

**Albemarle County Planning Commission  
December 4, 2018**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public hearing on Tuesday, December 4, 2018, at 6:00 p.m., at the County Office Building, Lane Auditorium, Second Floor, 401 McIntire Road, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Members attending were Tim Keller, Chair, Pam Riley, Vice Chair, Daphne Spain; Bruce Dotson, Karen Firehock, Julian Bivins and Luis Carrazana, UVA representative. Jennie More was absent. Ms. Firehock arrived at 6:03 p.m.

Other officials present were Andrew Gast-Bray, Assistant Director of Community Development/Director of Planning; Tori Kanellopoulos, Planner, Andy Reitelbach, Planner, Sharon Taylor, Clerk to Planning Commission and Andy Herrick, Deputy County Attorney.

**Call to Order and Establish Quorum**

Mr. Keller called the regular meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and established a quorum.

The meeting moved to the next item.

**Public Hearing Item.**

**a. [SP-2018-00015 Albemarle Montessori School](#)**

MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT: Rivanna

TAX MAP/PARCEL(S): 046B20100002F0

LOCATION: 1562 Insurance Lane, Charlottesville VA 22911

PROPOSAL: New Special Use Permit to establish a 1,970 sq. ft. Montessori School in an existing building for grades 1-6, with a maximum enrollment of 36 students. The building would include one classroom and four office/storage areas. No residential units are proposed.

PETITION: Sections 20.4.2 and 23.2.2(6) School of Special Instruction

ZONING: PUD- Planned Unit Development – residential (3 – 34 units per acre), mixed with commercial, service and industrial uses.

OVERLAY DISTRICT(S): Entrance Corridor, Airport Impact Area, Steep Slopes-

Managed

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: Commercial Mixed Use – commercial, retail, employment uses, with supporting residential (no maximum density), office, or institutional uses in the Hollymead area of the Places29 Master Plan. (Tori Kanellopoulos)

Tori Kanellopoulos, County Planner and lead reviewer for this project, said we are here this evening for a public hearing for SP-2018-15 a Special Use Permit to establish a Montessori School for up to 36 students in the Hollymead Neighborhood. In a PowerPoint presentation Ms. Kanellopoulos reviewed an overview of where the proposed school is located at 1562 Insurance Lane at the entrance to the Hollymead Planned Unit Development (PUD) Neighborhood. It is adjacent to Route 29 and near the neighborhood of Forest Lakes. In an aerial view enlargement, she pointed out that the school would be within a portion of the existing building, the adjacent uses are mainly offices as well as an existing Montessori daycare is located behind the proposed school.

The property is zoned Planned Unit Development (PUD) that allows schools of special instruction by special use permit. It is designated as Commercial Mixed Use by the Places29 Plan in the Comprehensive Plan. Properties with this designation may include institutional, office, and multifamily uses. Therefore, this proposed use is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan designation.

The proposal is for a Montessori School for up to 36 students in grades 1-6. It is a new special use permit. The school would be established within the existing 1,970 building. There would only be interior renovations to the building. There would be one classroom. The hours of operation would be between 7:15 AM and 5:45 PM, the same as the existing daycare. The playground for the school would be shared between the existing daycare and proposed school and is located between the two buildings that is also shown in the concept plan.

The concept plan shows the parking circulation plan for the school, where parents would circulate around the proposed school and existing daycare and would pull into designated parking spaces for the school to drop off and pick up students. The concept plan also shows the shared playground. There is an existing 6' fence between the playground and the vacant office space to mitigate noise for future tenants. Given that no exterior changes are needed, there is no

Site Plan required for this application.

Staff is recommending approval of this Special Use Permit application with the following conditions and since you have already seen them in the staff report she will cover them briefly and can return to them to address any questions or comments.

1. Development shall be in general accord with the concept plan, as shown on the previous slide. This is intended to mitigate any potential concerns around noise and parking.
2. The maximum enrollment shall be 36 students, as requested by the applicant.
3. The hours of operation shall be between 7:15 AM and 5:45 PM, with occasional after-school events several times per year.

Ms. Kanellopoulos said the last slide has motions for your consideration and would answer any questions.

Mr. Keller invited other questions for staff.

Mr. Bivins asked the material of the fence, and Ms. Kanellopoulos replied it would be a 6' wood fence.

Ms. Spain noted that we talked about this proposal at the Places29 North Community meeting and she asked about connectivity but had read in here that it was not a requirement because this is not a site plan review. She asked if that was it.

Ms. Kanellopoulos replied that was correct and the consensus of staff.

Ms. Spain asked if it was not a condition that it create connectivity and Ms. Kanellopoulos replied no.

Mr. Keller opened the public hearing and invited the applicant to speak.

Fred Catlin, Director of the Albemarle Montessori School and the Director of the Albemarle Montessori Children's Community which is next door, said we

have a thriving Montessori School that goes from the ages of 2 to 6 now in that space next door. He said we have had parents who have asked us to go ahead and expand it to elementary and so we have a desire to go ahead and have an elementary Montessori program in this space. He said we would have one classroom with as many as 36 children and 2 teachers (one a lead teacher and one an assistant). He said the lead teacher is here and right now we anticipate this year having 5 students with the lead teacher in the space.

Mr. Catlin said we are not making any external changes and think the benefits of having this for the county is that we will relieve a burden on the county's school classrooms. He said a lot of our students would be at Baker Butler, which he knows is very full right now. He said second, we are the only AMI, which is an Association Montessori International, and we are the only AMI accredited school in central Virginia. He said that it would add a high quality educational opportunity for families in the northern part of Albemarle County. He said we would also have an elementary Montessori School in that part of the community. He noted that Places29 is an example that this area is growing and developing its own rich culture and that having a Montessori Elementary School could add to that. He said there are other Montessori Schools but none of them are affiliated with us. He said one is located on Pantops Mountain, that is the largest, and they do have an elementary program. He said the other four Montessori Schools in town are just preschools and do not have an elementary, so this would be the second Montessori Elementary School in Albemarle County. He said those are my comments and asked if there are any questions.

Mr. Keller suggested that we hold the questions, take public comment and then have a wrap up.

Mr. Keller invited public comments. Hearing none, he invited the applicant to come back up and invited questions.

Ms. Spain said she could report that your presentation at the Places29 North CAC was well received and there was general approval at that point.

Mr. Dotson said the staff report mentions a fence and one of your statements mentions a wall and having looked at site he was not sure where those were

and what they were doing in terms of noise.

Mr. Catlin replied that there is a 4' chain link fence around the playground, of course, but the part of the second building that is part of the 1562 Insurance Lane we are not planning to use for most of that at the request of the previous tenant. He said we actually did it on our own as a good neighbor option to build a 6' high wooden panel fence to serve as a noise abatement or reduction for them. He said that 3-year old's can get very excited on the playground and make a little noise.

Mr. Dotson noted that he asked simply because he could not see it when driving through.

Mr. Catlin pointed out that it was between the two buildings on the south end.

Mr. Dotson said that the other thing when he was driving through he was curious about how your drop off and pick up worked. He said it looked like a parent would pull into a parking place, drop off and presumably the children if they were in both the school and daycare could then walk from that one drop point and then the parent would then back out into the lane. He asked is that how it would work.

Mr. Catlin replied yes, sir. He said one of the things that we are looking at that we put into this presentation is on the north side to have some specifically designated spots for drop off and pick up. He said we are doing that now on the south side of the building and it works very effectively. He said we are always concerned when you have big vehicles and small children and so we are trying to figure out some way to do it that is going to be the safest for everybody involved.

Ms. Riley said in the staff report it says that you would be looking for one classroom of a maximum of 36 students and is there any other expansion intensions over time.

Mr. Catlin replied that if there is any other expansion it would probably be one more preschool classroom. He said Montessori works on the premise of

a three-year age group and when you get to elementary it can be a six-year age group. He said so you would have children from the first through sixth grade. He said because Montessori does not teach to the children rather we introduce the appropriate material at the appropriate time to each individual child. He said each child is working on at their own individual journey of discovery and so you can have that diverse age population within the classroom all working on different things during the day. He said the benefit of having that diversity of age is that you have the older children serving as mentors to the other children. He said the younger children are seeing what the older children are doing and they want to aspire to do those same things. He said that is a hallmark of a Montessori education. He said the preschool has 3 to 6 classrooms and the last thing he would also say is that Montessori because we develop self-control and the children develop independence and self-responsibility the Montessori classes tend to be larger than a traditional school because the children do not have to be controlled since they are so engaged in the work during the day. He said at the preschool we have a special balanced mixed age classroom having a 1 to 14 ratio versus a 1 to 10.

Ms. Spain said to follow up on that if there is an expansion would you want to incorporate that into this request, so you don't have to appear before the Planning Commission again in possibly five years.

Mr. Catlin replied that he believed we have the opportunity in this space to do a preschool by right versus a special use permit.

Ms. Spain asked but if the elementary school expands, and Mr. Catlin replied that the elementary school would not expand since the only expansion would be a 3 to 6-year-old classroom.

Mr. Bivins asked where is the 6' wooden fence, and Mr. Catlin pointed out that if you drive along the south side you will see that fence as shown in the photo.

Mr. Bivins asked if it would sort of close off the playground.

Mr. Catlin pointed out we have a chain link fence and between the chain link fence and those bushes on the right the fence is located over there.

Mr. Bivins said that he saw the picket fence, chain link fence but not the wooden fence on site. He said in your parking circulation piece you have parked up to 40 children and 4 staff in the school space, again, would you not like us consider 40 children and 4 staff so that you have as much possibility as you might grow to.

Mr. Catlin replied that you are very kind to do that but an elementary Montessori program if we are going to go into making a more significant space then we are going to want to have a new space to it. He said what we have now is perfect for the size but if we grow to a second elementary classroom we need to go to a new space.

Mr. Keller asked if there were other questions. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing to bring the request back for discussion and action.

Ms. Spain moved to recommend approval of SP-2018-00015 Montessori School with the reasons and conditions stated in the staff report.

Mr. Bivins seconded the motion.

Mr. Keller invited questions.

Ms. Firehock asked if the motion includes the staff conditions, and Ms. Spain and Mr. Bivins said that it does include staff conditions.

Mr. Keller asked for a roll call.

The motion passed by a vote of 6:0 (More absent).

Mr. Keller thanked the applicant and staff for this thorough presentation.

The meeting moved to the next item.