Village of Oak Park

STAFF REPORT

TO: Zoning Board of Appeals **REVIEW DATE:** February 11, 2026

FROM: Project Review Team **PREPARED BY**: Bob Bernhart, Zoning Administrator

P R O J E C T T I T L E

CALENDAR NUMBER: 03-26-Z

The Zoning Board of Appeals ("ZBA") will conduct a public hearing on an application filed by Jennie Hull on behalf of Beyond Hunger seeking a special use permit for a warehouse and distribution facility (a food pantry) at 6209 North Avenue, Oak Park, Illinois, Property Index Number 16-05-102-032-0000 ("Subject Property"), in the NA North Avenue Zoning District.

A P P L I C A N T I N F O R M A T I O N

APPLICANT: Jennie Hull (Beyond Hunger)
848 Lake Street
Oak Park, Il 60301

PROPERTY OWNER: First Savings Bank
702 N Shore Drive
Suite 300
Jefferson, IN 47130

P R O P E R T Y I N F O R M A T I O N

EXISTING ZONING: NA North Avenue Zoning District
EXISTING LAND USE: Vacant Building & Surface Lot (former gym and grocery store)
PROPERTY SIZE: 35,979 square feet
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: Corridor Commercial/Mixed Use

SURROUNDING ZONING AND LAND USES:

NORTH: North Avenue followed by City of Chicago (Commercial, Day Care Center)
SOUTH: Public alley followed by R-4 Single-Family Commercial Zoning District (Residential)
EAST: N Lombard Avenue followed by NA North Avenue Zoning District (Mixed Use)
WEST: N Harvey Avenue followed by NA North Avenue Zoning District (Place of Worship)

A n a l y s i s

Submittals

This report is based on the following documents which were filed with the Zoning Administrator-Development Services Department:

1. Application for Special Use Permit;
2. Narrative/Summary;
3. Proposed Site Plan;
4. Plat of Survey;
5. Proposed Floor Plans; and
6. Response to special use standards pursuant to Section 14.2 (E).

Description

The subject site is a single parcel with a land area of approximately 35,979 square feet. It is located along North Avenue between N Harvey Avenue and N Lombard Avenue. There is an existing 14,198-square foot structure at the east end of the property, with an off-street parking lot immediately to the west of the building. The site features direct access from the adjacent rights-of-way to the west, north, and east, as well as access to the building from the public alley to the south. The building was most recently used for a health club/gym, and prior to that it was a grocery store. It is currently vacant.

The Applicant, Jennie Hull, is proposing to modify the building and use the site as a new headquarters for Beyond Hunger, a non-profit hunger relief organization. The building would house a variety of uses, including office space for administrative staff, a community kitchen, a classroom, a staging area for home deliveries, and a community market, but a large portion of the building would be used for food warehousing and storage. Drive-through food pantry/pickup events would also be hosted periodically. Given the amount of space dedicated to warehousing and storage and the operational focus on food distribution (through the interior market space, home deliveries, and drive-through events), it was determined that the most appropriate use classification in the Zoning Ordinance would be “Warehousing & Distribution”, which is defined as “an enclosed facility for the storage and distribution of manufactured products, supplies, and/or equipment”. The establishment of this use requires a special use permit.

Images of Subject Property:

Compliance with the Zoning Ordinance

The previous use of the property was a health club/gym and the Applicant is proposing a change of use to operate a warehouse and distribution facility (a food pantry with offices and other ancillary uses), which requires special use approval. Thus, the ZBA will conduct a public hearing on a special use permit application filed by said Applicant to operate a warehouse and distribution facility pursuant to Section 8.3 ("Table 8-1: Use Matrix) of the Oak Park Zoning Ordinance at the property located at the Subject Property in the NA North Avenue Zoning District. The Zoning Ordinance does not list specific principal use standards for warehouse and distribution facilities, but the property is compliant with other zoning requirements such as parking. As stated in its purpose statement (Section 5.1(E)), the NA district "is intended to accommodate the North Avenue corridor. The NA District addresses commercial uses of various scales, including larger auto-oriented retail, individual storefronts, and retail centers, while improving the pedestrian environment along the corridor. Higher density residential and mixed-use development is also encouraged."

Special Use:

The listing of a use as a special use within a zoning district does not constitute an assurance or presumption that such special use will be approved. Rather, each special use must be evaluated on an individual basis, in relation to all applicable standards of this Ordinance. Such evaluation will determine whether approval of the special use is appropriate at the particular location and in the particular manner proposed. The recommendation of the Zoning Board of Appeals and decision of the Village Board must make findings to support each of the following conclusions:

1. The establishment, maintenance, and operation of the proposed special use will not have a substantial or unduly adverse impact on the neighborhood or endanger the public health, safety, or welfare.

2. The proposed special use is compatible with the general land use of adjacent properties and other property within the immediate vicinity.

3. The special use in the specific location proposed is consistent with the spirit and intent of this Ordinance, adopted land use policies and the Comprehensive Plan.

4. The special use meets the requirements for such classification in this Ordinance.

The Applicant has responded to the approval standards within the application.

Following the hearing, the Zoning Board of Appeals shall transmit to the Village Board a written report of its findings as to compliance of the special use approval standards listed in Section 14.2 (E) (Approval Standards) and give its recommendation to either approve, approve with conditions or deny the special use.

Compatibility with Surrounding Land Uses

The subject property is surrounded by the following uses: To the north across North Avenue is a mix of commercial uses and a day care center. To the west across N Harvey Avenue is a place of worship and to the east across N Lombard Avenue is an existing mixed-use building. To the south across the public alley is an intersecting alley and single-family homes.

The structure was previously used as a health club, but that business closed in 2025 and the building has remained vacant since then. Prior to this, it was a grocery store for many years. The site features a large off-street parking lot with 41 spaces, and there are an additional five parking spaces along North Avenue. Access to the site from three adjacent rights-of-way is existing and no new curb cuts will be required for the proposed use. The site already features a loading area to the rear of the building, which may be modified to accommodate truck deliveries once or twice per week (a reduction from the delivery frequency of the previous grocery store use).

The Applicant has submitted a detailed narrative describing the scope of operations and the various components of their proposed use of the property. While many components would be contained within the enclosed structure—such as the mezzanine office space, the community kitchen, and the market area—the Applicant is also proposing to continue the drive-through food pickup events that they host at their current location. These events would occur two to three times per week for several hours, and the submitted site plan proposes using directional signage to route vehicles east along North Avenue, then south along N Lombard Avenue and through the alley, heading west. Vehicles would then turn right on N Harvey Avenue to enter the site, which will feature ample off-street space for stacking/queueing. This proposal maximizes the stacking space for vehicles while minimizing traffic impacts, and the presence of a large parking lot with full drive aisles would assist with containing the queue during these designated event times. The addition of a community market, which would function similarly a small standard grocery operation (limited to specific times each week), may also spread out demand for food pickup, reducing peak impacts. There is a perpendicular north-south alley to the south that will maintain access for the residential properties.

The proposed facility and operations are designed to minimize and mitigate any potential impacts on adjacent properties, and the substantial off-street parking area would be a major benefit for containing operations within the site during peak hours and events. The proposed special use should be compatible with the neighborhood and nearby land uses.

General Information

Project Review Team

The Project Review Team consists of representatives from various departments and divisions within the Village government. Discussion of this application included comments regarding life safety systems within the building, public health requirements for the kitchen component, specific operational details, the idea of a community/neighborhood meeting, the potential need for outside agency approvals (such as MWRD), the use of the alley, and on-street parking. Public Works, Fire, and other departments had no major concerns about the proposal, but staff recommended that the Applicant work with Parking and Mobility Services staff to develop a parking restrictions plan for the on-street spaces adjacent to the building on N Lombard Avenue. This plan would aim to keep those spaces clear during drive-through events in order to maintain traffic flow.

End of Report.

c. Applicant
Zoning Board of Appeals members
Rasheda Jackson, Zoning Board of Appeals Attorney
Mike Bruce, Village Planner