

**STAFF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE REPORT**

To: Plan Commission  
 Prepared By: Sam Hubbard, Development Planner  
 Meeting Date: October 13, 2016  
 Date Prepared: October 9, 2016  
 Project Title: Thomas Middle School SUP  
 Address: 1430 N. Belmont Ave.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Petitioner: Don Hanson  
 Address: 350 W Ontario St – Suite 200  
 Chicago, IL 60654

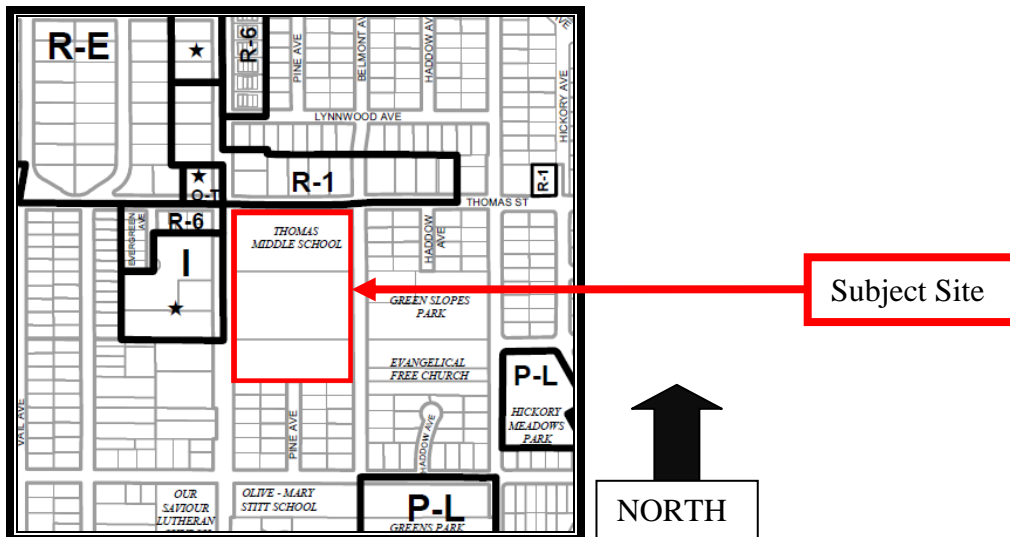
Existing Zoning: R-3, One Family Dwelling District

**Requested Action:**

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

**Variations Identified:**

- Variation from Section 11.4-4 to reduce the required on-site parking spaces from 314 spaces to 140 spaces.
- Section 5.1-3.6a to allow a front yard setback of 22.5' along Thomas Street where code requires a 25' setback (this setback applies to the existing building).
- Section 5.1-3.6 to allow an exterior side yard setback of 21.2' where code requires a 40' setback (this setback applies to the existing building).
- Section 5.1-3.9 to allow a maximum building height of 33'-8" for the existing building and proposed gym, where code limits the building height to 25'.

**Surrounding Properties:**

Direction	Zoning	Existing Use	Comprehensive Plan
North	R-1, One Family Dwelling District	Single Family Homes	Single Family Detached
South	R-3, One Family Dwelling District	Single Family Homes	Single-Family Detached
East	R-3, One Family Dwelling District	Single Family homes, Green Slopes Park, and Orchard Church	Single Family Detached, Government, and Institutional
West	R-6, Multiple Family Dwelling District and I, Institutional District	Multi-Family homes, Medical Office Complex, Daycare, and Florist Shop	Moderate Density Multi-Family and Offices Only

**Background:**

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 staff. 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 a larger and reconfigured parking lot on the eastern side of the site. With the exception of morning drop offs for 6<sup>th</sup> 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. There is no existing Special Use Permit for the Thomas Middle 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.

**Zoning and Comprehensive Plan**

As indicated above, the property is within the R-3, One Family Dwelling District, and all schools are classified as a special uses within the R-3 District. Therefore, a Special Use Permit is required. The petitioner has provided written justification for Special Use Permit approval based on the following criteria:

1. *That said special use is deemed necessary for the public convenience at this location.*
2. *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.*
3. *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 has reviewed the petitioner's response and concurs that the necessary criteria for approval has been met (please see attached response).

The Village's Comprehensive Plan designates the future use of the subject property as "Schools". The proposed Special Use is therefore consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

**Neighborhood Meeting**

The School District held an informational meeting for neighborhood residents on August 31, 2016. Four residents attended this meeting and had questions relating to the street lights and after hours events, whether the ball field location would be moved (the west field location will remain the same, the east field will be removed), whether drop-off and pick-up operations will remain the same, and general questions about the interior spaces in the building.

**Plat and Subdivision Committee**

The Plat and Subdivision Committee met on July 27, 2016, to discuss the proposed development. The subcommittee did not identify any major concerns and encouraged the applicant to move forward. The minutes from this meeting are attached.

**Plat and Subdivision Committee**

The Design Commission met on September 20, 2016, to discuss the proposed building addition. The Commission recommended approval of the proposed building addition subject to the following condition:

- Add additional landscaping along the new building wall at the south end of the new entrance plaza.

Upon completion of the Design Commission process, the applicant has redesigned the site in order to provide better access for the Fire Department. As part of this redesign, the area of greenspace along the south end of the new entrance plaza has been replaced with concrete, which will adjust the location of this landscape area. Staff has recommended a condition of approval to add additional landscaping by the southern entrance in close proximity to the building in order to comply with the Design Commission condition of approval.

### **Site Plan, Building and Landscaping**

Overall, the school district is proposing a 20,270 sq. ft. addition to the existing building. The total size of the school will increase to 144,270 sq. ft., and the addition therefore represents a 14% increase in floor area. The proposed addition will house a new gymnasium and locker room area, as well as increased space for a new front entry and reception office areas. The existing gym, located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, will be converted to additional classrooms.

Certain variations are required to accommodate this addition. Specifically, the proposed height of the gymnasium addition will be 32' tall and the R-3 District limits structure heights to a maximum of 25' in height. The existing building is 33'-8" in height and so the proposed addition will not increase this existing non-conformity. Furthermore, the proposed addition will be centrally located on the subject property and therefore will be substantially away from the immediately abutting residential areas to the south of the property. For these reasons, staff is supportive of the proposed height variation.

It should be noted that, although the proposed building addition conforms to all required setbacks, the existing school building does not conform to the required front and exterior side (east) yard setbacks. Specifically, in the front yard along Thomas Street, the existing building is setback 22.55' from the property line where code requires a 25' setback. In regards to the exterior side yard setback, the existing building is 21.25' from the side yard property line along Belmont Avenue where code requires a 40' exterior side yard setback. As the School District is requesting Variation approval for the parking and height, they have included a request to authorize the existing building setbacks via a Variation to formally allow these setback encroachments. Since the building setbacks are an existing condition, staff is supportive of the setback Variations.

The petitioner has provided written justification for the requested Variations per the approval criteria as summarized below:

- The property in question cannot yield a reasonable return if permitted to be used only under the conditions allowed by the regulations in that zone.
- The plight of the owner is due to unique circumstances.
- The variation, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality.

Staff has reviewed the petitioner's responses and concur that the necessary criteria for approval has been met (see petitioner's responses attached).

With regards to landscaping, the proposed landscape plan meets all code requirements except for the southern side of the proposed parking lot where a 3' tall row of landscaping is required. Therefore, staff recommends a condition of approval to add a 3' tall hedge along the southern side of the new parking lot in order to comply with code requirements.

Staff notes that the petitioner has provided an "Alternate Plan 2", which includes minor changes to the northwest corner of the site. These changes will only take place if the School District receives a suitable bid for the work that will allow for its construction. If all bids received by the School District are not within their budget, changes to this area will not take place. Staff notes that these changes involve the removal of 6 trees and no replacement trees have been proposed. Therefore, staff has recommended a condition of approval to require replacement trees for the six trees proposed for removal per the exchange rate as set forth in Section 6.15-6.4 of the Chapter 28.

### **Engineering**

Final engineering plans show the location of the detention area as west of the building and south of the western parking area. These plans were received on the day that this staff report was prepared and have not been fully reviewed. However, preliminary stormwater detention calculations and preliminary engineering plans have already been submitted and analyzed, and the

Engineering Department has not identified any major issues with the proposed engineering. All outstanding items can be addressed during review of the final engineering plans, and a condition of approval has been added to address these items.

Additionally, the School District has proposed a wire mesh screening system on one of the restrictors within the utility system, which screen is not acceptable to the Public Works Department due to their concerns that it will clog easily and require frequent maintenance. As the District believes that a wire mesh screen will provide the most efficient means to allow flow into the restrictor, in lieu of requiring the District to change this screening system, the Public Works Dept. has proposed a maintenance agreement that assigns responsibility for future maintenance of the screen to the School District. A condition of approval has been added to address this.

### **Traffic & Parking**

Exhibit 1 (attached) analyzes the current and proposed parking calculations for the subject property. A parking deficit currently exists and the proposed addition to the building and parking area will not eliminate this deficit. Therefore, a parking variation to reduce the number of required parking spaces is necessary.

The petitioner has submitted a parking study that concluded the current onsite parking demand to be 107 vehicles. The current parking areas, with a capacity for 102 vehicles, cannot accommodate peak demand and the District has proposed an expansion to the parking lot. Based on the projected future enrollment, the anticipated parking demand for the site is estimated at 116 spaces, and the proposed parking expansion will provide overall capacity for 141 vehicles. Although the parking lot will not conform to the code requirement of 314 spaces, staff agrees that the proposed 141 space parking capacity will be sufficient based on the information that has been provided. It may also be noted that the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Parking Generation* publication from the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), which is a nationally recognized publication used for estimating the parking demand of different uses, estimates that a middle school with enrollment of 1,030 students would create a parking demand of 93 cars, which further demonstrates the adequacy of the proposed 141 space parking lot.

With regards to drop-off and pick-up operations, currently all 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents utilize the western parking lot for morning drop-offs and 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents utilize the western (southbound) side of Belmont Avenue to drop off their students, which has a dedicated area along the side of the road for cars to pull over and drop-off children without interfering with southbound traffic. The eastern parking lot is not open during arrival and departure times. Crossing guards are present at Arlington Heights Road at the intersection of Thomas Street, and at Belmont Avenue at the intersection of Thomas Street during both arrival and dismissal.

During dismissal school busses stage in the western parking lot, and when ready, relocate to the pick-up lane along Belmont Avenue to load children. There is no proposed change to the drop-off and pick-up functions, and the new parking lot will not have an impact to this operation. The School District has estimated that one additional bus may be needed given the anticipated increase in enrollment and have confirmed that the western parking lot has the capacity to handle an additional bus for staging if necessary.

With regards to traffic, the traffic study has found that no intersection currently functions at a Level of Service (LOS) lower than "D". Additionally, the only projected decrease in LOS will be for southbound traffic along Belmont Avenue at the intersection of Thomas Street where wait times will increase by half a second (causing the LOS to decrease from "B" to "C"), and for westbound vehicles along Thomas Street making a left turn into the western parking lot where wait times will increase by .1 second (causing the LOS to decrease from "A" to "B"). The nominal increase in students will have a minimal impact on traffic and congestion and no upgrades to the street network were identified in the traffic study. As such, the study concluded that the existing street network is capable of handling the minor increase in traffic associated with the proposed addition. The only recommendation in the traffic study was for additional signage at the exit point of the western parking lot onto Thomas Street to reinforce the right-out only function of this intersection. It should be noted that Belmont Avenue, where most of the drop off and pick up operations take place, will continue to function at a LOS of "A".

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Staff Development Committee reviewed the proposed request and supports the proposed Special Use Permit and Variations, subject to the following:

1. Final Engineering plans must be reviewed and approved, which plans must be in compliance with all stormwater management regulations as determined by the Engineering Department, and which plans shall include a photometric plan to be submitted for review and approval by the Engineering Department and a signage plan for the southern parking lot to be submitted for review and approval by the Engineering Department.
2. A 3' tall hedge shall be added along the southern side of the new parking lot and replacement trees, per Section 6.15-6.4 shall be incorporated for the 6 trees that will be removed if Alternate Plan 2 is constructed.
3. The School District shall enter into a maintenance agreement that assigns future maintenance on the Restrictor Structure A to the School District, or the School District shall propose an alternate screening system on this restrictor which is acceptable to the Public Works Department.

August 5, 2016

Bill Enright, Deputy Director of Planning and Community Development

Cc: Randy Recklaus, Village Manager  
All Department Heads

Exhibit 1 – Parking Analysis

SPACE	PARKING CODE USE	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	NUMBER OF CLASSROOMS	PARKING RATIO	PARKING REQUIRED
Existing Thomas Middle School	Elementary School	127	41	1 space per classroom plus two space per employee	295
Total Parking Required					295
Total Parking Provided					102
Parking Surplus/(Deficit)					193 (65% reduction in required parking)
Proposed Thomas Middle School	Elementary School	135	44	1 space per classroom plus two space per employee	314
Total Parking Required					314
Total Parking Provided					141
Parking Surplus/(Deficit)					173 (55% reduction in required parking)