

**STAFF ANALYSIS**

**STAFF PERSON:** Rebecca Ragsdale, Planning Manager  
**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:** April 5, 2023  
**PROJECT:** Little Explorers Discovery School Special Exceptions  
**PARCEL ID:** 056A2-01-00-01600

**Proposal**

The Applicant requests two special exceptions associated with a final site plan under review for the Little Explorers Discovery School. The preschool has been operating at 5762 Tabor Street since July 2022 and is currently licensed for up to 50 children. The preschool currently uses parking and the drop-off/pick-up loop on the Tabor Church property to the west of the school. The proposed site plan is to provide parking in front of the existing preschool to accommodate parking and a pick-up/drop-off loop onsite. Two special exceptions have been requested and the applicant has provided a narrative and exhibits (Attachment A). The applicant is proposing:

**1. SE202200071 Parking Lot Aisle Width Reduction**

To modify County Code § 18-4.12.16(c)(3), which requires a minimum aisle width for 60-degree angled parking of 16 feet, to reduce aisle width to 14 feet and 15 feet in two locations for a one-way travel aisle, as shown on proposed plans.

**2. SE202200072 Sidewalk and Street Tree Modification**

To modify County Code §18-20B.7, which requires a minimum eight-foot-wide sidewalk, to reduce the sidewalk width to six feet. A grass strip of three feet would be provided adjacent to Tabor Street, with street tree requirements met on-site behind the sidewalk.

**Character of the Area**

The site is 0.80 acres, located at the corner of Tabor and High Streets in Crozet and zoned Downtown Crozet District (DCD). It is located at the edge of Downtown, as recommended by the Crozet Master Plan (CMP). The property is developed with an existing structure (5762 Tabor St.) of approximately 2,742 square feet, used for a preschool. An existing 720 square foot shed is also located on the property and is used for storage. Surrounding properties are developed, with Tabor Church to the west, and other properties developed as single-family residences. Adjoining properties to the north and west are zoned DCD and are designated Downtown in the CMP. Property to the south is zoned R2 Residential and is designated Middle Density in the CMP. Property to the east is zoned R2 Residential and is designated Neighborhood Density. (Attachment C-Location Map)

**Planning and Zoning History**

The property was rezoned DCD with the County's comprehensive zoning map amendment for Downtown Crozet in 2008.

CLE202100083- A zoning clearance and associated building permits were approved to convert an existing house to a preschool for the Little Explorers Discovery School. Shared parking and a pick-up/drop-off loop to serve the preschool was approved at Tabor Church.

SDP202200028- An initial site plan was approved to add on-site parking and landscaping, along with entrance improvements and stormwater facilities to the site.

SDP202200073- A final site plan is under review for proposed parking and other site improvements associated with the initial site plan.

**Analysis of Special Exception Request**

Factors for consideration in a special exception request are described in County Code § 18-33.9(A). This section states that factors, standards, criteria, and findings, however denominated, in the

applicable sections of the Zoning Ordinance, are to be considered.

Staff offers the following analysis of the proposed special exceptions:

**SE202200071 Parking Lot Aisle Width Reduction**

County Code § 18-4.12.16(c)(3) requires a 16-foot aisle width for 60-degree angled parking. However, under County Code § 18-4.12.2(c), the design requirements in County Code § 18-4.12.16 may be modified or waived if the Board of Supervisors finds (i) that the public health, safety or welfare would be equally or better served by the modification or waiver and (ii) that the modification or waiver would not otherwise be contrary to the purpose and intent of the Zoning Ordinance. County Code § 18-4.12.2(c)(2) further provides that such a modification or waiver may occur “only after consultation with the county engineer, who shall advise the zoning administrator whether the proposed waiver or modification would equally or better serve the public health, safety or welfare.”

In order to provide a pick-up/drop-off loop with adequate circulation and room for vehicle stacking, a one-way circulation drive aisle with 60-degree angled parking is proposed. Though the ordinance requires an aisle at least 16 feet wide, the proposed entrance drive aisle is 14 feet wide and the proposed travel aisle closest to the building is 15 feet wide. The proposed curbing would be the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) standard CG- 3 (a mountable curb). The mountable curb would allow for less restriction of movement for emergency vehicles to navigate the site.

The Deputy County Engineer has reviewed the special exception request and believes that public health and safety would be equally served with the proposed travel aisles. The request has been reviewed with Albemarle County Fire Rescue, including an on-site visit with the applicant and review of a fire truck turning wheel path exhibit. There are no concerns with maneuverability or access to the site. Signage and pavement markings would be used to direct drivers and to provide for pedestrian circulation.

Staff recommends approval of the requested travel aisle width reductions as proposed.

**SE202200072 Sidewalk and Street Tree Modification**

County Code §18-20B.7 requires sidewalks and street trees for any development requiring site plan approval in the DCD. County Code §18-20B.7(A) requires a sidewalk at least eight feet wide, and County Code §18-20B.7(C) requires street trees to be planted in grates on the sidewalk or in a planting strip abutting the sidewalk. Under County Code §18-20B.7(D), the Board of Supervisors may waive the requirements for a sidewalk and/or street trees where the developer demonstrates that:

- (i) either the Virginia Department of Transportation prohibits establishing sidewalks and/or planting street trees or existing utility easements prohibit establishing sidewalks and/or planting street trees;
- (ii) there are unusual physical conditions on the lot or an adjoining lot including, but not limited to, the location of existing structures and parking areas, steep topography or other environmental features, the narrowness, shallowness, size or shape of the lot, or the width or alignment of the existing sidewalk, that make it impossible or unfeasible to provide the required sidewalk and/or street trees as provided in subsections 20B.7 (A) and (C);
- (iii) the strict application of the requirements of subsections 20B.7 (A) and (C) would not further the purposes of this chapter or the DCD or otherwise serve the public health, safety, or welfare or achieve the goals established in the comprehensive plan.

The Applicant has worked with VDOT and County Staff to provide a sidewalk that addresses VDOT standards and responds to the Tabor Street Sidewalk Plan and Crozet Master Plan (CMP) recommendations. A six-foot-wide sidewalk with a three-foot-wide grass strip is proposed along the property's Tabor Street frontage, terminating at the existing right-of-way prior to High Street. Though

not proposed in the Tabor Street Sidewalk Plan, a three-foot-wide grass strip is a requirement of VDOT. No improvements are proposed along High Street.

The Applicant has indicated a number of challenges with constructing the eight-foot-wide sidewalk and street trees required in the DCD, and with extending sidewalks the full length of the property frontage on Tabor and High Streets. Several challenges could require off-site improvements.

- The extension of the sidewalk to the intersection of High Street would warrant a reworking of storm drainage at this road intersection.
- The current drainage system in the High Street right-of-way appears to be very shallow and would likely need to be completely replaced, with impacts to at least one neighboring property, located at 5757 Tabor Street.
- There apparently are no recorded easements for drainage on the 5757 Tabor Street property. The potential drainage improvements would likely require easement(s) from the 5757 Tabor Street property.
- The right-of-way fronting High Street on the 5757 Tabor Street property is a steep slope populated with established trees that would likely be impacted by a replacement of the existing storm drainage piping system.
- The County's internal 2019 study for sidewalk improvements to Tabor Street illustrates the potential for retaining walls to be located on 5757 Tabor Street to properly align the sidewalk for future extension to the Hill Top Street network.

The DCD street section is not recommended by the Tabor Street Sidewalk Plan that was completed in 2019. This Plan calls for a six-foot-wide sidewalk along Tabor Street. The Plan also shows the termination of the sidewalk at the intersection of Tabor Street and High Street with no connection or proposed sidewalk along High Street. Currently, the only existing segment of sidewalk is along the north side of Tabor Street, extending about 200+ feet from its intersection with Crozet Avenue. The existing and proposed sidewalk network is shown on the Crozet Master Plan Future Bicycle + Pedestrian Network map below.



Completing the sidewalk network is a goal of the Crozet Master Plan (CMP) and Tabor Street is one of the priority segments, along with High Street.

Goal 2: Establish sidewalks, paths, trails, bike lanes, and other improvements to provide safety and access for all users.

- A. Construct priority segments of the sidewalk network shown on the Future Bicycle & Pedestrian Network Plan as funding becomes available, including missing segments of sidewalk along Crozet Avenue, Park Road, High Street, Tabor Street, and Hill Top Street.

Goal 4: Support the redevelopment of Downtown with appropriate transportation infrastructure improvements.

- A. In coordination with community members and relevant partners and agencies, design and construct improvements to High Street from Tabor Street to Library Avenue. Use the Crozet Transportation Analysis study recommendations for guidance, ensure improvements provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections, and consider if a phased approach is appropriate.

The [CMP](#) recommends sidewalks along both sides of Tabor Street, but future sidewalks are shown only on the east side of High Street and further study is needed. The CMP appears to recommend a street section consistent with the Tabor Street Sidewalk Study for Tabor Street.

Staff believes that the applicant has sufficiently demonstrated issues with physical constraints on the parcel and adjacent streets. The strict application of the DCD street section standards would not further the goals of CMP to provide an interconnected sidewalk network, as the street section required by the DCD is not the preferred section for Tabor Street. A sidewalk section that can more easily integrate with future improvements on abutting properties is preferred.

Given the limited area to accommodate parking and on-site stormwater management in the form of a planted bio-filter, there is not adequate space for an eight-foot-wide sidewalk and street trees. The applicant prefers a bio-filter with planted trees to other stormwater alternatives and believes it could provide a learning opportunity for students as well. The proposed plan would provide a three-foot-wide grass strip between the street and sidewalk. The existing hedgerow, historically part of the Tabor streetscape would be removed for site improvements but planted back with a native species. Staff believes that this approach would be more in keeping with the streetscape character along Tabor Street.

Staff supports the modification to the street section along Tabor Street, which would be consistent with more recent sidewalk studies and master plan recommendations. Staff supports not constructing a sidewalk along High Street at this time. Right-of-way width for future improvements appears sufficient without additional right of way needed from the preschool property.

### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Board adopt the attached Resolutions (Attachment D and E) to approve special exception request SE202200071 to reduce the parking lot travel aisle width and SE202200072 to modify the sidewalk and street tree requirements, each with conditions, as follows.

#### **SE202200071**

1. Development and use must be in general accord (as determined by the Director of Planning and the Zoning Administrator) with the plan titled "Little Explorers Discovery Preschool Final Site Plan Site Layout," prepared by Woolly Engineering and dated December 14, 2022. To be

in general accord with the Conceptual Plan, development and use must reflect the location and configuration of the proposed parking area and travel aisles shown on the Conceptual Plan, which are essential to the development's design.

Minor modifications to the plan that do not otherwise conflict with these essential elements may be made to ensure compliance with the Zoning Ordinance.

**SE202200072**

1. Development and use must be in general accord (as determined by the Director of Planning and the Zoning Administrator) with the plan titled "Little Explorers Discovery Preschool Final Site Plan Site Layout" prepared by Woolly Engineering and dated December 14, 2022. To be in general accord with the Conceptual Plan, development and use must reflect the location and dimensions of the proposed sidewalk and grass strip shown on the Conceptual Plan, which are essential to the development's design.

Minor modifications to the plan that do not otherwise conflict with these essential elements may be made to ensure compliance with the Zoning Ordinance.