' fears, there are currently no plans for south-side bleachers and a press box. Especially given the cost of asbestos mitigation required at the school site, he said, those facilities "would be incredibly expensive."

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