

**Albemarle County Planning Commission
FINAL Minutes Regular Meeting
September 27, 2022**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public hearing on Tuesday, September 27, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.

Members attending were: Karen Firehock, Chair; Corey Clayborne, Vice-Chair; Julian Bivins; Luis Carrazana; Fred Missel; Lonnie Murray.

Members absent: None.

Other officials present were: Charles Rapp, Director of Planning (via Zoom); Jodie Filardo (via Zoom); Andy Herrick, County Attorney's Office; Bart Svoboda; Rebecca Ragsdale; Kevin McCollum; Alberic Karina-Plun; and Carolyn Shaffer, (via Zoom) Clerk to the Planning Commission.

Ms. Shaffer was present electronically via Zoom call.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Ms. Shaffer called the roll.

Ms. Firehock established a quorum.

Matters Not Listed on the Agenda

Ms. Firehock said this item was for matters not currently scheduled for a public hearing, so if there was anything that was not on the public agenda for this evening that a member of the public would wish to speak to, now would be the time. She said she saw no one approach the podium.

Ms. Shaffer said there was no one signed up remotely.

Ms. Firehock said she would move to the next item.

Consent Agenda

Ms. Firehock asked if any Commissioner wished to pull an item from the Consent Agenda.

Mr. Missel moved that the Planning Commission adopt the Consent Agenda, which was seconded by Mr. Carrazana. The motion passed unanimously (6-0).

Public Hearings

Ms. Firehock said there were two public hearings even though there was one site being considered because there were two specific items that had to be addressed separately.

SP202200009 Virginia Institute of Autism
SP202200003 Virginia Institute of Autism (VIA) Stand Alone Parking

Ms. Ragsdale said there would be two separate actions for the two separate SPs. She said the first was SP202200009 for the school expansion to locate the elementary school programs beside where the existing high school and adult programs were, and the associated special use permit for standalone parking across the street.

Ms. Ragsdale showed the location map of the existing Virginia Institute of Autism facility at the corner of Greenbrier and Hillsdale Drive that was approved in 2019, and next to it to the south was the proposed expansion of the school so that the elementary school could move from its current location in the City, allowing all the facilities to coexist in one location. She said across the street was the vacant parcel that had an existing entrance and would be used for extra employee parking. She said the existing zoning of the site in this area was C-1 Commercial, private schools and standalone parking were by special use permit, with nearby residential planned unit development shown in blue.

Ms. Ragsdale said that currently, the adult program served 52 participants and approximately 69 staff members, and with the addition of the elementary school, it would bring the total across the two properties to 137 students and approximately 158 staff members. She said the existing buildings would be utilized, there was a proposed outdoor play area that would be added to the site, and the standalone parking consists of approximately 166 spaces and would be across the street, accessible by the existing sidewalks and crosswalk on Hillsdale Drive.

Ms. Ragsdale said showed a slide with an overview of the concept plan. She said there would be a very detailed site plan for the parking area that would include landscaping requirements for street trees, parking lot landscaping, and tree canopy that was not shown at the concept plan stage. She said there would also need to be a minor amendment to allow for parking lot adjustments, a review of the final bus queueing, and the location of the playground if the proposal was recommended for approval.

Ms. Ragsdale said there were three different designations for future land use for the site. She said the existing school facility was designated as Institutional, and the area was surrounded by Urban Density designations, which could include secondary uses such as schools. She said the parcel proposed for expansion was designated as Office/R&D/Flex/Light Industrial with residential suggested as a secondary use. She said staff felt this was an appropriate location, an analysis was performed that included Transportation Planning and VDOT. She said the community meeting was held, with some questions and comments raised about transportation, noise, and several supportive comments about the facility and its important services for the region.

Ms. Ragsdale said staff recommended approval with conditions for the school expansion that addressed the concept plan, maximum enrollment, hours of operation, and other typical items for these uses, along with a carryover from the prior SP for signage for the bus queueing. She said there was a similar condition for the special use permit for standalone parking, and in general accord with the concept plan, reflecting the major elements to include the location of the parking areas.

Ms. Firehock asked if there were questions for staff.

Mr. Missel said on the front page, it talked about proffers and conditions. He asked if there were no proffers associated with this application.

Ms. Ragsdale said that was correct.

Mr. Missel said he missed the information regarding the timing of the implementation of the off-site parking. He said it noted that the proposed parking would only be necessary when the school expansion created a need for employee parking. He asked if there was a time for that.

Ms. Ragsdale said the applicant would discuss the timing of the different phases of expansion in their narrative.

Mr. Missel thanked Ms. Ragsdale.

Mr. Bivins said they were losing a C-1 spot to a parking lot. He asked if staff in Economic Development were part of the discussion about losing that spot. He asked if there was some way, they could put relegated parking under a building.

Ms. Ragsdale said they were not losing it, and this would allow the school the option to use it for just parking, but it did not preclude it from future development either by-right.

Mr. Bivins asked if the C-1 Commercial designation would remain on the land use map and would have a special use as a parking area.

Ms. Ragsdale said that was correct and that would have the additional use option. She said it was actually shown as Urban Density Residential in the master plan.

Mr. Bivins said there were few places with access to commercial property and he had to bring it up if it were being lost.

Ms. Firehock asked to hear from the applicant.

Ms. Valerie Long said she was with Williams Mullen, representing the applicant, Virginia Institute of Autism. She said she would allow Ethan Long, President and CEO, to discuss the plans for the property. She said she would address questions and provide clarity if needed.

Mr. Ethan Long said this was his 12th year at the Virginia Institute of Autism, a nonprofit organization that had existed since 1996 and was founded in Charlottesville. He said the mission of the organization was to serve individuals struggling with the challenges of autism, which was done through evidence-based practices. He said they were one of a handful of programs across the country and internationally, and this was a culmination of a vision that had been held since he arrived at the organization. He said they were building off of the site for adolescent and adult autism services. He said all the students who came to their school program had a diagnosis of autism or a related development disability and were experiencing significant challenges in areas of communication, social interaction, and learning.

Mr. Long said this student population was different from when entering any other public school. He said they were an extension of the public schools and were licensed by the Department of Education, and families did not pay private tuition because it was funded by the school districts and localities, as well as the Office of Children's Services, to provide a free and appropriate public education to the student population. He said about a third of their students came from the Albemarle County and Charlottesville City communities, but they also took students from as far away as Fauquier County, Harrisonburg, and other areas about an hour away from their location.

Mr. Long said the current school they had was on Westwood Road and the school had outgrown some of those facilities. He said the opportunity to be able to renovate their Jordan Building was exciting for them, partly because of the synergy it would bring. He said it was a unique model because they had more staff than students at a 1:1 model, and all of their staff members were specialists, with registered behavioral technicians, special educators, licensed behavioral analysts, social workers, and psychologists to create a multidisciplinary team to work with the students. He said the goal for all the students was to get them back to public schools in a condition they could maintain in their public schools and communities. He said it was a unique opportunity because when parents received their child's diagnosis, it was often at an early age, and they did not know what resources they needed.

Mr. Long said they had been able to design their current building's space for autism for sensory needs, including reinforced walls, egresses to make spaces wide, safely unloading buses, certain classrooms designed to teach functional living skills, and other spaces, which they would be able to create more of at their new building. He said they would aim this to more of their elementary school-aged children, ages 5 to 14, and they would have special learning spaces where they would focus on getting ready to learn in public school and spaces where they could have individual working activities.

Mr. Long said they were looking to have nine to 10 classrooms focused on that, and then a special unit that would be a neurobehavioral classroom, utilizing the expertise in the [UVA] Neurology and Developmental Pediatrics Department, for students having significant challenges of behavior including self-injury and destructive behaviors be able to stay in their homes but come in for education, stabilize behavioral needs and medication, and as they become successful to be able to transition and matriculate them into the right classes in the program. He said it would be continuing support and services that would be offered. He said this model was a culmination of a professional career and a dream, and to be able to bring that to the community and leverage the power at the University of Virginia to share the model across the United States was exciting. He said he would let Ms. Long answer some of the detailed questions.

Ms. Valerie Long said that the existing site was what used to be the senior center. She said there was an existing site, existing SP, then a proposed new location for the elementary school, the shared parking area, and roughly the location of where the new playground would be located, and the standalone parking for if and when it was needed. She said to Mr. Bivins' question, the C-1 zoning would stay in place, and hopefully this would be developed with a commercial use of some sort, and the parking could be integrated. She said as they moved forward with their planning, they would have enough parking for their unique staffing and ratios.

Ms. Long said Hillsdale Drive was recently improved with sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, and a bus stop. She showed a slide of the two sites together. She showed an image of the field where the overflow parking would be needed, and to answer Mr. Missel's question, there was no set time, and it was dependent on if and when they needed it. She said the timing for the capital campaign to raise money for the second phase of the elementary school was uncertain at this time.

Ms. Long said they had lots of information about how they arrived at the number of parking for teachers and staff. She showed a conceptual plan and indicated the site of the existing building and where the elementary school building would go. She said there was a detailed bus drop-off, a playground area, and a fence and sidewalk designed carefully to keep the children separate from buses and cars. She showed a slide of examples of the indoor and outdoor play areas at the

existing elementary school and said it would be similar to that, and that the new playground would be larger than the existing one.

Mr. Murray said that very near the site was Meadow Creek, and they were converting a permeable surface into an impermeable one. He asked if there were any measures to capture stormwater onsite, including vegetative islands in order to keep the water in the landscape instead of washing it out.

Ms. Long asked if Mr. Murray was discussing the future standalone parking site.

Mr. Murray said yes. He said anything that could be done to capture stormwater onsite, and he was sure staff had many ideas they could work with.

Ms. Long said she would imagine the new stormwater regulations would probably incentivize that.

Mr. Murray said they would.

Ms. Long said Jonathan Walter with Timmons Group was present. She said that if and when they got to the point of needing that site planning stage, they would keep those in mind.

Mr. Bivins asked if there would be a site-specific or site-contained way for people to walk between the two buildings without using the external sidewalk.

Ms. Long said yes. She said they had not really gotten to that point. She said there was a bus circulation route.

Mr. Bivins said that was fine.

Ms. Long said they had not gotten to that part, but they recognized that would be an important issue to help everyone walk through the parking lot safely.

Mr. Bivins said to keep people off the road.

Ms. Long said yes.

Mr. Bivins asked if they were not changing the use of the building on Greenbrier. He asked if that building would remain for them.

Ms. Long said that was correct.

Mr. Bivins said many geese lived in that area.

Ms. Long asked what area Mr. Bivins was speaking about.

Mr. Bivins said he was referring to the proposed parking lot.

Ms. Long said she was familiar with the geese problem on the opposite side of Hillsdale.

Mr. Bivins said there was a group of geese that occupied that field.

Ms. Firehock asked if there was a second presentation for the Commission to hear.

Mr. Herrick said that there was only one presentation by staff and the applicant.

Ms. Firehock asked if there was no further presentation.

Mr. Herrick said that was correct. He said the intention was to combine them.

Ms. Firehock said she understood.

Mr. Herrick said that only the motions for each special use permit would need to be separate.

Ms. Firehock said she had overcomplicated the matter.

Ms. Firehock asked if there were any public speakers.

Ms. Shaffer said there was not.

Ms. Firehock asked if the applicant had any further comments. Hearing none, she brought the matter back before the Commission for discussion.

Mr. Bivins said he was pleased to know they were not losing inventory from the commercial land use. He said at some point, there would be a connected route, so this became an alternative.

Ms. Firehock asked if Mr. Bivins was referring to the future traffic volume increase.

Mr. Bivins said yes. He said this would be a perfect place for commercial office space on the other side of that development.

Mr. Murray said it could be an apartment building with commercial on the bottom.

Ms. Firehock said she was pleased to see the use of existing urban space and the work on an existing footprint. She said she hoped the playgrounds they put in were as environmentally friendly as possible. She said there was a lot of research about the access to green space for people with learning disabilities or behavioral issues, and it was a paved area except for the space across the street. She asked if it could be made a calming environment for arriving or playing outside. She said it seemed an appropriate use that helped a business combine and become more efficient in their provision of services, with a very worthwhile mission.

Mr. Missel moved to recommend approval of SP202100009 Virginia Institute of Autism Expansion for the reasons stated in the staff report and with the staff recommended conditions.

Mr. Herrick asked Ms. Ragsdale for clarification that it was SP202200009.

Ms. Ragsdale said that was correct.

Mr. Missel apologized.

Mr. Herrick said that there was a typo on the screen. He said that the SP number was 202200009, and asked Mr. Missel if his motion was to approve that SP number, with the conditions stated in the staff report.

Mr. Missel said yes, that was correct.

Mr. Clayborne seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0).

Mr. Bivins moved to recommend approval of SP202200010 Virginia Institute of Autism Stand Alone Parking.

Mr. Herrick said the staff report had suggested that the motion for approval be with the conditions stated that the staff report and for the reasons stated in the staff report. He asked if that was Mr. Bivins' motion.

Mr. Bivins said yes.

Ms. Firehock thanked Mr. Herrick and Mr. Bivins for clarifying that.

Mr. Carrazana seconded the motion, which passed unanimously (6-0).

Ms. Firehock said both SPs passed unanimously by the Planning Commission and would be heard before the Board of Supervisors at a date to be determined.

Adjournment

At 8:00 p.m., the Commission adjourned to October 11, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.



Charles Rapp, Director of Planning

(Recorded by Carolyn S. Shaffer, Clerk to Planning Commission & Planning Boards; transcribed by Golden Transcription Services)

Approved by Planning Commission
Date: 10/25/2022
Initials: CSS