



Meeting Summary June 30, 2021

Attendance

Panel Members:

Fred Marino, Chair
Robert Gorman, Vice Chair
Dan Lovette
Ethan Marchant
Sujit Mishra
Larry Quarrick
Vivian Stone

DPZ Staff:

Anthony Cataldo, Nick Haines, Melissa Maloney

Applicants and Presenters:

Maple Lawn Montessori – Anil Cherukuri, Alice Miller, Chris Norwalk, Hal Sachs

1. **Call to Order** – DAP Chair Fred Marino opened the meeting at 7:07 p.m.
2. **Review of Plan No. 21-07, Maple Lawn Montessori, Elkridge MD**

Owner/Developer: Anil Cherukuri
Engineer: Benchmark Engineering
Architect: Gold Leaf

Background

The applicant presented the project as Maple Lawn Montessori, which will be a facility providing a best-in-class early learning environment like the larger multi-unit national and regional childcare operators. Their care model is differentiated by the affordable price that will be offered to the young families seeking the best educational experience for their children. They believe there is an unfulfilled need for high quality education at a value cost. This value model will be achieved through mindful design and development, operational efficiencies, and proficient programming.

Applicant Presentation

The applicant presented their design and noted that this site has a significant slope west to east making development difficult. There is a retaining wall to the left side of the building that will create a level site and lower the play area for the children attending the school. Another retaining wall to the right of the parking area is proposed to level out the parking area and make up grade. There is a drop down to the SWM area right off the parking lot. There is also a 100-year floodplain easement in the environmental area on the eastern portion of the site where they cannot do any kind of development. The biggest constraint for the project is on the eastern portion of the site where environmental elements and their associated buffers prevent them from developing about 1/3 of the site. For the plantings that

are required with this site, the plantings would be native plants that would provide some color to the site in both fall and summer.

The applicant asked the panel for input regarding the retaining walls, as they want to be considerate of development costs and retaining walls are very expensive but needed. The retaining walls will be anywhere from 1' to 3' and in some spots get a little over 36", but for the most part will be 24" or less. They have designed the site to minimize the walls, except for a few areas specifically by the dumpster enclosure in the upper northwest corner and just off the parking lot to the right side where it is somewhat steep. Since they are keeping the retaining walls below 48" they are not required to have a retaining wall permit.

The applicant provided visuals of the surrounding area and noted that there is a filling station and retail area to the south of the site and a retail strip center to the. Business Parkway off Route 1 is a divided roadway. There are also various types of industrial buildings north of the site.

The building proposed is in early concept but the applicants want to make it colorful and playful for the kids. Several schemes were developed, but they have selected the "tree scheme" with green colored panels, with tan corners and columns between. Their goal was to keep the design appropriate, practical, but still pleasing so it fits with the context of the other buildings in the area. This building was designed as a transition from some of the big industrial buildings and some of the smaller retail centers. The building is located one block off Route 1 on Roosevelt Drive, but the team wanted to be considerate of the Route 1 design initiative with a varying footprint, façade articulation, and different heights. The proposal was to create something noticeable, but not iconic and sticking out. They have added several elements to allow light into the classrooms and will utilize an open fence design to allow visibility to the play area in the back so that the green space will not be obstructed by a solid fence. The building was also designed so that if needed in the future, this building could be repurposed for other uses, such as retail, small business flex space or a larger industrial building. This building structure would be relatively easy to adapt to other uses and the colored panels could be swapped out. The building proposes a parapet wall to screen the HVAC. There are awnings proposed over the windows and the entrance to the right of the tower has been accentuated.

Staff Presentation

DPZ agreed with the information presented and noted it was detailed. DPZ noted the site is located at the intersection of Business Parkway and Roosevelt Drive and does not have direct frontage to Route 1 but is subject to the Route 1 manual and guidelines. The site has existing vegetation covering the majority of the property and is generally sloping from west to east downhill to the northeast corner. There are environmental features located on site, including a stream that cuts through the top of the northern corner and enters a pipe that runs under Business Parkway. There are wetlands associated with the stream and DPZ noted the proposal staying out of those environmentally sensitive areas. The project is Zoned CE-CLI, which consists of light industrial and corridor employment. The proposed use is supported under that zoning. DPZ would like the panel to make recommendations on the site layout, including edge transitions and the perimeter of the site and asked if there are any recommendations or comments on the architecture and the palette design of the structure. DPZ also requested the DAP to advise if there are any recommendations for better orientation of the site or amenities and addition to landscape, they should consider.

DAP Questions and Comments

Site Design

DAP likes the approach to the building and consideration for making it flexible for future uses but questioned its appropriateness for kids. DAP inquired how many employees will be working at the site and how will drop off and pick up of the kids be handled at the school; will parents will be walking their children into the building? The applicant advised they are estimating about 10-12 employees and parents will be coming into the building to drop off their kids with the teachers. Drop off will be in the morning and some parents will pick up their kids around 12:00 or 1:00 before lunch for a half day or at 4:00 or 5:00 or later after work for a full day.

DAP asked if the site was going to be a daycare or a Montessori Elementary School and if the entire building will house the proposed use. The applicant advised this is a preschool and goes from age 3 months to 5 years and that the entire building will house the daycare. They designed the building to be flexible so in the future, if the daycare moved out it could be for other uses.

DAP noted that the dumpster enclosure seems to be off the play area, it didn't seem accessible from the road, and asked how it will be accessed and how it will function. DAP also asked how the truck will pick up the trash and noted that there is not a pad in front of the dumpster on the plan. The applicant advised that the concrete will be extended to the existing roadway. The trash truck can come left or right up Roosevelt Boulevard and can drive up the access road where there will be a concrete apron that comes out to the edge of the road. The truck can then continue the left hand turn around the warehouse. This was designed so the truck will not have to go through the site's parking lot.

DAP inquired if any meals are being prepared at the site for the children. The applicant advised there will not be meals prepared on site. All meals will be pre-packaged and delivered. The staff will need to go out the side door through a gate around the play area to the dumpster to throw the trash out in the dumpster area through a side door access. DAP also asked what the enclosure around the dumpster will be like as it is not clear from the plan what will be screening it and it is also right next to the playground and the road. Space will be needed around the dumpster for people to dump their trash and for the truck to pick up the trash. The applicant advised they are anticipating building a 6' high board on board enclosure with 2 swing gates for the truck and a pedestrian gate on the back side. They will put bar stops so the gates won't hit the playground fence when open.

DAP discussed the number of staff and timing of people dropping off their children as it could be difficult for someone to get out of the parking lot, especially at the dead end or in the last space since the parking lot is truncated. The DAP noted that last few spots in the parking lot don't work and there is not ability to back out. It was recommended that for the last 2 parking spaces, a sign could be posted stating there is no parking for 2 hours in the morning and 2 hours in the afternoon to free up those spaces for the rush times so people can turn around, this way the actual parking spots are not lost.

The DAP members agreed that the play area should connect to the woods and if this is not possible, to create a visual connection. They also recommended the play structure have shade cells to add color and whimsy.

DAP asked about the square footage of the building. The applicant advised it is 10,000 square feet. The DAP members suggested it would be better to rotate the whole site 90 degrees clockwise, so the parking is along Roosevelt Boulevard and the building rotates so the play area is facing the back wooded area; even if it involves extending the retaining wall. This would provide an overall better site configuration and playground area. From a retail perspective this would be a better layout with the spaces facing Roosevelt Boulevard instead of being set back off the road. The applicant advised they did study this and looked at 6 or 7 options and they were unable to make that configuration work with the site geometry. The wetlands would impact the corner of the building and would pinch the play area and the edge of the building. DAP advised if they could make that work it would be more desirable

from many perspectives as the orientation does not seem appropriate if this is going to be a flexible site and potentially a retail center.

DAP inquired if it was the applicant's intent to have the sidewalk run along the edge of the parking lot; that 5' was too narrow unless wheel stops were installed. If the sidewalk was not expanded, there would be a safety issue with car bumpers hanging over the sidewalk where parents and children are walking. The applicant advised they prefer not to use wheel stops but can look at making the sidewalk 6'. DAP advised the applicant may want to just make the space from the curb to the façade paved. Permeable pavers would be an option rather than concrete sidewalk and it could be decorative with possibly large ceramic pots next to the window. The applicant advised there is 10' of space so they will look at this.

DAP commented that they did not see where the applicant was addressing street or parking lot lighting and noted they are subject to the Route 1 corridor design guidelines and this will need to be addressed on the site development plan. DAP also noted that there are no crosswalks marked on the design, especially where the ramp goes down to the road and the sidewalk crosses over the driveway.

Landscape

DAP commented that although the applicant may be meeting the requirements, the plan was not robust. DAP asked if the applicant was meeting the minimum for parking requirements and recommended adding some tree planting islands in the parking lot to help with the heat and provide shade. The applicant advised that they are meeting the minimum and, unfortunately, they are restricted on space due to the easements and wetlands on a 1/3 of the site and do not have parking spaces to spare. Absent tree islands in the parking lot, DAP recommended planting shade trees on the edge of the parking lot.

DAP noted that the applicant has Crape Myrtle and Arborvitae proposed in the pond and suggested different species of native plantings should be planted there, as these are not appropriate plantings for that area. DAP commented that since the site has the terrific woodlands the applicant may want to consider putting a woodchip pathway or walking trail in so the kids can go outside and be exposed to nature. The applicant responded that the trees are up at the top of the pond and not in the pond and there will be separate list of wetland plantings that will go down into the pond. They are not permitted to go into the environmental area on the site or put a path in due to restrictions from the Army Corp of Engineers.

DAP agreed that it would be beneficial to engage with the unique attributes of the site and the wooded area to become a component in child's play. DAP asked if they considered taking the exact plan and mirroring it to put the playground on the open space closer to the environmental features, rather than sandwiching it in between a building a retaining wall and street. The applicant advised they investigated that plan, looking at the 3 modules (building, play area and parking lot) to see which way they could be arranged. The predominant traffic will come from Route 1 up Business Parkway from Route 100 corridor and from Mayfield off 103. The applicant wanted visitors to see the front door to the facility and if it flipped the parking lot and front door would be behind the building. DAP commented that they understand that mode of thinking, but that is more of a retail theory for the building whereas this will be a destination building. DAP stated that this site is very unique with the outdoor landscape and it is not being maximized to it's potential.

DAP commented that they liked the building façade and it was whimsical, but it would be nice to express that throughout the site with trees and tree islands as well. This would be tight with the parking

and recommended that the applicant could line the base of the wall along the parking lot with trees such as River Birch so no spaces would be lost but there would be the benefit of trees lining the edge.

DAP commented that Red Maples proposed are a native tree, but the River Birch is preferred due to the soil conditions at this location. 15 Crape Myrtles are proposed on the plan. It was suggested that some other trees, such as Eastern Redbud or Serviceberry be used as well to diversify the planting. It was suggested to look at the plant palette in terms of trees to help our watershed and provide seasonal interest. DAP noted that the Emerald Green Arborvitae are very narrow and tall and won't provide much color or seasonal interest and are planted between major shade trees. It is recommended that the applicant look at why these are being planted where they are and what is trying to be accomplished.

DAP suggested for the bio retention area, the plant palette should include perennials such as Joe Pye Weed, Winterberry, Red Osier Dogwood and Inkberry that like wet roots. DAP also suggested narrow shade trees could be added to the play area to break up the space and give the kids contact with nature in terms of the seasons. It was also noted that there is a green strip between the walkway and the front of the building which could accommodate foundation plantings like Carl Forest Grass or Little Blue Staff Grass, and a low ground cover such as Bloody Cranesbill which would give that green area some purpose.

Architecture

DAP advised the applicant may want to pay attention to the building elevation along Roosevelt Boulevard which is as important as the elevation in the front. Also, the DAP Chair was concerned the colors are overwhelming and may become outdated; perhaps it would be better to have the theme be more subtle. Another DAP member commented that they like the theme because it is so different and the other buildings in the area are depressing.

Overall, DAP advised that the architecture is big improvement from the buildings surrounding the site, noted that they are using some of the same materials found in the area like EIFS, and appreciated the fiber cement board. Collectively, the DAP liked the color scheme but commented on the blank rear façade. The 2 areas where the classrooms are on the building front are developed, but the elevation on the right side of the building is simple and it would be beneficial to redesign the elevations there in order to brighten it up. DAP commented that there are no windows in the program and not a lot of articulation of those façades, and suggested the applicant investigate a design akin to what was done in the front. DAP commented that they appreciated the color and use of materials and the recessed entry way.

A DAP member inquired about the specific materials being used. The applicant advised they will be using a combination of EIFS and panels for the core towers. The panels under the awnings will be fiber board or Nichiha panels. The bottom will be ground face CMU block or similar material that has stone in it to create the hard surface for the foundation. Regarding the awnings DAP inquired if they tried louver awnings so they would be maintenance free. The applicant will investigate options.

DAP Motions for Recommendations

DAP Larry Quarrick made the following motion:

1. For the applicant to add a couple of small trees to the play area.
2. For the applicant to add shade trees at the base of the retaining wall along the parking lot.
3. For the applicant to increase the number of native trees in relation to the total number of trees and shrubs specified.

4. For the applicant to develop a specific planting list for the wetlands, especially around the bio retention area.

DAP Vice Chair Bob Gorman seconded.

Vote: 6-0

DAP Larry Quarrick made the following motion:

1. For the applicant to look at the parking lot layout, especially the terminus of the parking lot as to how cars will turn around and that may include signage that will keep those spaces open during rush times.
2. For the applicant to look at the width of the walkway at the edge of the parking lot and the building and to pave the area with material decorative in nature.

DAP Member Dan Lovette seconded.

Vote: 6-0

DAP Dan Lovette made the following motion:

For the applicant to add a crosswalk at the end of the driveway.

DAP Vice Chair Bob Gorman seconded.

Vote: 6-0

3. Other Business

- DPZ advised that the second applicant couldn't attend the DAP meeting this evening and they are tentatively scheduled for July 21st.
- DPZ noted the July 7th meeting is cancelled and the next one will be July 21st.
- DPZ advised that due to technological limitations the DAP meetings will continue virtually.

4. Call to Adjourn

DAP Chair Fred Marino adjourned the meeting at 8:03 p.m.