

**REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF
THE PLAT & SUBDIVISION COMMITTEE**
OF THE VILLAGE OF ARLINGTON HEIGHTS PLAN COMMISSION
HELD AT VILLAGE HALL ON:

July 27, 2016

Project Title: Thomas Middle School SUP
Address: 1430 N. Belmont
Petitioner: Don Hansen
350 W. Ontario St. – Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60654

Requested Action:

- Special Use Permit to allow a Middle School within the R-3 District.

Variations Required:

- Variation from Section 5.1-3.9 to increase the maximum allowable height from 25' to 32' for the proposed building addition
- Variation from Section 11.4-4 to reduce the required on-site parking spaces from 314 spaces to 144 spaces.

Attendees: Don Hansen, Petitioner
Mike Henderson, Petitioner
Ryan Schulz, Petitioner
Bruce Green, Plan Commissioner
Jay Cherwin, Plan Commissioner
John Sigalos, Plan Commissioner
Lynn Jensen, Plan Commissioner
Sam Hubbard, Development Planner

Project Summary

The subject property is 10.82 acres in size and contains the Thomas Middle School and associated recreational areas on the southern end of the site. Thomas Middle School is one of six middle schools within the boundaries of District 25 and has a current enrollment of 950 students with 127 staff members. Enrollment is expected to increase in the future, with future capacity estimated at 1,030 students and 135 teachers. In order to provide adequate space for the anticipated increase in student population, District 25 is proposing an addition to the middle school building, which would include a new gymnasium, classrooms, a relocated front entry area, and an addition to the existing parking lot on the eastern side of the site. With the exception of morning drop offs for 6th grade students, who are dropped off in the western parking lot that has ingress/egress onto Thomas Street, all pick-ups and drop-offs occur on the eastern side of the site along Belmont Street. There is no change proposed to the pick-up and drop-off operations.

The subject site is located within the R-3 District, and all schools within the R-3 District are required to have a Special Use Permit. Moreover, any substantial expansion of a school facility would require an amendment to the Special Use Permit. No evidence of an existing Special Use Permit has been located for the Thomas School site, and therefore, due to the proposed expansion of the school, a special use permit is required. The School District recently went through a similar process for expansions to the Ivy Hill and Olive-Mary Stitt schools in 2015.

Meeting Discussion:

Mr. Hansen explained that the number of students at Thomas Middle School was expected to increase in the future, and to accommodate that increase the School District was planning on constructing a new gymnasium building, which

would allow them to convert the existing gymnasium into additional classrooms. He said the new gymnasium would be similar in size to the gymnasium within the South Middle School, but would have a taller ceiling height than the existing gym within the Thomas School. He added that the number of classrooms would increase from 41 to 44 upon completion of the new gym and the conversion of the old gym into classrooms. He clarified that the zoning request would be for a Special Use Permit for the existing middle school, as well as a height variation. He stated that the proposed gym addition would not be taller than the height of the existing school building, but that it would exceed the maximum allowable height per the R-3 zoning district. He said that the height of the gym building would be approximately 32 to 33 feet tall. He stated that the existing gym was located on the second floor of the building and that the height of the ceiling was not sufficient for all sports related activities. He added that one of the baseball diamonds would have to be removed to accommodate the proposed gym.

Commissioner Green asked if there would be a need for any safety netting around the existing soccer fields.

Mr. Schulz responded that the kids would have to “really really good” to create any type of need for a safety net.

Mr. Hansen explained that a request for a parking variation would be included within the scope of this project. He stated that the existing school is non-compliant relative to parking codes, but that they would be adding additional parking spaces as part of the gym expansion project. Specifically, he stated that they would be removing the existing western parking lot and replacing it with a larger parking lot, however, although they would be adding additional spaces, the parking would still not be enough to conform to the required parking by Village Code. He stated that the total number of staff would increase along with the expected increase in students, from 127 staff members to 135 staff members. He mentioned that the overall parking deficit would decrease a result of this project. He stated that the School District has prepared a traffic and parking analysis, which found that the proposed parking lot would meet the needs of the school. He added that the building addition would include additional room for staff offices, as well as a revised entryway into the school which would now be located on the south side of the building as opposed to the east side of the building.

Commissioner Green asked if the new parking lot along Belmont would be the new student drop-off area.

Mr. Schulz responded that parents currently use that space for drop-offs.

Commissioner Green asked if both the east and west areas were used for drop-offs.

Mr. Schulz replied that only the Belmont side was use for drop offs.

Commissioner Green stated that is was good that drop offs occurred on the Belmont side as it would keep this traffic away from the intersection of Thomas and Arlington Heights Rd.

Mr. Schulz stated that the new orientation of the eastern parking lot would be north-south, which would help to facilitate the flow of traffic through the parking lot.

Mr. Hubbard stated that the Plan Commissioners may recall that the School District underwent a similar process last year for expansions to the Ivy Hill and Mary Olive Stitt schools, and that this process would be similar. He stated that staff would be interested in evaluating the traffic study to ensure that drop-offs and pick-ups were occurring smoothly with the increase in students and new orientation of the parking lot. He said that staff was not aware of a current problem in this regard. He mentioned that the existing school building was non-conforming with regards to height and setbacks, and he mentioned that the School District had the option to incorporate variations to formally allow these non-conforming elements, which he encouraged them to do. He said that staff was generally supportive of this project.

Commissioner Jensen asked if the proposed building was going to be non-compliant with regards to height, which height was necessary for proper function of the gym, was the height restriction in need of revision.

Mr. Hubbard replied that the height regulation was due to the property being within the R-3 district, which district is primarily intended for single-family homes. He stated that the 25-foot height restriction was probably appropriate for single-family homes, and that schools were exceptional developments within the R-3 district, which is the reason that the height regulations did not appear to meet the needs of the development.

Commissioner Jensen stated that the necessary criteria for variation approval required that the subject property could not generate a reasonable return if developed under the strict letter of the code. He asked how the School District could demonstrate conformance to this criterion.

Mr. Hubbard replied that he's seen not-for-profit governmental agencies justify conformance to this criteria by stating that it was not directly applicable as they are not in the business of generating a reasonable return. He said that the School District would have to get creative in preparing a response to this criterion.

Commissioner Sigalos asked how many spaces would be added to the parking lot.

Mr. Hansen responded that the existing parking lot on the east side had 27 parking spaces and that this parking lot would contain 66 when the project was completed, which was a net gain of 39 spaces.

Commissioner Sigalos asked if any addition would occur where the old gymnasium was located.

Mr. Hansen clarified that there would be no addition to the existing gymnasium; that the existing gymnasium would be converted into classrooms which would house the music programs for the school.

Commissioner Sigalos said that the plan showed existing classroom below the proposed music classrooms, and asked if the sound from the music classrooms would interfere with the classrooms below.

Mr. Henderson responded that the existing gym already created an impact to the classrooms below given the activities within the gym, and that the music classrooms would actually have less of an impact than the gym.

Commissioner Cherwin asked if there would be a neighborhood meeting to outline the project to the surrounding residents.

Mr. Schulz responded that this meeting was not scheduled yet, but that it would be.

Commissioner Cherwin asked if the School District had received any feedback to-date on the project.

Mr. Schulz replied that they had not received any feedback yet.

Commissioner Cherwin asked if Arlington Aces still used the sports fields at the school for practice.

Mr. Schulz replied that he believed that they did, and that the School District had already met with the Park District to discuss this project.

Commissioner Cherwin said he was supportive of this project.

Commissioner Green stated that he liked the idea of the addition and was supportive of it. He said that he especially liked how it had been designed to be toward the center of the site so as to keep any potential impact as far away from the neighbors as feasible.

Commissioner Sigalos asked what the timeline for construction was.

Mr. Schulz replied that they were targeting being completed for the 2017-2018 school year. He inquired into the

“reasonable return” criterion.

Discussion ensued regarding this criterion and its applicability to this particular case.

RECOMMENDATION

The Plat & Subdivision Committee was supportive of the proposal and advised the petitioner to move forward.

**Bruce Green, Chair
PLAT & SUBDIVISION COMMITTEE
Sam Hubbard, Recorder**