

Docket Item #5
SPECIAL USE PERMIT #2004-0066

Planning Commission Meeting
September 9, 2004

ISSUE: Consideration of a request for a special use permit amendment for a preschool.

APPLICANT: Trinity MOPS Preschool
by Irene Reynolds

LOCATION: 2911 Cameron Mills Road (Parcel Address: 2900 Cameron Mills Rd)

ZONE: R-8/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends **approval** subject to compliance with all applicable codes and ordinances and the permit conditions found in Section III of this report.

SUP#2004-0066
2911 Cameron Mills Road

SITE GRAPHIC
AVAILABLE IN THE PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE

I. DISCUSSION

REQUEST

The applicant, Trinity MOPS Preschool by Irene Reynolds, requests a special use permit amendment to increase/correct the number of children allowed at the preschool located at the Trinity United Methodist Church at 2911 Cameron Mills Road.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The subject property is one lot of record having approximately 250 feet of frontage on Cameron Mills Road, 123 feet of frontage on Allison Street, 311 feet of frontage on Pierpont Street and a lot area of 64,022 square feet. The property is developed with the Trinity United Methodist Church building. A parking lot is located to north across Allison Street. Otherwise, the property is surrounded by residential uses with predominantly single-family structures.

BACKGROUND / PERMITTED PROGRAMS

The Trinity MOPS Preschool has been in operation since 1968 and was granted four special use permits to operate specific programs within the Church premises. They include:

- (1) SUP #722, granted by City Council on February 13, 1968, for the operation of a preschool child care center/nursery school ("MOPS" Mother of Pre-Schoolers) for 30 children;
- (2) SUP #822, granted on March 23, 1971, for an increase in the number of children in the MOPS program to 90;
- (3) SUP #1805, granted on July 30, 1985, for the operation of a day nursery for 20 children between the ages of five and twelve during the academic school year; and
- (4) SUP #1961, granted on December 13, 1986, to operate a crafts program for a maximum of 15 children between the ages three to six. Staff notes that no or very few conditions were attached to the receptive special use permits and that some of these programs were modified or even eliminated over the past three decades.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As listed in the paragraph above, City Council approved special use permit # 822 in March 1971 to allow an increase in the number of children attending MOPS preschool child care center for a total of 90. However, the applicant at that time had requested a total number of 130 children, which was reduced to 90 by Planning Commission and City Council because of concerns involving noise generated by children using the on-site playground and potential traffic increase. As a technical matter, the Department of Social Services assumed a maximum of 130 children to be permitted at the site, which was consistently reflected in the preschool's license and Fire Prevention Permit since 1971. In reality, the applicant states, the actual occupancy averages around 118 children at any one

time. Staff is not aware of any complaints related to the operation of the preschool with its actual capacity.

In order to correct the discrepancy, the applicant seeks special use permit approval to adjust the SUP permitted number of children to attend the Trinity MOPS Preschool to the licensed number of 130. No changes are proposed to the floor plan or operation of the business.

In an effort to clarify the complicated special use permit history and the variety of children’s programs at the site, staff and the applicant agree on combining SUP #722, #822, #1805, and #1961 into one umbrella SUP that maintains the following existing and approved programs:

| | Morning Preschool Program | Optional Crafts Afternoon Program | Inclusive Afternoon Program (in lieu of day nursery) |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|
| Max. Number of Children | 130 (9 classrooms with 12-14 children each) | 15 (one classroom) | 12 (one classroom) |
| Age of Children | 18 months- 5 years | 3 ½ -5 years | 3 ½ -5 years |
| Program Hours | 9:00 A.M. to 12:30/1:00 P.M. Monday-Friday | 1:00 P.M. to 2:30/3:00 P.M. Monday-Friday | 1:00 P.M. to 3:45 P.M. Monday-Thursday |
| Number of Employees | 23 (two teachers per classroom, and administrative staff) | 3 (one-two teachers, and administrative staff) | 2-5 (One teacher, one special educator, one licensed speech language pathologist and pediatric occupational therapist each, and the school’s director) |
| Program Characteristics | Regular preschool program including playground and outdoor activities. | Crafts program involving planned art activities, games, songs, stories and tumbling indoors. | Instructional preschool program. About 30% of children have development delays in the areas of speech, language and motor skills. The remaining 70% will be typically developing children. |

Facility/

Outdoor Play Area: The school utilizes the lower, first and second floors of the Trinity United Methodist Church building, and the existing on-site playground for outdoor activities.

Trash: Approximately ten small bags of trash per day are generated by the use. Trash is disposed of in a designated area located on the church property and is collected along with the residential garbage in the neighborhood once a week.

Noise: The applicant states that some noise is generated from children playing at the on-site playground. However, children are under supervision at all times and the large church property is surrounded by streets, which serve as buffers for noise.

Pick-up/Drop-off: Parents and care givers use the on-site parking lots to drop off and pick up the children at either the Cameron Mills road or the Pierpont Street entrance at the following designated times: Children who participate in the morning program are dropped of between 9:15 A.M. and 9:45 A.M. and picked up between 12:15 P.M. and 12:45 P.M. Children who participate in the optional crafts afternoon program are picked up at 2:30 P.M. Children participating in the inclusive afternoon program are picked up at 3:45 P.M. Both afternoon programs do not begin until 1:00 P.M. to avoid traffic issues with overlapping pick-up and drop-off times for the classes.

PARKING

Pursuant to Section 8-200 (A)(11) of the zoning ordinance, a child day care center is required to provide two parking spaces for each classroom. In this case, the applicant's layout indicates a total of 9 classrooms for a requirement of 18 spaces. Parking in excess of 30 spaces is provided on the on-premise parking lots, thus exceeding the technical parking requirement.

ZONING

The subject property is located in the R-8/Single-family Residential zone. Section 3-303 (B) of the zoning ordinance allows day nurseries within church buildings with a special use permit. The proposed use is consistent with the Northridge/Rosemont Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan, which designates the property for residential use and therefore permits church operations.

II. STAFF ANALYSIS

Staff has no objection to the proposed increase/technical correction of the maximum number of children from 90 to 130 allowed to attend the existing child care center/preschool located at 2911 Cameron Mills Road.

The applicant has been operating the preschool since 1971 with the assumed permitted and licensed capacity of 130 children. No incidents or complaints have been reported since. The programs offered to children are highly supported by both parents/caretakers and the Department of Human Services, Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD). Staff believes that the school is a good use for a building designed for educational purposes and that it has been compatible with the surrounding area over the past three decades. Adequate on-site parking as well as structured pick-up and drop-off procedures are provided. In addition, sufficient open space is provided with the on-site playground.

Staff notes that the existing special use permits have no or very few conditions applied to the operation of the preschool/child care center. Therefore, consistent with comments received from other City departments, staff recommends a number of conditions to be attached to the proposed umbrella special use permit. This will ensure an orderly operation in the future and will provide guidance to both the applicant and staff regarding the operation and limitations of the business.

Finally, staff recommends a condition requiring a review of the preschool/child care center one year after approval. With these conditions, staff recommends approval of the special use permit.

III. RECOMMENDED PERMIT CONDITIONS

Staff recommends **approval** subject to compliance with all applicable codes and ordinances and the following conditions:

1. The special use permit shall be granted to the applicant only or to any business or entity in which the applicant has a controlling interest. (P&Z)
2. The hours of operation shall be limited to between 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M., Monday through Friday. (P&Z)
3. The maximum number of children permitted at the child care facility shall be 130 at any one time. (P&Z) (OECD)
4. The applicant shall provide outdoor play area to the satisfaction of the Virginia State Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs. (P&Z)

5. The applicant shall comply with all other department's recommendations, and the licensing and registration requirements and other limitations of local and state regulations. (P&Z)
6. The applicant shall provide a minimum of 18 parking spaces and require its employees who drive to work to use off-street parking. (P&Z)
7. The applicant shall encourage its employees to use mass transit or to carpool when traveling to and from work, by posting information regarding DASH and METRO routes, the location where fare passes for transit are sold, and advertising of carpooling opportunities. (P&Z)
8. The applicant shall conduct employee training sessions on an ongoing basis, including as part of any employee orientation, to discuss all special use permit provisions and requirements. (P&Z)
9. The applicant is to contact the Crime Prevention Unit of the Alexandria Police Department at 703-838-4520 regarding a security survey for the preschool, a robbery awareness program for employees, and regarding safety programs available through the department for the children. This is to be completed prior to the child care home opening for business. (Police)
10. All loudspeakers shall be prohibited from the exterior of the building and no amplified sound shall be audible at the property line. (T&ES)
11. The Director of Planning and Zoning shall review the special use permit one year after approval and shall docket the matter for consideration by the Planning Commission and City Council if (a) there have been documented violations of the permit conditions which were not corrected immediately, constitute repeat violations or which create a direct and immediate adverse zoning impact on the surrounding community; (b) the director has received a request from any person to docket the permit for review as a result of a complaint that rises to the level of a violation, or (c) the director has determined that there are problems with the operation of the use and that new or revised conditions are needed. (P&Z)

STAFF: Eileen Fogarty, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning;
Bettina Irps, Urban Planner.

Staff Note: In accordance with section 11-506(c) of the zoning ordinance, construction or operation shall be commenced and diligently and substantially pursued within 18 months of the date of granting of a special use permit by City Council or the special use permit shall become void.

IV. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F - finding

Transportation & Environmental Services:

- R-1 All loudspeakers shall be prohibited from the exterior of the building and no amplified sound shall be audible at the property line.
- C-1 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Noise Control Code, Title 11, Chapter 5, which sets the maximum permissible noise level as measured at the property line.

Code Enforcement:

- F-1 The proposed technical correction is consistent with the approved Fire Prevention Permit for Public Assembly. There are no Code issues.

Health Department:

- F-1 No comments.

Police Department:

- R-1 The applicant is to contact the Crime Prevention Unit of the Alexandria Police Department at 703-838-4520 regarding a security survey for the preschool.
- R-2 The applicant is to contact the Crime Prevention Unit of the Alexandria Police Department at 703-838-4520 regarding a safety programs available through the department for the children.

Department of Human Services, Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD):

- R-1 A representative of the Office for Early Children Development (OECD) made a site visit to Trinity M.O.P.S. Preschool at 2911 Cameron Mills Road on July 13, 2004. After an inspection of the premises, OECD recommends that their request to amend the current SUP capacity of 90 to a capacity of 130 children be approved. This program has been licensed by the Virginia Department of Social Services for 130 children since 1971.

- S-1 There are two sets of classrooms on the first level that share bathrooms and, under current enrollment patterns, as many as 24 children could be required to share one toilet. State licensing requires that there be one toilet for every 20 children. Therefore, it is suggested that the program devise a plan for these four classrooms that will ensure ready access to additional bathroom facilities.

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**REPORT ATTACHMENTS
AVAILABLE IN THE PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE**