

**City of Decatur
Planning Commission**

**January 9, 2024 Regular Meeting
MINUTES**

Decatur City Hall
City Commission Room
509 North McDonough Street

Members Present: Rachel Cogburn (Acting Chair), Marc Brambrut, Greg Chilik, Jason Friedlander, John McFarland, and Jenny Stein
Member Absent: Joe Greco

Call to Order at 7:00 p.m.

Ms. Cogburn confirmed a quorum and called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. She provided introductions of the Commission members and delivered an overview of the procedural process for the meeting.

Welcome New Commission Appointees.

Ms. Cogburn recognized and welcomed the new members Ms. Jenny Lipana Stein and Mr. Marc Brambrut to the Planning Commission. They were appointed by the City Commission, each to their first term of service.

Unfinished Business.

Approval of Minutes from December 12, 2023 regularly scheduled meeting.

On a motion by Mr. Friedlander, seconded by Mr. McFarland, the minutes were approved as presented. Mr. Chilik abstained from the vote, as he was not in attendance at the December meeting.

New Business.

Flippo Civil Design applicant, St. Thomas More Catholic Church property owner, have requested an amendment to a previously approved comprehensive site development plan to construct new classroom and worship buildings for the existing church and private school located at 618 West Ponce de Leon Avenue.

The Applicant, Mr. Paul Flippo, with Flippo Civil Design, 931 Monroe Dr. NE, Suite A102, #223 in Atlanta, GA, explained that the request is for the construction of a new 19,000 sq. ft. school building, renovations to an existing worship center, improvements to the athletic fields, and construction of stormwater detention facilities within the athletic field area. The timeline for these improvements are within the next two (2) years. Additionally, the long term development plan includes a new worship building, which is shown on the plan, a parish commons area, and renovations to the administration building. This timeline would be in approximately ten years.

Mr Flippo guided the Commission through the specific location of each building and infrastructure location on the site plan and noted that he could further walk the Commission through any specific design or question as needed.

In response to a question by Mr. McFarland, Mr. Flippo stated that the detention basin will remain in the same location and the outlet control structure and capacity will then be designed to the

correct size that is needed to meet all of the City's current stormwater requirements. Furthermore, they are looking at utilizing the stormwater to irrigate the athletic field area in the future.

Mr. Flippo stated that the application package includes an exhibit that shows the routing of the school drop off/ pick up for the students. There is no increase to the number of student enrollment. The classroom building is intended to have the same number of classrooms and the traffic operation would remain unchanged.

In response to a question by Mr. Chilik, Mr. Flippo stated that all of the trees currently shown on the plan would be installed during the construction and any additional trees would be required to be replaced per the Arborist during the land disturbance process.

Ms. Threadgill clarified that the City Arborist will require a replanting plan to be submitted and reviewed during each phase of construction for the school building and then again during the build out of the worship building. Additionally, no net loss of the canopy or 45 percent canopy coverage of the site area, whichever is greater, is the requirement of the current City Codes. Furthermore, during an initial review by the City Arborist noted that she will review the formal tree replanting plans once submitted by a certified arborist, and noted that there appears to be errors in certain calculations of the architectural site plan prepared by the architect. During the Land Disturbance review process, the applicant is required to submit all documentation from a certified arborist showing adherence to the tree ordinances.

In response to a question by Mr. Friedlander, Mr. Flippo stated that the Church intends to keep the same connectivity and entrance for the School on West Trinity, whereas the front door of the church fronts onto Ponce de Leon Avenue. The new school building will only be accessible via the entry facing Trinity Place.

In response to a question by Mr. Friedlander, Mr. Flippo stated that the number of classrooms would remain the same at 20 rooms, the rooms would merely increase in size. If the Church ever wanted to increase enrollment, they would need another large addition or building. In turn, the current classrooms would be utilized as meeting space. Therefore, the activities happening would be at the same intensity as they are today. A Church Representative stated that the enrollment is 463 students today, and the capacity that was granted to the school was 516 students. They confirmed that they were not seeking an increase in the enrollment capacity.

In response to a question by Mr. Friedlander, Mr. Flippo confirmed that the 20 parallel parking spaces along Ponce de Leon Avenue would remain as public parking. It is his understanding that those 20 spaces were counted and credited towards the parking requirements in the previously approved comprehensive site development plan.

In response to a question by Mr. Brambrut, Mr. Flippo stated that they had investigated possible locations of the proposed electrical transformer, yet the power service comes directly off of Ponce De Leon Avenue. Therefore, the primary transformer needs to be in the front yard adjacent to Ponce de Leon Avenue, as opposed to Waters Street. The slope in the topography and additional landscaping is used to screen the transformer.

In response to a question by Mr. McFarland, Mr. Flippo stated that there is still a lot of design left to do, but the intent is that the basin location of the storm water management system remains in the current location and the new piping will all meet all current City stormwater regulations. They are also looking to use the collected water to irrigate the athletic field.

In response to a question by Mr. Friedlander, Mr. Flippo stated that the current surface parking spaces in the front yard adjacent to Ponce de Leon Avenue would be reconfigured as a result of the proposed worship building, but there would not be an increase in the number of parking spaces.

Mr. Friedlander pointed out that there is an ordinance that prohibits parking in the front yard between the building and the street. He stated he is not in favor of the reconfiguration and preferred the spaces be eliminated.

Ms. Cogburn opened public comment.

Shirly Osternach, 3 Charter Square, spoke in opposition to the request due to lack of communication between the School and the residents of Charter Square neighborhood. She spoke of school traffic and unauthorized parking by parents in her subdivision. She has approached the Church about this previously, but nothing has changed. She is concerned that this construction will increase the traffic problems occurring in Charter Square.

Susan Chesher, 2 Charter Square, spoke in opposition due to school traffic and unauthorized parking by parents in the Charter Square subdivision.

Dominique Willis, 9 Charter Square, spoke in opposition due to school traffic and unauthorized parking by parents in the Charter Square subdivision.

Colin Cromwell, 8 Charter Square, spoke in opposition to the request due to lack of communication between the School and the residents of Charter Square neighborhood, and unauthorized parking by parents in the subdivision. He asked for clarification if there was a reduction in parking.

During his rebuttal, Mr. Flippo stated there is no reduction in parking. The number stays the same, including the relocation of the seven (7) spaces in the front. The discrepancy coming to light may be that the Church has an easement agreement with the Post Office for 24 additional spaces. So, he suspects that the plan does not notate these 24 spaces that are part of this agreement.

There being no further public comment, Ms. Cogburn closed public comment and opened the meeting to board discussion.

In response to a question by Mr. Chilik, Mr. Flippo confirmed that there is no change to existing parking lot behind the building.

In response to a question by Mr. Friedlander, Ms. Threadgill stated that a multi-modal transportation study was not required because there would be no increase in student enrollment or intensity of use. [The study is required when the anticipated vehicular trips generate 30 or more new vehicle trips during an AM or PM peak hour or 300 or more new vehicle trips in an average day.]

In response to a question by Mr. Friedlander, Mr. Flippo confirmed that the parking calculation is set by the number of classrooms, not the size of the classrooms. The future construction of the worship building will increase the parking due to the new assembly space and new calculations will need to be submitted in the future when build-out plans are finalized with final square feet.

In response to a question by Ms. Stein, Mr. Flippo stated that there are currently 20 classrooms and the new building will have 20 classrooms. So, the parking calculation remains at two (2) spaces per classrooms. The floor area of each classroom is not finalized. The desire is not to be capacity driven, but

quality driven to meet the needs of classroom activities. Currently, each classroom is approximately 500 sq. ft. and new classrooms would be 750 sq. ft. each.

Ms. Cogburn reviewed the draft ordinance and requested the word “approximately” be removed from condition number 6. She also requested a correction of reference in condition number 7. Ms. Cogburn recalled a previous application where a condition of approval was added to record the maximum enrollment and requested the same be done for this application for a private school.

In response to a question by Mr. Friedlander, Ms. Threadgill stated that previous applications that involved parking in the front yard were of commercial retail and office uses. However, the institutional zoning district is designated for places of worship, hospitals, colleges and similar uses with ever-changing campuses that need the flexibility to grow and change overtime within the framework of a comprehensive site development plan. The previously approved comprehensive site development plan permitted a limited number of parking spaces in the front yard adjacent to Ponce de Leon Avenue. She stated that the proposed reconfiguration does not increase the degree of non-conformity as it were, only the location of spaces consolidated closer together. She stated the Planning Commission would need to determine if the requested relocation of spaces is still appropriate or if the spaces should be recommended for elimination.

Mr. Friedlander pointed out that there is an ordinance that prohibits parking in the front yard between the building and the street. He stated he is not in favor of the reconfiguration and preferred the spaces be eliminated.

Mr. McFarland recognized a conflict between the school and the Charter Square neighborhood, and even though the board cannot regulate those two parties, the school leadership should address these concerns with the parents.

Mr. Friedlander stated his desire to see bike racks added to the site plan to allow more multi-modal connectivity to the campus.

On a motion by Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Chilik, the Planning Commission voted 5 to 1 to recommend approval of the comprehensive site development plan with the following conditions:

- 1. The property shall be developed substantially similar according to the comprehensive site development plan attached as Exhibit “B.1” through “B.5” prepared by Flipppo Civil Design, dated October 27, 2023.*
- 2. The proposed future worship building shall not exceed a height of 40 feet, and front and side street setbacks shall not be reduced less than the current setbacks of the existing buildings on the property.*
- 3. The proposed loop drive on West Ponce de Leon Avenue shall be designed so that no westbound traffic can enter the driveway entrance near the West Trinity intersection, per previously approved Ordinance O-00-Z-04.*
- 4. The one-way loop driveway on West Ponce de Leon Avenue shall be maintained to require exiting traffic to make a right turn only to avoid traffic impacts to Pinetree Drive, per previously approved Ordinance O-00-Z-04.*
- 5. No school traffic shall be allowed from West Ponce de Leon Avenue. All students shall arrive and depart from the West Trinity Place (rear) side of the property, per previously approved Ordinance O-00-Z-04*

6. *Site improvements shall maintain curbing and sidewalks with planting strip along the West Ponce de Leon frontage of the property, including dedicated parallel parking lane with 20 spaces adjacent to the sidewalk. Such parking spaces shall continue to be credited to the applicant for use in compliance with zoning requirements, per previously approved Ordinance O-00-Z-04.*
7. *On-site parking requirements shall be reduced to 120 spaces. With credit for the proposed on-street parking described in condition "6," total parking provided shall be 140 spaces, per previously approved Ordinance O-00-Z-04.*
8. *School enrollment shall not exceed 516 students.*
9. *Construction parking shall be designated on-site or shall be provided in a designated off-site location on a nearby property through an agreement to ensure ease of vehicular traffic flow and mitigate parking disruption to the surrounding neighborhoods.*

The vote was 5 to 1. Mr. Brambrut, Mr. Chilik, Ms. Cogburn, Mr. McFarland, and Ms. Stein voted in favor and Mr. Friedlander voted in opposition.

Other Business.

Election of Officers.

On a motion by Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Chilik, Ms. Cogburn was elected as Chair with a unanimous vote. On a motion by Mr. Friedlander, seconded by Mr. McFarland, Mr. Chilik was elected as Vice Chair with a unanimous vote.

Next Regular Meeting. Ms. Threadgill stated that there were no new applications filed for the February hearing schedule. Ms. Threadgill stated that the next meeting would be held on March 12, 2024.

Adjournment. There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m. on a motion by Mr. McFarland.

Consistent with the requirements of O.C.G.A. §50-14-1(e)(2)(B) these minutes were approved at the next regularly scheduled meeting on March 12, 2024 and made part of the record.

(draft)

Kc Krzic
Planning & Zoning Manager
Acting Secretary to the Planning Commission