

STAFF PERSON: Mariah Gleason, Senior Planner
PLANNING COMMISSION: August 20, 2019
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS: October 2, 2019

SP201900004: Virginia Institute of Autism Adult Service Center

PETITION:

PROJECT: SP201900004 Virginia Institute of Autism Adult Service Center

MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT: Rio

TAX MAP/PARCEL(S): 061W0-02-00-002A1

LOCATION: 491 Hillsdale Dr, Charlottesville, VA 22901

PROPOSAL: The Virginia Institute of Autism is requesting to use an existing building on a 1.71ac lot for office and private school uses, for the purpose of an Adult Service Center program. The program would be a year-round, day program serving approximately 52 adult participants and 69 staff members. No building expansion is proposed. Some on-site parking may be converted to open space.

PETITION: Sections 18-22.2.2(6) and 18-18.2.2(5) allow private school uses by Special Use Permit. Section 18-22.2.1(b)(1) allow office uses By Right.

ZONING: C-1 Commercial – retail sales and service; residential by special use permit (15 units/ acre)

OVERLAY DISTRICT(S): Steep Slopes (Managed and Preserved), Flood Hazard Overlay, Airport Impact Area

PROFFERS: No

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: Institutional – civic uses, parks, recreational facilities, and similar uses on County-owned property within Neighborhood 2 of the Places29 Master Plan.

CHARACTER OF SURROUNDING AREA:

The subject property is located at the corner of Hillsdale Drive and Greenbrier Drive [Attachment 1]. Traveling along Greenbrier Drive away from Route 29, this area transitions from commercial to residential zoning. The subject property lies at the edge of the commercially-zoned area and is buffered from residential uses by a highly vegetated stream. Businesses surrounding the subject property to the north and west of the site are RoseWood Village Assisted Living and The Laurels of Charlottesville (a skilled nursing and rehabilitation center), which are both separated from the site by the traffic intersection. Sharing a parcel boundary to the south is an office building and, to the east of the property, are two planned unit developments, Branchlands Retirement Village and Brookmill.

PLANNING AND ZONING HISTORY:

SDP199000078 The Senior Center at Pepsi Place – Final site plan

- Letter of Revision #1 (2005) – Approved the addition of a garden shed located adjacent to the building on the southeast corner.

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL:

The applicant, Virginia Institute of Autism (VIA), is requesting a special use permit to allow private school uses on an existing C-1 Commercial property. The property currently serves as The Center, formerly known as The Senior Center, which has been operating at this location since 1991. However, with The Center's upcoming move to a new location along Belvedere Avenue, VIA is proposing to use the existing building for a new Adult Service Center Program. VIA is also hoping to use a portion of the building as their company's headquarters. As office uses are allowed by-right in this zoning district, a special use permit is not required to allow these uses.

The proposed Adult Service Center Program will act as a year-round, comprehensive day program, to support adults with autism spectrum disorder. The program will provide vocational training to enhance participants' ability to obtain gainful employment, train participants in the skills necessary to live more independently, and include social, cultural, and recreational opportunities to help participants better integrate into the larger Charlottesville community.

The program hopes to serve approximately 52 adult participants and be staffed by 69 personnel, including 13 administrative staff members. Participants in this program will be ages 18 and older in the first three to five years and, after five years, VIA envisions that this location will only serve participants ages 22 and older. Another location is being planned to serve individuals between the ages of 18 and 22 in the future.

While the applicant will be occupying the existing building on-site, the conceptual plan shows some changes to the area surrounding the building, including a new garden area, relocation of parking islands and curb within the main parking area to accommodate buses, enclosing outdoor recreation areas in the rear and sides of the building with a new fence, and a potential future conversion of the parking lot area on the eastern side of the building to a new outdoor passive recreation area [Attachment 2].

COMMUNITY MEETING:

The applicant conducted the required community meeting with the Places29 - Hydraulic Community Advisory Committee on Monday, June 17th. Overall, there was general agreement from those in attendance that this is an excellent location for VIA.

Additional questions and discussion included:

- The applicant answered questions about what autism is, emphasizing that it is a spectrum disorder.
- Attendees discussed the on-going, supportive relationship between Albemarle County Schools and VIA.
 - VIA is able to provide a continuation of care after individuals with autism exit or age out of the school system.
- Several attendees also voiced support for the organization's ability to draw families to the area because of the quality of support systems and programs they provide.
- Attendees wondered if additional signage would be provided at the traffic intersection for the safety of program participants.
 - The applicant reiterated that the program would serve adult participants who would generally be aware of traffic safety. Also, the applicant plans to install a fence around the building's outdoor recreation spaces as a safety measure to separate recreation areas from the traffic intersection.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST:

Section 33.39(B) states that the Commission, in making its recommendation, shall consider the same factors found in Section 33.40 (B):

1. No substantial detriment. Whether the proposed special use will be a substantial detriment to adjacent parcels.

In evaluating whether the proposed special use will be a detriment to adjacent properties, the type and intensity of new use are considered, as well as comments and concerns of neighboring properties.

The special use proposed on the property will functionally be very similar to the current use of the site by The Center, formerly known as The Senior Center. The proposed new use will offer education, training, and social/cultural/recreational opportunities to adult program participants.

While the applicant is proposing to occupy the existing building, the conceptual plan demonstrates some changes to the area around the building. One of which is the potential future conversion of the parking area on the eastern side of the building to a new passive outdoor recreation area. Staff finds this potential conversion to be an improvement to the existing, impervious nature of the lot,

however, this area lies within a water protection ordinance buffer, commonly referred to as the 100ft stream buffer area, and adjacent to preserved steep slopes. Therefore, to ensure no substantial detriment to the stream is created if/when this area is converted to recreation space, Staff offers the following condition:

- Prior to converting a portion of the parking area to outdoor recreation space, provide silt fencing along the top of preserved steep slopes.

The proposed private school use will require less on-site parking than is currently available. The subject property currently offers 106 parking spaces, however, the parking requirement to support expected proposed uses – private school and office – is 80 parking spaces, as determined by Zoning Staff. This includes 69 parking spaces for VIA staff members and 11 parking spaces which will be open to visitors. No parking need is anticipated for program participants as none of the participants drive independently. This reduced parking need is also expected to reduce the number of daily vehicular trips to and around the property.

To accommodate participant travel to the subject property, VIA anticipates participants will use public transportation (CAT stops for routes 7 and 12 are located along Hillsdale Drive, adjacent to or across from the property), Jaunt buses, cabs, or be dropped off and picked up by family vehicles. VIA also expects four full-sized buses to provide drop off and pick up services for participants between the ages of 18 and 22. These buses will access the site twice a day, once in the morning around 8:45am and once in the afternoon around 2:45pm.

Simulated auto-turn analysis for the full-sized buses entering and exiting the site revealed that buses executing right turn movements out of the site will temporarily cross into the dedicated left turn lane of opposing traffic [Attachment 2, Sheet C2.0]. This potential traffic conflict was found to be inadvisable by VDOT, particularly since the buses are expected to provide drop off and pick up services regularly. Thus, it was recommended by the VDOT staff reviewer that the applicant explore alternative options.

Based on these findings, Staff proposes the following changes be made to the conceptual plan so that the proposed use will not be a detriment to adjacent property:

- The applicant will work with VDOT to make sure VDOT concerns, regarding the ingress and egress of buses providing regular drop off and pick up services to the site, are addressed.

2. *Character of the nearby area is unchanged. Whether the character of the adjacent parcels and the nearby area will be changed by the proposed special use.*

The proposed special use on the subject property is consistent with the existing character of the area, in that it will provide medical services and office uses. Also, VIA's proposal for the Autism Service Center suggests a repertoire of support, education, and recreational programming that is similar in nature to what is currently offered by The Center.

3. *Harmony. Whether the proposed special use will be in harmony with the purpose and intent of this chapter,*

The purpose and intent of the C1-Commerical zoning district is to permit retail, service, and public use establishments to support urban areas, communities, and villages. Located at the edge of commercial and residential areas, the special use permit request for a private school in this area is in harmony with the intent of this zoning district as well as the transition between these zoning classifications – commercial and residential.

with the uses permitted by right in the district,

The addition of a private school in this district will not restrict the current uses or other by-right uses available on this, or adjacent properties.

with the regulations provided in Section 5 as applicable,

No supplementary regulations apply for this use.

and with the public health, safety, and general welfare.

VIA's proposal for a private school use on this property will offer opportunities for adults with autism spectrum disorder in the community to enhance vocational skills to obtain gainful employment, practice skills needed to live more independently, and better integrate into the larger Charlottesville community. This program can be seen as promoting public health, safety, and general welfare of the community.

As is typical with private school uses, Staff offers the following conditions to ensure the proposed use will not have any detrimental impacts to public health, safety, or general welfare:

- Maximum enrollment shall be 65 participants.
- Normal hours of operation for the center shall be from 7:30am to 6:00pm, Monday through Friday, with occasional evening and weekend activities.

Note: Traffic and parking related impacts were previously discussed under factor 1 above.

4. Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. Whether the proposed special use will be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

The Places29 Master Plan, revised in 2015, designates this property as "Institutional" which allows for civic uses, parks, recreational facilities, and similar uses on County-owned property. With the upcoming move of The Center, which has existed here since 1991, to a new location along Belvedere Boulevard, the civic uses currently offered here may not be as prevalent or publicly-accessible as they have been previously. However, the proposal by VIA for an Adult Service Center Program offers very a similar new use of the existing building and parcel – support, education, and recreation opportunities for adult participants in the program. Therefore, the proposed use is consistent with the practiced intent of this designation.

SUMMARY:

Staff finds the following factors favorable to this request:

1. The proposal provides specialized support, education, and training opportunities for adults in the community with autism spectrum disorder.
2. Community members in attendance at the community meeting generally agreed that this was an excellent location for VIA.

Staff finds the following factor(s) unfavorable to this request:

1. Simulated auto-turn analysis for the full-sized buses entering and exiting the site demonstrates that buses executing right turn movements out of the site will temporarily occupy a portion of the dedicated left turn lane of opposing traffic.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Based on the findings described in this report and factors identified as favorable, **staff recommends approval of special use permit application SP201800004 with the changes outlined below and following conditions.**

Changes

- The applicant will work with VDOT to make sure VDOT concerns, regarding the ingress and egress of buses providing regular drop off and pick up services to the site, are addressed.

Conditions

1. Development of the use shall be in general accord with the conceptual plan titled "Virginia Institute of Autism" prepared by Timmons Group, with the latest revision date of 07/15/2019, as determined by the Director of Planning and the Zoning Administrator. To be in general accord with the Conceptual Plan, development shall reflect the following major elements within the development essential to the design of the development:

- Location of potential future outdoor recreation area as shown on the plan.

Minor modifications to the plan which do not conflict with the elements above may be made to ensure compliance with the Zoning Ordinance.

2. Maximum enrollment shall be 65 participants.
3. Normal hours of operation for the center shall be from 7:30am to 6:00pm, Monday through Friday, with occasional evening and weekend activities.
4. Prior to converting a portion of the parking area to outdoor recreation space, provide silt fencing along the top of preserved steep slopes.

POSSIBLE PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION - SP201900004:

A. Should the Planning Commission **choose to recommend approval** of this special use permit:

Move to recommend approval of SP201900004, Virginia Institute of Autism Adult Service Center, with the changes and conditions as recommended by staff.

B. Should the Planning Commission **choose to recommend denial** of this special use permit:

Move to recommend denial of SP201900004, Virginia Institute of Autism Adult Service Center. *Should a commissioner motion to recommend denial, he or she should state the reason(s) for recommending denial.*

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Vicinity Map

Attachment 2 – Conceptual Plan, last revised on July 15, 2019

Attachment 3 – Applicant Justification for Special Use Permit