

Support*

Flom, Gerald

Berger, Christine

Bechtold, Nicole & Kevin

Anderson, Tanya

Hennessey, Ryan

District 10 Como Park (variances only)

Hannu, Bobbi Jo

1121 Argyle Street, Saint Paul

1272 James Ave, Saint Paul

981 Hoyt Ave W, Saint Paul

2103 Doswell Ave, Saint Paul

781 Cottage Ave W, Saint Paul

1224 Lexington Parkway N

986 Como Ave, Saint Paul

****Letters received after packet was created***

December 13, 2018

TO: Zoning Committee of the St. Paul Planning Commission

RE: Variances requested by Twin Cities German Immersion School
File # 18-117-556 and 18-126-865

Dear Commissioners:

I am a long-term neighbor of the school with only two houses and Como Avenue between my home and the perimeter of the school. I support approval of the three variances requested by the Twin Cities German Immersion School (TCGIS).

I believe the variance requests for building height (3'-1"), lot coverage (1%), and off-street parking (37 spaces), are: in harmony with the purposes and intent of the zoning code (economic viability, general welfare of the community, encourage appropriate use of land, ensuring adequate light, air, privacy, etc.); consistent with the City's comprehensive plan (promoting a vibrant, environmentally responsible and energy efficient City, living wage jobs, collaboration with schools in conjunction with construction and major remodeling); will not permit land uses that conflict with the current R-4 zoning; and will have no impact on (i.e., will not alter) the essential character of my neighborhood. I believe that allowing the school to grow and thrive will contribute to the strength of the neighborhood.

Building height:

The proposed 3 foot, 1 inch height variance will have minimal or no impact on surrounding structures or the neighborhood. I say this for 2 reasons: 1st, the proposed building will be substantially shorter than the existing structure (reaching only to the height of the eaves on the existing structure) and 2nd, the proposed building is far enough from neighboring structures that it will not block light, cast shadows, or in any way impede the view. From my home three houses away, I will not be able to see the new building.

Lot coverage:

The proposed variance of 1% is negligible in my view, and any potential impacts (though I cannot think of any) are offset by a proposed increase in green space. TCGIS has already reduced impervious surface at the site from 65% to 60%, and the new site plan will reduce impervious surface to 55%. The new site plan creates more open spaces for outdoor study and play. I would like to mention that TCGIS has incorporated native and edible plantings into the site over the past 5 years, where school children, parents, and neighbors can come together to voluntarily garden.

Parking:

The City requires 87 parking places, one for each full-time equivalent faculty and staff. TCGIS plans to provide off-street parking both on-site and in leased space in an existing parking lot across the street, but will need a 37-spot variance. TCGIS anticipates that up to 20 on-street parking spots will actually be used because a number of staff walk, bicycle or take transit to the school.

As a fairly immediate neighbor to TCGIS, I can attest that there is ample parking on our neighborhood streets. As I write this, at 11 AM on a school day, there are only 9 cars parked on our block. On the east side of the street are 4 cars: only one (close to the intersection with Como) is likely school-related. Our streets are parked to capacity only during the July 4th Hmong Freedom Festival – which is a welcome event in our neighborhood, by the way.

Other considerations:

Variance opponents claim that the need is of TCGIS's own making – i.e., if TCGIS did not build a new building, it would not need variances. But this argument ignores the fact that the current structure needs major repairs, provides insufficient classroom space, deprives the children of access to light because it has few eye level windows, does not provide private spaces for individual counseling meetings, and maintains religious overtones that are inappropriate for a public school.

The applicant has not created these problems. The variances are necessitated by the school's unanticipated success in retaining students, the size of the property, the elevations and configuration of buildings already existing on the site, and the laudable effort by TCGIS to plan for the eventual maximum size of the school. To ask TCGIS to reduce enrollment (so that a shorter smaller building can be built) would require it to: abandon sibling preference in admissions (an unreasonable penalty for families); reduce the number of students at entry level, which would create an unsustainable imbalance in future class size, or restrict the school to teaching only the elementary grades, consequently dislocating higher level students.

The variances are not proposed due to economic considerations; spending more on the building design and construction would not eliminate the need for height or surface coverage variances. Nor is the limited parking budget-related; instead it is a function of lot size and the desire to provide outdoor areas for the children and attractive and beneficial green space.

In conclusion, I believe the variances are minor and will not have a negative impact on the neighborhood. The lack of impact was evidenced at the District 10 Land Use Committee December 5, where 57% of the neighbors present voted in support of the variances, with only 43% objecting.

I would suggest one condition relating to the parking variance. If the future use of the site should change, i.e., the site were proposed for a use other than a school, perhaps the on-site parking variance should be revisited at that time.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and for your work on behalf of the City.

Sincerely,

Gerald C. Florin
1121 Argyle Street
St. Paul, MN 55103

Langer, Samantha (CI-StPaul)

From: Christine Berger <cberger@mnrealtor.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 13, 2018 5:18 PM
To: Williams, Josh (CI-StPaul); Anderson, Tia (CI-StPaul)
Cc: district10@district10comopark.org; zimmermanstp10@gmail.com; Markus Berger (markus.berger@suncountry.com); 'TCGIS'; #CI-StPaul_Ward3
Subject: Support for German Immersion School (TCGIS) Variances

Zoning Board Committee
City of St. Paul Planning Commission

Hello! TCGIS is a great school – please support the three requested variances related to the expansion. Thank you!

On behalf of all the parents and kids involved at the Twin Cities German Immersion School (TCGIS), we are writing for your support of our recent request to the District 10 Land Use committee for three variances related to the much-needed expansion of our school site. That committee approved each of our requests. We hope you will do the same.

Here are some key facts about us and the variances:

- **54 TCGIS kids (10%) live in St. Paul's District 10!**
- **An additional 211 live in other areas of our fair city of St. Paul!**
- **46% of our students live in St. Paul!**
- **This is our school's 3rd location, all of which have been in St. Paul.**
- **TCGIS invested more than \$12,000 in a traffic and parking study from a professional traffic engineering firm. The results indicate ample on-street parking in Warrendale.**
- **We intend to deepen our roots and stay in the Como neighborhood.**

Our new Site Plan calls for the following variances:

VARIANCE 1: SLIGHT HEIGHT VARIANCE

To Keep our New Floors Level with Existing School Floors- and improve Accessibility- We Need a Slight Height Variance.

- The city's zoning standard for building height is 30 feet. We are asking for a variance of 33' 1" to match the level of the existing floors and to accommodate the increased height due to differences in building systems since construction of the 1950's classroom building.
- The addition will address level transitions that cause difficulty for many younger students as well as those with disabilities. A new elevator with access to all three levels will dramatically improve accessibility over the current situation with lifts, ramps and elevators at opposite ends of the buildings, which require someone with a disability to go back and forth, and up and down levels to travel between buildings.
- **The existing structure is much taller than the height of the proposed new school building.** As a result, even with the variance the new building will fit more with the scale of surrounding structures.
- A variance will allow TCGIS to keep level with the existing structures, improve ADA accessibility within the school, and provide easier access to the building -- we don't have to incorporate steps, which would add more impervious surface to the site.

VARIANCE 2 – BUILDING COVERAGE VARIANCE

The Footprint of the Proposed Building is Comparable to – and Less Imposing than -- the Current Church Footprint and Takes Up Less Space.

- Our variance seeks only 1% more building coverage.
 - Our proposed variance is actually a significant improvement and is in harmony with the general intent of the zoning code. **Before the school occupied the property, 65% of the lot was covered in impervious surfaces; we reduced this to 60%. This proposed project will bring the percentage of impervious surfaces down even more -- to 55%. Building coverage will be 36% instead of 35%.**
 - **The variance will not negatively affect the property values of the neighborhood.** Instead, it will benefit the community as a whole while being consistent with the uses allowed in a zone R4 neighborhood like Warrendale.
- The materials proposed for the project are consistent and compatible with the materials of the existing building and the 2014 school addition.

VARIANCE 3: PARKING

TCGIS Needs More Green Space - Not More Asphalt!

- **Each required parking spot equals a job at our school – and in the City of St. Paul.** The reason we need this variance is because we bring **jobs** to the Como neighborhood!
- We anticipate 6 additional teaching staff after the addition. To mitigate the loss of 6 parking spots when we convert the TCGIS east parking lot into playground, we contracted with the OPC to rent 15 parking spaces in their lot. This means, TCGIS will actually have 3 more parking spots than previous years.
- Approximately 20% of TCGIS staff do not drive a car to school. Currently, 16 staff walk, bike, or take mass transit to the school. We attribute this in part to the fact that many of our teachers are from Germany, who stay for 1 to 3 years and do not invest in cars.
- **When TCGIS considers the fact that 20% of TCGIS staff does not drive or require parking, this reduces the anticipated need for on street staff parking to about 20. This number of cars could readily fit along city streets or even along the train track side of Jessamine.**
- **TCGIS already made the existing School site greener by landscaping and adding play areas, turf fields, and rain gardens that have improved the character of the surrounding area.**
- TCGIS' traffic study by a professional traffic engineering firm indicated ample on-street parking in Warrendale.

We look forward to seeing approval from your committee, and thank you for the consideration.

Sincerely,

**Christine Berger, Parent, St. Paul Resident & Voter
1272 James Ave
St. Paul, MN 55105**

Langer, Samantha (CI-StPaul)

From: nicole bechtold <ntmartens@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, December 14, 2018 8:50 AM
To: Williams, Josh (CI-StPaul); Anderson, Tia (CI-StPaul); district10@district10comopark.org; zimmermanstp10@gmail.com

**Zoning Board Committee
City of St. Paul Planning Commission
Via Email**

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- **An additional 211 live in other areas of our fair city of St. Paul!**
- **46% of our students live in St. Paul!**
- **This is our school's 3rd location, all of which have been in St. Paul.**
- **TCGIS invested more than \$12,000 in a traffic and parking study from a professional traffic engineering firm. The results indicate ample on-street parking in Warrendale.**
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- **When TCGIS considers the fact that 20% of TCGIS staff does not drive or require parking, this reduces the anticipated need for on street staff parking to about 20. This number of cars could readily fit along city streets or even along the train track side of Jessamine.**
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- TCGIS' traffic study by a professional traffic engineering firm indicated ample on-street parking in Warrendale.

We look forward to seeing approval from your committee, and thank you for the consideration.

Sincerely,

Nicole and Kevin Bechtold
981 Hoyt Ave. W.
St. Paul, MN 55117

Langer, Samantha (CI-StPaul)

From: Tanya Anderson <tanya.anderson03@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 13, 2018 4:24 PM
To: Williams, Josh (CI-StPaul); Anderson, Tia (CI-StPaul)
Cc: district10@district10comopark.org; zimmermanstp10@gmail.com
Subject: Zoning Committee regarding TCGIS

**Zoning Board Committee
City of St. Paul Planning Commission
Via Email**

On behalf of all the parents and kids involved at the Twin Cities German Immersion School (TCGIS), we are writing for your support of our recent request to the District 10 Land Use committee for three variances related to the much-needed expansion of our school site. That committee approved each of our requests. We hope you will do the same.

Here are some key facts about us and the variances:

- **54 TCGIS kids (10%) live in St. Paul's District 10!**
- **An additional 211 live in other areas of our fair city of St. Paul!**
- **46% of our students live in St. Paul!**
- **This is our school's 3rd location, all of which have been in St. Paul.**
- **TCGIS invested more than \$12,000 in a traffic and parking study from a professional traffic engineering firm. The results indicate ample on-street parking in Warrendale.**
- **We intend to deepen our roots and stay in the Como neighborhood.**

Our new Site Plan calls for the following variances:

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this to 60%. This proposed project will bring the percentage of impervious surfaces down even more -- to 55%. Building coverage will be 36% instead of 35%.

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- The materials proposed for the project are consistent and compatible with the materials of the existing building and the 2014 school addition.

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- We anticipate 6 additional teaching staff after the addition. To mitigate the loss of 6 parking spots when we convert the TCGIS east parking lot into playground, we contracted with the OPC to rent 15 parking spaces in their lot. This means, TCGIS will actually have 3 more parking spots than previous years.
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We look forward to seeing approval from your committee, and thank you for the consideration.

Sincerely,

Tanya Anderson
2103 Doswell Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55108

From: Ryan Hennessey [mailto:ryanthennessey@yahoo.com]

Sent: Thursday, December 13, 2018 10:04 AM

To: Williams, Josh (CI-StPaul) <josh.williams@ci.stpaul.mn.us>; Anderson, Tia (CI-StPaul) <Tia.Anderson@ci.stpaul.mn.us>

Cc: manstp10@gmail.com; district10@district10comopark.org; Janelle Hennessey <janellehennessey@yahoo.com>

Subject: Supporting TCGIS and it's neighborhood families

Josh, Tia and my city's Zoning Committee,

I am writing this letter to encourage your support of TCGIS's recent request to the District 10 Land Use committee for three variances related to the much-needed expansion of my family's school site. That committee approved each of these requests. We request that you will do the same.

Here are some facts about TCGIS and it's neighborhood families:

- 54 TCGIS kids (10%) live in St. Paul's District 10 including my kids Mabel (3rd grade) and Graham (1st grade)
- An additional 211 live in other areas of our fair city of St. Paul
- Almost half of TCGIS kids live in St. Paul
- TCGIS and my family intend to deepen our roots and stay in the Como neighborhood

The new Site Plan for TCGIS calls for the following variances:

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- TCGIS' traffic study by a professional traffic engineering firm indicated ample on-street parking in Warrendale.

We look forward to seeing an approval from your committee, and thank you for the consideration.

Sincerely,

Ryan Hennessey (Mabel and Graham's Dad)
 781 Cottage Ave W
 St. Paul, MN 55117
 Mobile- (952) 237-6135



District 10 Como Community Council
1224 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, MN 55103
651.644.3889
district10@district10comopark.org
www.district10comopark.org

December 19, 2018

Commissioners:

The Como Community Council is recommending **approval of all three variances** required for the proposed expansion of Twin Cities German Immersion School. The recommendation follows a Land Use meeting on Dec. 5 attended by more than 200 people, including 178 District 10 residents who voted on the variances. Subsequently, the full District 10 board voted Dec. 18 to concur with the committee votes. Specifically, District 10 recommends approval of a:

- 1 percent variance in lot coverage, to 36 percent.
- 3.1-foot variance in height, to 33.1 feet.
- Parking variance of 37 spaces. Board members specifically rejected an amendment for a 29-space variance, as recommended by city staff. Discussion on the amendment suggests that a larger parking variance is preferable to requiring additional pavement and a loss of green space on the school property.

District 10 also recommends that the Zoning Committee and Planning Commission **table action** on the school's site plan. The plan, as it currently exists, is incomplete. It should not be approved until numerous areas of uncertainty are settled. Parking, traffic, pedestrian safety, and sound and sight buffering of the school's play areas all are specific issues that remain unresolved. For example:

- **Parking.** There is new uncertainty about how many spaces the school needs to provide onsite and how that might be addressed. In addition, the school's contract for shared parking with Mission Orthodox Presbyterian Church expires on June 13, 2019. At a minimum, there should be a new contract in place for when the expansion actually opens in fall 2019.
- **Traffic and pedestrian safety.** City staff and the community have not had time to fully review the 200-page traffic impact study. It is unclear what actions city staff will require in areas such as traffic flow, student drop-off and pick-up, bus parking, crosswalk treatments, a Safe Routes to School plan, and related issues. It is not clear how those recommendations may be implemented or paid for. Especially because of the high percentage of private vehicles that transport students, these decisions have intense impacts on quality of life in the immediate residential neighborhood.
- **Play areas.** The school's playground equipment is unusually close to nearby residences. Enrollment growth has increased the number of children who are outdoors at any given time, and the length of time they are outdoors. There is no resolution on what type of fencing and other sound reduction efforts the school will provide on the east and north sides to reduce the impact of playground sound.

These are issues that go hand in hand with the school's success and enrollment growth. These are issues that have a serious and ongoing results on the immediate neighborhood. These are issues that exist today, and will continue to exist – regardless of what form the school's expansion

takes. These are issues that exist, and will continue to exist, whether or not the Aula/St. Andrew's church building receives designation or is demolished.

The school, city staff, and community need time to fully review, deliberate, and reach agreement on these issues for good. If not now, when? We believe the best process and best outcomes will occur if the Planning Commission retains the ability of provide a full public review, rather than signing off now and simply allowing the issues to be resolved administratively, behind the scenes. We believe tabling any action will accomplish that.

Sincerely,

Michael Kuchta
Executive director

Langer, Samantha (CI-StPaul)

From: Bobbi Jo Hannu <bj.hannu@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 20, 2018 2:24 PM
To: Brendmoen, Amy (CI-StPaul); Williams, Josh (CI-StPaul); Anderson, Tia (CI-StPaul)
Subject: Fwd: Zoning re: TCGIS... false misrepresentation by a neighbor in my name! Important!

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Bobbi Jo Hannu <bj.hannu@gmail.com>
Date: Thu, Dec 20, 2018 at 2:21 PM
Subject: Zoning re: TCGIS... misrepresentation by a neighbor
To: josh.williams@ci.st.paul.mn.us <josh.williams@ci.st.paul.mn.us>, tia.anderson@ci.stpaul.mn.us <tia.anderson@ci.stpaul.mn.us>

Hello,

I woke this morning to a note informing me a FB post I had written on the Como park Neighbor page had been printed out and submitted in a packet of info submitted by a Kris and Kevin Anderson. My post related to an incident where a vehicle nearly struck my son while his school bus was stopped with all lights flashing and the arm out. This has happened twice. I live at 986 Como Ave.

I am requesting that this fb printed page found on page 124 be removed and pulled as it is false misrepresentation. My post has absolutely nothing to do with any of the parking or traffic variances. Of note I need to clarify the following:

1. This happened a block and a half away from the TCGIS, But.... it had absolutely nothing to do with any traffic related to the school or parking.
2. How do I know this? I know this because I witnessed it and his bus arrives between 7:35- 7: 45 am BEFORE there is any activity at the school.
3. Como ave is a feeder street and at that time of the morning, traffic is relatively light and primarily neighbors and residents of St. Paul heading off to work.

I am telling you that these neighbors are clearly attempting to make it look like this incident should be submitted as evidence against a parking variance for TCGIS.

I am angry that a neighbor tried to pick and choose and maneuver my FB post to look like it represents their opinion against the parking variance.

I do not want my FB post to look like it is supporting that. These folks did not contact me prior to printing to ask me any questions to clarify the post. If they had, they would have realized school parking and traffic had no relevance to this incident. This incident just reinforced that St. Paul has a cultural issue with distracted driving and speeding. This type of thing happens in all neighborhoods, in all cities across the country.

I do not want my name to appear that I do not support TCGIS request for a parking variance, when in fact I whole heartedly support it.

I do feel that this misrepresentation might start to cast doubt on other materials submitted as to their actual factual nature vs. emotional and desire for many neighbors to have a spot open to park in directly in front of their homes when we live in a vibrant city with public street parking. I know this is why several members of Save Historic St. Andrews has jumped on that bandwagon. The reality is that parking is busy in the block

around the school only during the 20 or so minutes before and after school. Otherwise it's like living in a suburb around here. Open Parking everywhere.

Thank you in advance, for removing that printed document that was included in Kris and Kevin Anderson's letter/ email.

Sincerely,
Bobbi-Jo Hannu
986 Como Ave.

P.s. I would have been at the meeting to dispute this but our family is reeling from the latest stomach bug going around the city.