

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
VILLAGE OF RIVER FOREST
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS**

May 9, 2024

A meeting of the River Forest Zoning Board of Appeals was held at 7:30 pm on Thursday, May 9, 2024, in the Community Room of the River Forest Village Hall, 400 Park Avenue, River Forest, Illinois.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Martin called the meeting to order at 7:36 pm. Meeting started by calling roll. Upon roll call the following persons were:

Present: Chairman Frank Martin, Members Gary Dombrowski, Chris Plywacz, Mary Shoemaker, Corina Davis, Ron Lucchesi, Sheila Price

Absent: None

Also present at the meeting: Matt Walsh, Village Administrator; Jessica Spencer, Assistant Village Administrator; Anne Skrodzki, Village Attorney; and Clifford Radatz, Secretary.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS ON APRIL 11, 2024

A **MOTION** was made by Member Plywacz and seconded by Member Lucchesi to approve the minutes from the April 11 meeting.

Ayes: Chairman Martin, Members Dombrowski, Shoemaker, Plywacz, Price, Lucchesi, Davis

Nays: None

Motion passed.

III. APPROVAL OF FINDINGS OF FACT FOR THE TEXT AMENDMENT REQUEST REGARDING COMMERCIAL DISTRICT ZONING REGULATIONS

Chairman Martin stated that the Village had expressed an interest that each member provide a statement on why they voted the way that they did. He asked if the members had an opportunity to review the Findings and if any corrections were needed. No corrections were offered.

A **MOTION** was made by Member Davis seconded by Member Shoemaker to approve the Findings of Fact for the text amendment request regarding commercial district zoning regulations.

Ayes: Chairman Martin, Members Dombrowski, Shoemaker, Plywacz, Price, Lucchesi, Davis

Nays: None

Motion passed.

IV. PUBLIC HEARING – SPECIAL USE PERMIT – CHILD DAYCARE CENTER IN THE C-3 COMMERCIAL DISTRICT – 7777 LAKE STREET

Chairman Martin opened the topic for discussion.

Secretary Radatz swore in those who wished to testify.

Chairman Martin invited the applicant to present their application. Ranier Ramos from Mosaic Montessori Academy addressed the concerns raised by the Fire Chief and the Police Chief in memos that were distributed to the commission and the applicant prior to this meeting. He briefly explained a plan which would include a van shuttle service to families to pick up and deliver students of the Academy. He stated that he is open to suggestions of other options and noted that Mosaic was determined not to impede the operations of the first responders.

Chairman Martin asked for clarification of the special use.

Mr. Ramos said that currently the space is not zoned for a day care, so the request of the special use is to allow it to be used for that purpose.

Ariel Pang identified herself as the real estate broker for the owner of 7777 Lake Street. She stated that the property owner has a strong interest in renting the space to the Academy.

Member Lucchesi asked how much parking is currently dedicated to this building.

Ms. Pang responded that she believed there are 17 parking spots.

Member Lucchesi asked for clarification on where the parking spots are located.

Ms. Pang indicated the parking lot west of the building, south of the Village's parking lot.

Member Davis asked if the 17 spaces are generally open at 7:30am, which might allow the drop off parents to park in those spots in the morning.

Ms. Pang responded yes. She also noted that there is one car currently parked in the lot, however it will be removed.

Member Dombroski inquired about how many employees will be on site, on an average day.

Mr. Ramos responded that each classroom would require 2 instructors, so at least 6 employees, in addition to a few floater instructors. He emphasized that employees will be parking at the original location at Lake and Thatcher and walking or using the shuttle to the Lake and Park location.

Member Dombroski asked if the original location of the Academy would remain in operation in addition to this new location; Mr. Ramos clarified that it would.

Member Dombroski asked about how many students are enrolled at the current location.

Ms. Maria Ramos clarified that the intention is for the other site to remain operational, however it is not a year-round program. She stated that all staff will be required to park at Lake and Thatcher and use the shuttle except for 1 employee (herself). She noted that there will always be 1 employee who is welcoming the children, so parents would not need to go into the building for drop off unless the child is transitioning from one classroom to the next. She clarified that this drop off process will be different from the original location.

Member Lucchesi asked about the safety of the children during pick up and drop off.

Member Davis shared her personal experience with another school, in which a volunteer opens the door and removes the child from the vehicle while her husband remains in the driver's seat. She confirms this is a seamless, easy process.

Chairman Martin asked about how many children are enrolled at the current location.

Mr. Ramos responded that there are 57 currently enrolled of which about 95% are River Forest residents.

Chairman Martin asked if there was a waitlist for the proposed school.

Mr. Ramos responded not yet, as they were waiting for a decision on the Special Use Permit to begin marketing.

Chairman Martin asked if the Board had any questions for the applicant. As there were no questions, Chairman Martin closed the public portion of the hearing and discussions began between the Board members.

Member Davis stated that she is concerned about the traffic issue but also recognizes the need for daycare in the Village. She shared her personal experience of dropping off her child at a daycare on a busy street and stated that she had limited concerns regarding the traffic at this location.

Member Dombroski: He originally was not going to support this application, but he changed his opinion because the business is not new to the Village, and he feels that they have a workable plan. The adjacent Lincoln Elementary School is a concern, however, there seems to be flexibility in the pick-up schedule.

Member Davis believes that 50 to 60 children sounds like a lot, but believes that the vehicle count would be less due to families that might enroll multiple children in the school at once, as well as the hope that more local families would walk their children to the day care center.

Member Lucchesi raised his concerns about the traffic and would like to see a traffic plan to address it. He supports the Academy moving to a new space but is concerned about traffic.

Member Davis says that she spoke to friends at Lincoln Elementary School, and they did not express any concerns about traffic. However, the Police and Fire Chiefs' response to this application gives her pause.

Chairman Martin stated that the previous meetings were held to discuss the commercial text amendment to deal with commercial districts, to give the Village more appeal in the zoning code to attract more developers so various structures would be built and generate revenue. Now the topic is involving a non-revenue development in a commercial space, which is contrary to the amendments that were being previously considered. He is concerned about non-commercial use in the property. He agrees with Member Lucchesi about the problems regarding traffic patterns. He does not think the Lincoln traffic patterns should bear as much weight on the decision, when there are significant concerns raised by the Police Chief and Fire Chief. He also said that he is concerned that teachers are going to park so far from this new property. The shuttle was not proposed before this evening; he does not believe that the teachers are going to take a shuttle when it is raining or snowing. He does not think this use is what the Village wants to see for commercial property.

Member Plywacz suggested that if a developer purchases the property at Lake Street and Park Avenue, there may be traffic concerns then as well. Chairman Martin stated that that parcel was not under discussion at this hearing.

Member Price stated that the opinions of the Fire Chief and Police Chief weigh heavily on her. She relayed her personal experience of traffic surrounding a school that she works for, where "the best laid plans" of instructions for drop off and parking are not followed on a regular basis by parents. While she acknowledges that there would be fewer children at this school than at her own, she is very concerned about the danger for students and parents. She also asked about the businesses that exist now and where those employees would be expected to park. She was hopeful that the daycare might draw more business to the existing, neighboring businesses, but asked what would happen if those parking spaces were taken up by parents instead.

Member Davis asked if there was another, creative solution for parking that might be applied here. She recalls another business that was able to identify another parking solution in a nearby area. No one had any suggestions.

Chairman Martin stated that each member would need to weigh how important the lack of parking is on this application. He stated that he did recall agreeing to off-site parking, but the applicant came in with a plan for that process. Speaking of the same previous applicant, Member Davis acknowledged that situation involved customers, while this situation involves parents and small children that would be parking a few blocks away.

A **MOTION** was made by Member Dombrowski seconded by Member Davis to recommend to the Village Board of Trustees to approve this special use permit for a Child Daycare Center in the C-3 Commercial District.

Ayes: Members Dombrowski, Plywacz, Davis

Nays: Chairman Martin, Members Lucchesi, Price, Shoemaker

With a vote of 3 – 4, the Motion fails.

Chairman Martin clarified that the ZBA does not approve the special use at this location and this would be the recommendation to the VBOT. He said this will be before the VBOT in the future, and the applicant is able to appear before the Board, making a presentation if they choose to.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was none.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

A **MOTION** was made by Member Davis to dismiss the meeting, seconded by Member Lucchesi to adjourn. A unanimous voice vote passed the motion.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

Submitted:


Clifford E. Radatz, Secretary


Frank Martin, Chairman
Zoning Board of Appeals

Date: 7/11/2024