



### **Project Background:**

In June of 2022, the Arlington Heights School District 25 community passed a referendum to establish a full day Kindergarten program for all children within District 25. As a result, the District will transition away from the current half-day Kindergarten model where approximately half of the Kindergarten cohort arrives at 9:05am and is dismissed for the day at 11:50am, and the remaining Kindergarten students arrive at 12:50pm and are dismissed at 3:35pm. The full day Kindergarten program is scheduled to begin at the start of the 2024/2025 school year. In order to accommodate the entire Kindergarten cohort within each elementary school building at one time, building additions have been proposed at six of the elementary schools within the district, which will result in an increase to the number of staff, classrooms, and overall student population at each of these six schools.

Westgate Elementary School, which is already at full capacity, is one of the six schools that needs additional space for the full day Kindergarten program. In order to accommodate anticipated kindergarten enrollment, as well as to have the appropriate capacity to absorb future variations in student population, the School District is proposing 10 new classrooms, a new gymnasium, storage spaces, an art room, and a small group room.

The site has three parking areas, the largest of which is located off of Grove Street and contains 51 parking stalls (the “West Lot”). A secondary parking area (the “East Lot”) is located adjacent to the main front entrance of the building along Dwyer Avenue and contains 18 stalls. An auxiliary parking area is located south of the school building with access from Dwyer and contains 45 parking stalls (the “South Lot”). In sum, the site has 114 parking spaces.

Westgate school currently has 600 students, 95 employees, and 34 classrooms. Within five years and at the start of the 2026/2027 school year, the building is expected to have 661 students, 102 employees, and 44 classrooms as a result of the building addition and full day Kindergarten program. It should be noted that the proposed building addition is meant to provide capacity for 15% above the five-year enrollment and staffing projections in order to accommodate possible future “bumps” in enrollment beyond the five-year projections.

There are two busses that currently serve the school and there is no change anticipated to bussing as a result of the full day program. The standard 9:05am arrival and 3:35pm dismissal would remain unchanged. The existing playground at the rear of the school would also remain unchanged, however, the mulched area that includes swing sets would be removed (and not replaced) to accommodate for the proposed building addition. The existing playground equipment on the east side of the building would be removed and is proposed for replacement within a new rubber surfaced play area. The specifics of the play equipment in this area have not yet been determined. Finally, the West Lot and South Lot would be removed and reconstructed within their existing footprints, the East lot would be removed and a reconfigured parking lot with additional pick-up/drop-off stacking space would be reconstructed in its place.

### **Zoning and Comprehensive Plan**

The subject property is zoned R-3, One-Family Dwelling District, which allows schools only through issuance of a Special Use Permit. Westgate School has never been approved for a Special Use Permit, and due to the proposed building expansion, a Special Use Permit is now required for the site. The School District has submitted a written response explaining how the existing school and proposed building addition comply with the three standards for Special Use Permit approval, which standards are summarized below. The written response from the School District has been included in the materials provided to the Plan Commission:

- ***That said special use is deemed necessary for the public convenience at this location.***
- ***That such case will not, under the circumstances of the particular case, be detrimental to the health, safety, morals or general welfare of persons residing or working in the vicinity.***
- ***That the proposed use will comply with the regulations and conditions specified in this ordinance for such use, and with the stipulations and conditions made a part of the authorization granted by the Village Board of Trustees.***

Staff concurs that the necessary criteria for Special Use Permit approval have been met for the following reasons; 1) the need for the school and building addition at this location is illustrated by the expected growth in enrollment and passage of a community referendum to provide a full-day kindergarten, 2) the school has existed on this site for many years and is part of the existing fabric of the neighborhood, and 3) the school is regularly inspected by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for compliance with ISBE health and safety regulations which will protect the safety, morals, and general welfare of persons residing or working in the vicinity.

The Village's Comprehensive Plan designates the future use of the subject property as "Schools", however, there is a small portion of land on the southern edge of the Westgate School site that falls within the "Single-Family Detached" classification. The majority of this area is currently used as open space although there is a small portion of the South Lot that is included within the "Single-Family Detached" classification. In order to align the entire site with the future land use as identified in the Comprehensive Plan, the Staff Development Committee recommends that the "Single-Family Detached" portion of the subject property be reclassified as "Schools."

In addition to the Special Use Permit, a several variations are required for the proposed site improvements. These variations will be discussed in detail within the various sections of the report below, however, for each required variation, the petitioner has submitted a written response documenting compliance to the four hardship criteria necessary for variation approval, which criteria has been outlined below:

- ***The proposed use will not alter the essential character of the locality and will be compatible with existing uses and zoning of nearby property.***
- ***The plight of the owner is due to unique circumstances, which may include the length of time the subject property has been vacant as zoned.***
- ***The proposed variation is in harmony with the spirit and intent of this Chapter.***
- ***The variance requested is the minimum variance necessary to allow reasonable use of the property.***

### **Neighborhood Meeting**

On Tuesday, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022, District 25 held a neighborhood meeting to present their conceptual plans to surrounding property owners and solicit early feedback to understand any potential concerns with the project. According to the petitioner, four residents attended the meeting. Questions generally related to clarifications on the project scope, timeline, construction staging, and stormwater. The petitioner's written summary of the discussion has been included as part of the materials provided to the Plan Commission.

### **Conceptual Plan Review Committee**

On October 24, 2022, District 25 appeared before the Conceptual Plan Review Committee. The discussion was primarily related to the gymnasium height, projected enrollment, and drop-off/pick-up stacking. In

general, the Conceptual Plan Review Committee was supportive of the project and encouraged the petitioner to proceed with their Plan Commission application.

### **Design Commission**

The Design Commission is scheduled to meet on January 24, 2023, to discuss the design and architecture of the proposed building addition. An update on the discussion will be provided during the Plan Commission hearing on January 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **Building and Site**

The proposed building addition would be located at the southwest side of the existing school building. The building addition complies with most of the Code requirements relating to bulk, height, lot coverage, and setbacks, however, certain variations are required. The new classroom areas and associated spaces are proposed at one-story tall and the gymnasium is proposed at 27 feet in height. The R-3 District restricts maximum building heights to no greater than 25 feet and the following variation is therefore necessary:

- ***Variation to Chapter 28, Section 5.1-3.6, to allow a 27-foot tall building where maximum building height is limited to 25 feet.***

Given the location of the gym addition towards the center of the site, the need to have quality indoor recreation spaces for students, the minor scope of the variation at only two feet above the maximum allowable height, and the fact that the gymnasium addition will match the height of the existing gym, the Staff Development Committee is supportive of this variation.

With regards to the site, the majority of the property will not undergo significant changes; the western and southern parking areas will be reconstructed within their existing footprints as noted above, and the existing playground at the west of the school building will be preserved. However, a new rubber playground is proposed in front of the building along the east side (Dwyer side), which will replace the existing mulched play area in this location and include new playground structures. The District has not yet selected the specific structures that will be installed within the rubber playground area. This location is considered an exterior side yard and accessory structures are only allowed within a rear yard. Additionally, accessory play equipment is not allowed to exceed 300 square feet in size and the District anticipates that the new play equipment may exceed this requirement. Accordingly, the following variations are required:

- ***Variation to Chapter 28, Section 6.5-2, to allow an accessory structure (play equipment) in an exterior side yard where accessory structures are restricted to rear yards only.***
- ***Variation to Chapter 28, Section 6.5-7b., to allow accessory structures (play equipment) no larger than 850 square feet in size where code restricts the maximum size of accessory structures to 300 square feet.***

The Staff Development Committee is supportive of both variations for several reasons; 1) the proposed equipment will replace existing play equipment in this area and the Village is not aware of any issues caused by the existing play equipment, 2) the equipment will be setback over 105' from the property line abutting Dwyer and will be partially screened by the existing building to the north, and 3) while the exact size of the play equipment is not known at this time, the size of the rubber surface upon which it will be located will limit the overall size of the structures. The petitioner has estimated that the total square footage of the new playground equipment will not exceed 850 square feet, however, staff believes that the square footage will likely be less than this.

With regards to emergency vehicle access, the redesign of the East Lot proposed elimination of the northern drive way entrance into the East Lot, which access point the Fire Department needs maintained in order to provide for adequate emergency egress from the site. Additionally, the reconfigured East Lot is just shy of the necessary width to provide suitable fire truck circulation, resulting in two areas where the fire truck would have to mount a curb to stage in the event of an emergency. These two items must be corrected, which will likely result in a gated “emergency service only” secondary egress point from the East Lot, and may involve slight modifications to the width of the drive aisles in the East Lot. Both the existing building and the proposed addition will be protected by a sprinkler system.

The petitioner has recently submitted a modified plan to address the access and circulation concerns, which plan preserves the existing northern curb cut, however, the Village has not had sufficient time to review the revisions to ensure Code conformance. Additional pavement marking, modifications to the proposed gates, or revisions to the plans may be necessary. A condition of approval to require the petitioner to continue working with the Village to resolve these issues has been included within the recommendation below and an update may be available during the public hearing on this application.

Relative to stormwater, the District is proposing a large underground stormwater detention trap, which will store stormwater water during rain events and slowly release the water into the Village storm sewer system. Currently, the site does not have an underground detention system and stormwater is captured by the impervious surfaces on the site and diverted into the Village system only through underground storm pipes. Additionally, the District is contemplating permeable pavers within a portion of both the East and South lots. While the petitioner has preliminarily demonstrated that the proposed stormwater system will be able to comply with all MWRD and Village requirements, final stormwater calculations are needed and minor details/modifications must be incorporated on the engineering plans prior to site development permit issuance. The petitioner shall continue to work with the Village to provide finalized stormwater information and plans to verify compliance with all MWRD and Village regulations.

#### **Landscaping:**

Given the full depth removal of the pavement within each parking lot, compliance with current landscape regulations is required. Generally speaking, this means a 3’ tall landscape screen is required at the edge of any parking lot where it fronts upon a public street and along the edge of any parking lot where it is adjacent to residentially zoned property. Additionally, landscape islands with a shade tree are required at each end of every parking row, and parking rows that include more than 20 parking spaces must include an interim landscape island to break up the parking row. The reconstructed parking lots are deficient in several areas and variations are required as identified below:

- ***Variation to Chapter 28, Section 6.15-1.2b, to omit the required landscape islands at each end of the two central rows of parking within the South parking lot. (due to permeable paver location)***
- ***Variation to Chapter 28, Section 6.15-1.2b, to omit the required landscape islands at the western end of the northern most parking row within the South parking lot, and on both ends of the southern most parking row within the South lot. (due to significant open spaces immediately adjacent)***
- ***Variation to Chapter 28, Section 6.15-1.2b, to omit the requirement for interim landscape islands within parking rows containing more than 20 parking stalls, within the West parking lot. (due to 23 parking spaces within the existing parking row)***
- ***Variation to Chapter 28, Section 6.15-1.2a.2, to omit the requirement for a 6’ tall landscape screen along the western side of the South parking lot. (due to adjacent large open space)***

Staff is supportive of the variation identified above and notes that the incorporation of permeable pavers will have a positive environmental benefit that can substitute for the environmental benefit of the omitted landscape island and shade tree. Moreover, permeable pavers have a better aesthetic than asphalt, which will mitigate for the omission of the landscape island. Additionally, the variations above are warranted due to the need to preserve parking areas for the school, the fact that the variations are required in parking lots that are only being reconstructed within their existing footprints, and due to the substantial greenery and open space that already exists on the site and specifically between the South Lot and the residential areas to the west.

#### **Parking and Loading:**

As mentioned above, the East Lot will be completely removed and reconstructed. The existing East Lot contains two access points onto Dwyer; the north point serves as the entrance and the south point serves as the exit. The northern access point would either be removed or reconfigured to allow emergency vehicles access only, and the reconstructed parking lot would have a singular entrance/exit located where the existing exit is currently located. Vehicles would circulate through the lot in a counter clockwise fashion. The revised entrance places ingress into the East Lot further away from the Dwyer/Grove intersection and would increase stacking capacity within the parking lot. Additionally, six new parking stalls would be added to the East Lot, bringing the total number of spaces within that lot to 24.

Although drop-off and pick-up occurs within both the East and West lots, the primary drop-off/pick-up area is located in the East Lot as this lot is adjacent to the main entrance to the school. Currently, afternoon pick-up involves parents stopping/standing along the west side of Dwyer, which occasionally results in vehicles stopping/standing at the intersection of Dwyer Avenue and Grove Street while they await entry into the queue. Additionally, vehicles have been observed parking on the south side of Grove Street west of Dwyer where parking is prohibited. The modifications to the East Lot will relocate the entrance further south and away from this intersection, which will create more space for cars to stack along Dwyer before they begin to impact the Dwyer/Grove intersection. Stacking capacity within the reconstructed parking lot will increase by approximately 58% (7 vehicles) and along Dwyer by approximately 180% (11 vehicles). These are positive improvements for pick-up and drop-off functions at the school.

Typically, there is congestion in and around the school site beginning approximately 15 minutes before the afternoon pick-up, however, the majority of traffic clears the area within 5-10 minutes after dismissal. It should be noted that both Dwyer and Grove in the vicinity of Westgate School are not heavily travelled streets during morning arrival and afternoon dismissal and they primarily serve local neighborhood traffic.

The School District provided a traffic and parking study from Ericksson Engineering Associates (EEA), which accessed the drop-off/pick-up operations, traffic, and parking for the school. The study was predicated on the School District projections for staffing and enrollment in the year 2026/2027 (661 students and 102 staff), however, it is important to note that the number of classrooms proposed are meant to accommodate capacity at 15% above the 2026/2027 projections to allow for future enrollment “bumps” and potential unanticipated growth. Therefore, the school would be building in capacity to accommodate enrollment beyond the findings as outlined with the EEA study. Staff has concerns that, should enrollment increase to fill the 15% excess capacity within the school, unanticipated traffic, parking, and/or drop-off/pick-up issues could be created. In order to manage possible future problems, a condition has been recommended that would require the School District to demonstrate, to the satisfaction of Village staff, that adequate onsite parking can accommodate peak demand and drop-off/pick-up operations will not create unsafe vehicular or

pedestrian movements. Should it be determined that improvements to the site or modifications to the drop-off/pick up procedures are needed to satisfactorily accommodate an increase beyond 661 students, any such improvements or modifications would need to be implemented upon administrative approval by the Village.

Relative to parking, the site complies with the Zoning Code parking requirements, as shown in **Table I** below:

**Table I:** Parking Calculations

Location	Use		Ratio	Number of Employees	Number of Classrooms	Number of Students	Parking Required
500 S. Dwyer	Westgate School	Elementary School	1 per employee + 1 per 5 classrooms	102	44	661	111
<b>Total</b>							
Total Required							111
Total Provided							120
<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>							<b>9</b>

Both the East and West parking lots are typically at or near capacity during pick-up times and parents will often arrive prior to dismissal and park within the lots to wait for their child to avoid utilizing the loading queue for pick-up. The South Lot is heavily used as well, but not to the same extent as the East and West lots. The EEA study has surveyed each parking lot during the day to determine whether excess capacity exists for staff parking and found that the overall number of parking stalls at the school are used at 70% capacity, which excess capacity should be sufficient to accommodate for the increase in staff associated with the full-day kindergarten.

Per code, 27 bike parking stalls are required. The existing site has approximately 90 bike parking stalls located across several large bike parking racks adjacent to the East Lot.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Staff Development Committee (SDC) reviewed the proposed Special Use Permit to allow a Public Elementary School on the subject property, Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan to reclassify the Single-Family Detached portion of the site into the Schools classification, and the following Variations to Chapter 28 of the Municipal Code:

1. Section 5.1-3.6, to allow a 27' tall building where building heights are restricted to 25'.
2. Section 6.5-2, to allow an accessory structure (play equipment) in an exterior side yard where accessory structures are restricted to rear yards only.
3. Chapter 28, Section 6.5-7b., to allow accessory structures (play equipment) no larger than 850 square feet in size where code restricts the maximum size of accessory structures to 300 square feet.
4. Section 6.15-1.2b, to omit the required landscape islands at each end of the two central rows of parking within the South parking lot.
5. Section 6.15-1.2b, to omit the required landscape islands at the western end of the northern most parking row within the South parking lot, and on both ends of the southern most parking row within the South lot.

6. Section 6.15-1.2b, to omit the requirement for interim landscape islands within parking rows containing more than 20 parking stalls, within the West parking lot.
7. Section 6.15-1.2a.2, to omit the requirement for a 6' tall landscape screen along the western side of the South parking lot.

The Staff Development Committee recommends **APPROVAL** of the application subject to the following conditions:

1. If enrollment at Westgate Elementary school exceeds or is projected to exceed 661 students within the proposed building, the school district shall demonstrate, to the satisfaction of Village staff, that adequate onsite parking can accommodate peak demand and drop-off/pick-up operations will not create unsafe vehicular or pedestrian movements. Improvements needed to satisfactorily accommodate such increase shall be implemented upon administrative approval by the Village. If administrative approval is not granted, an amendment to this Special Use Permit shall be required.
2. The petitioner shall continue to work with the Village and neighbors to address any drop-off/pick-up concerns.
3. The petitioner shall continue to work with the Village to provide stormwater information to verify compliance with all MWRD and Village regulations to the satisfaction of the Village.
4. The petitioner shall continue to work with the Village to address suitable emergency vehicle ingress, egress, and circulation within the East Lot.
5. Compliance with the 1-24-23 Design Commission motion shall be required.
6. The petitioner shall comply with all Federal, State, and Village Codes, Regulations, and Policies

\_\_\_\_\_  
January 20, 2023

Charles Witherington-Perkins, Director of Planning and Community Development

Cc: Randy Recklaus, Village Manager  
All Department Heads