

# Odyssey Charter eyes Barley Mill for K-12 campus

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Charter school would absorb nearly a third of the 92 acres along Del. 141



(Photo: Supplied)

Odyssey Charter School has filed plans to create a K-12 campus that would consume more than 35 acres of the Barley Mill Plaza Office Park, which would reduce land available for development there by more than a third.

That's welcome news to nearby residents who protested Stoltz Real Estate Partners' previous plans to develop the site for commercial and residential use, including high-rise condos and a shopping center.

In order for Odyssey's plan to be filed, Stoltz had to withdraw its original 2.8 million-square-foot mixed-use plan that has remained on file with the county, despite a court loss on a smaller compromise plan.

"I think this is a terrific idea. I hope it goes through," said John Danzeisen, president of the Kennett Pike Association and a member of Citizens for Responsible Growth, the group that negotiated with Stoltz and forged a compromise that resulted in the company's earlier development plan. "This does leave open the question of what's going to be along Route 141, which was always the more sensitive question. But I think this is a good step."

**EARLIER STORY:** [State Supreme Court rules against Barley Mill developers \(/story/news/local/2014/03/25/state-supreme-court-rules-against-barley-mill-developers/6880533/\)](#)

**STORY:** [Odyssey students learn about Ellis Island by living the journey \(/story/news/education/2014/04/19/students-learn-ellis-island-living-journey/7915771/\)](#)

Stoltz bought the 92-acre Barley Mill property in 2007 from the DuPont Co. for \$94 million. It has tried to redevelop the park since 2008, but faced strong opposition from local residents worried about its impact, especially the traffic it would generate.

Laurie Nicoli, a member of the Save Our County group that pressed the lawsuit against the compromise Barley Mill plan, said she didn't have enough information to endorse the new Odyssey proposal.

"I have no problem with the school itself. But it's very easy to say 'wow, that sounds great'," Nicoli said. "There are lots of things that sound great as a general principle, but it's only when you put pen to paper that you actually figure out that there's a problem."

Odyssey's re-subdivision plan, filed with New Castle County's land use department, would renovate existing buildings in the back of the site into elementary, middle and high school buildings and a combined gymnasium and science center, with athletic fields behind the property.

Odyssey is gradually expanding to a full K-12 school, adding a seventh grade this year, an eighth grade next year, and other grades in subsequent years. The buildings would likely total about 261,000 square feet, shrinking noticeably from the 480,000 square feet of former office space that currently exists.



John Danzeisen of the Kennett Pike Association speaks at a Citizens for Responsible Growth meeting in 2010. (Photo: The News Journal/WILLIAM BRETZGER)

"This has been a nightmare, really, for the school to find a long-term home," said Larry Tarabicos, the school's land use attorney. "We've known for quite some time that the back part of Barley Mill could be easily renovated and would be a great fit for our school. So there's a lot of excitement in the school community."

Tarabicos said the application needed some "administrative" approvals from the county for things like drainage and fire codes. But he said County Council does not need to approve it.

The school is working with the Delaware Economic Development Office to obtain bond financing for the deal. School leaders will seek donations from the community and local foundations to finance the project. He declined to say how much the deal would cost.

Danzeisen said the expansion might lead to some minor traffic issues, especially when school buses are dropping off and picking up students. But he does not expect any major problems.

One of the school's two current campuses is adjacent to the property, and Odyssey entered a 15-month lease of a Barley Mill building in May. The school's plans include an entrance at an intersection with traffic signals and circulation on the property for buses and parents picking up their kids.

Tarabicos, who also works for Stoltz, said the real estate company does not have any active plans for the remaining 55 or so acres.

"We've gone back to the drawing board," he said. "That's going to be a long, deliberate planning process. And we will be sure to seek the public's input on whatever we do end up deciding to do."



Map of Barley Mill property, part of which will be used for Odyssey expansion (Photo: Dan Garrow/The News Journal)

Stoltz first submitted a plan for a 2.8 million-square-foot mixed-use project at the site. Citizens for Responsible Growth objected and forged a compromise with the help of then County Executive Chris Coons for a 1.6 million-square-foot plan.

In 2011, the County Council approved a rezoning allowing for the smaller plan. But a second community group, Save Our County, objected, suing Stoltz and the county, seeking its reversal.

The compromise plan eventually was overturned by the Delaware Supreme Court, which ruled that Councilman Bob Weiner voted for it under the mistaken impression that he could not access a traffic study.

Weiner said he wants to make sure the county does its due diligence with the Odyssey proposal, but at first look it seems like a great deal.

"I'm excited for the community about this possibility," Weiner said. "I think a school would be a much better use for those 35 acres than what it would have been as part of the original Stoltz concept."

New Castle County Councilwoman Janet Kilpatrick, whose district included Barley Mill until recent redistricting, said she thinks the expansion is "a great fit."

"This is not something that is going to be in use 24/7, or even every day of the year. And it's an extension of what's already there," she said. "I think this is a great idea."

Reporter Adam Taylor contributed to this story. Contact Matthew Albright at malbright@delawareonline.com or at 324-2428. Follow him on Twitter @TNJ\_malbright.



Laurie Nicoli, who lives on Barley Mill Road, waits for her opportunity to speak against Keith Stoltz's proposal to have Barley Mill Plaza rezoned from office to commercial use so he can build his mall in early 2011. (Photo: SUCHAT PEDERSON/THE NEWS JOURNAL)

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