

July 11, 2017
City of Erie, Pennsylvania
ZONING HEARING BOARD
1:00 P.M.

The regular meeting of the Zoning Hearing Board was held Tuesday, July 11, 2017 at 1:00 P.M. in City Council Chambers, Municipal Building, 626 State Street.

– MINUTES –

THE FOLLOWING APPEAL WAS HEARD:

Appeal No. 12,161 by Gannon University (4014-220) concerning the property located at 457 West 4th Street in an R-2 district. The appellant is seeking a dimensional variance for a neighborhood center. Per Section 305.34(a) of the Erie City Zoning Ordinance, side yards shall be at least twenty (20) feet in width; 11 feet and 13 feet side yards are proposed.

Findings of Fact

1. Using a site plan and floor plan of what was titled St. Joseph House as a guide, the architect working with Gannon, Mr. Scott Landis, told the Board that the appellants recently purchased a property on West 4th Street for the purpose of building a new neighborhood center.
2. Mr. Landis said that the property is a standard size residential lot (approximately 57' wide), where Gannon plans to construct the proposed neighborhood center. The dimensions of the property, however, do not allow for the side yard setbacks that the City Code requires. He indicated that the proposed center would have only 24' of extra side footage; the design calls for 11' on one side, and 13' on the other, allowing for a drive way.
3. Also addressing the Board was Ms. Erika Ramalho, the Director of Community and Government Relations for Gannon University. She indicated that the lot was not randomly selected, but was chosen for its proximity to the Martin Luther King Center and its surrounding nearby lower west side area. She indicated that Gannon is an active partner in implementing the Erie City Comprehensive Plan, "Erie Refocused". The plan identifies areas of the City for revitalization efforts, and has targeted the area around West 4th Street near the Martin Luther King Center.
4. Ms. Ramalho said that Gannon has and will continue to join forces with other community-related groups, including several church-based organizations, to choose such areas and do what they can to make a difference in the revitalization efforts. The proposed neighborhood center facility is located just down the street from the MLK Center, and will be permitted to use the MLK Center's parking lot if necessary. For its part the MLK Center supports the proposed project; Erie Zoning official Matthew Puz read a letter of support sent from MLK Center representative James Sherrod into the record.

5. The proposed neighborhood center will have two full-time residents working in the facility, both of whom will be Gannon employees. The facility is intended to be a place for students to gather for various projects that hope to benefit the area, and would allow for up to twelve people to stay overnight.

Conclusions

1. The appellant, Gannon University, has recently purchased a residential lot on West 4th Street with the intentions of building a community neighborhood center on the site.
2. Due to the dimensions of the previously residential property, the proposed facility will only have approximately 24' of side space after construction; the architect has designed for 11' on one side, and 13' on the other side.
3. According to Section 305.34(a) of the Erie City Zoning Ordinance, side yards shall be at least twenty (20) feet in width.
4. The site for the community center was not selected at random. Gannon, in conjunction with other community-based organizations, has targeted the lower west side neighborhood, near the Martin Luther King Center, to place the proposed facility.

Decision

By a unanimous decision, the Board approved the appellant's request for the use variance. Board members Selena King, Mike Hornyak and Edward Dawson all indicated that they recognized the lot size hardship, and all said they saw the need for the center. All three voted to approve the variance request.

It is So Ordered.
