

Public Comments: OPRFHS Planned Development PC 23-03

To the Plan Commission:

As a neighbor of OPRFHS I am writing in **support** of its requested zoning variance. I have seen the plan and I think it carries out the basic architectural design of the school, far better than I had expected. The building will be attractive, infringe no further on the block than currently exists and the height has no "looming" aesthetic effect.

The planned improvements are years overdue. I have personally seen the inadequacy of the current building. I feel that I owe this to the next generation of children as citizens of this community provided so well for mine.

All students use PE facilities. My kids especially used the adaptive PE room and all the backstage (and front) theatre spaces. I am thrilled that these are included in this proposal.

As a Realtor for more than 30 years in our villages I can attest to the fact that OPRF is a primary draw for both new entrants and those "moving up" in our communities. It is crucial that it stay competitive with other suburban high schools, in physical plant as well as academics. We may be land-locked (both OPRF and the school) but we can see that the land we have is used to the greatest advantage.

Please approve the variance, in a timely way, to allow this project to proceed.

Sincerely,

Marjorie H. Greenwald
312 N. Elmwood, Oak Park, IL60302

We have been neighbors of the high school for the past seventeen years and are writing in **support** of the zoning variances you will be considering at your August 3, 2023 meeting. We are familiar with the details of the planned work and agree that the investment is necessary for the future of the high school and the community. This is a well-thought-out plan which has had years of input from multiple stakeholders, including the residents of the surrounding neighborhood.

Once this work is complete, everyone in the Oak Park and River Forest communities will benefit and virtually no one will be negatively impacted. The proposed building will extend no closer to Scoville Avenue than the existing building and will maintain the same distance from the parking garage as exists today.

We ask that you approve the requested variances and allow the OPRFHS Project 2 to proceed in a timely manner.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mike and Lynette Poirier
308 North Elmwood Avenue
Oak Park, IL 60302

Cassandra,

I'm sorry to sense this very palpable frustration in your email to us. Please allow me to try to tackle these problems one at a time.

The letter that goes out notifying our neighbors of the hearing is a standard letter that is required as part of the process, but I hear your desire for more information. Attached please find two documents. I hope this gives you what you need. One is a notice of public hearing that is posted here at the building. It provides a very high level description of the proposed project to replace the southeast corner of the building, just next to the parking garage on Scoville. The second attachment is the presentation from our neighbor meeting we hosted on June 28 to share the exact information with images included. Understandably, not everyone was able to attend, although I was happy to see about 15 or so of our neighbors present.

The dust has been tough to contend with, and I've been in frequent conversation with our construction management firm to press them to do all they can to mitigate the extent to which dust pervades our neighbors' property. I will send this message on to them as well. Regarding the dust, if you haven't already seen it, I've recently sent a letter to all of those who live adjacent to our property on Linden and Erie that we will gladly pay for window cleaning in the coming weeks or months. In case you didn't get that, I've copied that letter here as well.

Regarding any other damage to your property (you've mentioned broken windows, etc.) if they are caused by activities here, we will certainly have them covered by our insurance. I can point you in the right direction if any of those occurrences have been recent.

Please also let me know if you'd like to talk over the phone, and I'll reach out.

Greg



Dr. Greg Johnson
Superintendent
Oak Park and River Forest High School
gjohnson@oprfs.org | (708) 434-3211
www.oprfhs.org

From: Cassandra West <westcl@comcast.net>

Sent: Monday, July 24, 2023 12:44 PM

To: Planning <Planning@oak-park.us>

Subject: Fwd: Aug. 3 hearing before the Oak Park Plan Commission

Re: Letter dated July 19 to Neighboring Property Owners

As a 25-plus year OPRF neighbor on Linden Avenue, I've witnessed the many physical changes to the high school building and grounds over the years. I've had cars windows smashed by baseballs, and this

summer am enduring all the blowing dust from the sports field construction blanketing my car and dirtying my condo's windows.

Now we are in receipt of a letter notifying us of the Aug. 3 hearing at Village Hall. The purpose of the hearing remains a mystery as the letter does not give even a clue. Not everyone subscribes to the Wednesday Journal. Is it possible to inform we OPRFHS neighbors the substance of what will be presented in the Aug. 3 hearing? We deserve at least that courtesy.

Regards,

Cassandra West
Linden Avenue
Oak Park, IL

Dear Oak Park Plan Commission,

Please **support** the Planned Development requested by OPRF to build Project 2 on the southeast corner of the OPRF campus. The high school is a major asset to our community and needs to rebuild this space to fulfill its mission. Not only will this development not change the character of the neighborhood, but it will improve it significantly.

The educational institutions of Oak Park and River Forest are one of the key reasons people move to our villages, and OPRF is a major draw. The diversity in our communities is largely a result of all types of families from all income levels seeking a high-quality education for their children. A strong and desirable high school is also key to community stability and our property values. OPRF is a community asset that impacts all residents - current and future.

To continue providing that high-quality education, OPRF's facilities need to be modernized and improved. The proposed development is the second project in the five-project master facilities plan. The plan grew out of the community-led Imagine Process, which assessed how well the current campus met the educational needs of our students, and what needed to be done to better meet those needs. Instruction in Project 2 will focus on lifelong health and fitness for the students who use these physical education and athletics spaces. And because it adds square footage to that one corner of campus - by adding a full basement and one additional story above ground - it enables later projects that will be constructed largely within the footprint of the existing building.

Rather than change the character of the neighborhood, like some Planned Developments might, this rebuilding of a part of OPRF will strengthen that character. OPRF is already the defining institution of the neighborhood. Having this corner be newly built with better visibility and lighting will help make the whole area more welcoming and safer. And it will help students understand that they, their learning and their activities are valued by our entire community.

Any delay in your recommendation will have a grave impact on this project by pushing this desperately needed construction out another year. You know this project is needed, the D200 School Board approved it unanimously, the time is now to recommend this zoning to the Village

Board so that this critical work can get underway as soon as possible. Waiting any longer further opens up our community's children to the current dangerous and inequitable facilities and any issues that could arise therefrom.

Please support the Planned Development requested by OPRF to build Project 2.

Thank you for your consideration,

Laura Huseby

Plan Commission Members,

I recently learned that Oak Park and River Forest High School is asking the Plan Commission to approve an addition to the current building that doesn't quite fit current zoning. As a taxpaying citizen I encourage you to say yes to the OPRFHS addition as it is designed.

The local papers often cover controversial requests for exceptions to zoning, usually for new residential buildings. It seems to me that this request is different in many ways. This is not an out-of-town developer looking to make money by building something taller than surrounding buildings. This is a request from a local non-profit institution to replace a part of an existing building with a one that is only slightly taller, and not as tall as the church next door or the north end of the school building. Unlike many of the requests you receive, this will not be a change of use for the parcel of land. This land will continue to be used to educate the youth in our villages as it has been for a century. The proposed building is big and close to the sidewalk, but that's what it has been for almost 100 years, and, unlike other developments, this one won't increase the amount of traffic or number of residents in the neighborhood.

The building predates the current zoning by several decades. OPRFHS is completely land-locked, so doesn't have the option of adding square feet by reducing height to the current zoning and just building on nearby land instead. The school needs more space and building an addition one story taller than the existing building is the only way to get it.

Please grant the OPRFHS request.

Sincerely,
Laura Minnis

Hello board members.

I am a taxpaying resident of Oak Park and River Forest. I am writing to urge you to recommend the Project 2 zoning variance as any delay in your recommendation further delays the start of this critically needed construction and keeps our community sending our children to dilapidated facilities that are against current code and create a terrible educational environment for our students. Even a one month delay by your body delays the start of construction by one year. Project 2 was unanimously approved by the D200 School Board, and this work needs to begin as soon as possible. This zoning variance is not a huge change from the building's current structure.

This is critical work for our community, **please recommend** this zoning variance to the Oak Park Village Board.

Please do not delay the start of this much needed project.

Meg Chalmers
606 Speech, LLC

Dear Members of the Plan Commission,

I am writing in **support** of OPRF District 200's requests for zoning variances as they pertain to construction of a new physical education wing, replacing the existing structure at the southeast corner of the building. These variance requests are identified as PC 23-03 on the Commission's August 3rd agenda.

By any objective measure, both the height and setback variances District 200 is requesting are entirely reasonable and will hopefully be unanimously approved by the Commission. Extending building height twelve-feet above the existing structure's height at that location is in alignment with, or even lower than, other parts of OPRF and Pilgrim Church across the street. The setback being requested will be exactly the same as the current building. These are non-controversial details, preserving the character of the neighborhood, or changing it minimally, while OPRF itself will undergo significant improvement in the process.

I empathize with neighbors, especially those on Scoville, who will be directly effected by the construction project. I support any measures District 200 and construction managers can take to help mitigate impacts during the project. Given Oak Park's "urban-suburban" density, we unfortunately are faced with these kinds of disruptions in a community where available building space is limited.

Understanding that the process to approve this construction project was polarizing in the community, I am hopeful the technical nature of these zoning variance requests do not themselves become political. The Plan Commission's discussion is solely about the dimensions of the structure itself, not the contents it will eventually house or how those contents were decided. In that vein, I believe unanimous approval by the Plan Commission and the Village Board are straightforward decisions, in the best interests of our communities, and what is best for the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Peter Ryan
Oak Park, IL

Dear Commissioners,

I am an Oak Park resident and I **support** the zoning variance request from District 200 to replace a current section of the high school with an addition along Scoville Avenue.

I have been an ardent supporter of Imagine Project 2 and have closely followed the discussions around the needs identified in the master planning process, the design of the project, and its funding. Project 2 will build facilities the high school needs to educate our students each and every day in safe, modern spaces. Our school needs these new physical education spaces that serve all students in the building.

The inconvenience to immediate neighbors on Scoville is an unfortunate short term impact but the project will benefit tens of thousands of students for decades to come in the long term.

I urge you to approve District 200's request on behalf of all of those students.

Thanks,

Matt Kruse

Hello Planning Commission,

As a long time neighbor to OPRF living on the 100 block of North Euclid Ave., we're **supportive** of the three variance requests submitted by OPRF to the planning commission. The limited increase in building height is not overly significant or is thought to have any environmental impact to surrounding homes. In addition, the limited decrease in the setback to match the existing non-conforming setback is reasonable and an acknowledgement of the density limitations around the high school. Finally, a slight increase in lighting foot candles around the property is appropriate when considering the increase to safety it will provide to students and staff around the school during evening hours and illuminating the bikes that are often stolen.

Thank you,

Kristin & Kevin Friker

Public Comments from Thursday, August 3, 2023.

Dear Plan Commission,

The Oak Park and River Forest High School Imagine Foundation respectfully recommends that you grant the Zoning Ordinance relief requested by District 200 for the construction of Imagine Project 2. The Foundation was created to make the Imagine Long-Term Facilities Plan a reality by using philanthropy to help pay for the construction of Project 2 and subsequent Imagine Projects. We have a deep understanding of the need for Project 2 and its benefits to our communities.

OPRF is an excellent high school offering a wide range of educational and extracurricular opportunities to more than 3,000 students each year. But OPRF's aging facilities have become an obstacle to 21st Century teaching and learning. Project 1 of the Imagine Plan focused on improving academic classrooms, making the building more welcoming and secure, and creating spaces for study, research, creativity, and collaboration.

The current, century-old facilities in the southeast corner of the building no longer meet today's educational needs. Project 2 will replace antiquated physical education and some inadequate theatre spaces. All are used for daily curricular instruction and valuable extracurricular activities. Project 2 will provide the safe, accessible, and modern facilities that our students and communities deserve.

OPRF is a landlocked campus, so Project 2 is designed to meet student needs in the smallest possible footprint without significant height or setback changes along Scoville Avenue. Even with those constraints, Project 2 will add significant square footage to the building, thereby freeing up space elsewhere in the structure that is essential for later Imagine Projects.

This project has too many compensating community benefits to list here. The most immediate benefits are the educational opportunities this school provides to our students, and the importance of maintaining educational excellence with equity for ALL students. OPRF is a cornerstone of our communities that continues to make our villages attractive to new residents of all incomes and backgrounds. Updated learning spaces are central to that. Students, their families, and all residents benefit from living in an educated and diverse community. A strong OPRF is key to both.

The OPRFHS Imagine Foundation urges you to grant this zoning relief promptly. The community input has been gathered. The scope and funding have been approved by the D200 Board of Education. The building has been designed to meet the school's needs in the smallest possible envelope. The community and our students will benefit for decades to come.

Sincerely,

Teddy Scott, Director

OPRF HS Imagine Foundation

Dear Planning Commission Members,

I am writing in support of the zoning variances requested by OPRFHS to complete Project 2 as designed. Since the building's current non-compliant setback is grandfathered-in, as is the height of the north end of the current building (not to mention that of nearby Pilgrim Congregational Church) and since the architects have designed a modern facility, yet one that is as small as possible, as well as one which will rectify the years of neglect that have led to the current crowded, unsightly, and unsafe facilities (I saw this firsthand when I toured the building recently, as well as when my children were students there, from 2011 – 2018), all while meeting the physical education needs of not only ALL the students but many community members and outside groups, I urge you to grant this request of such a major public institution in our village.

I live less than 3 blocks from OPRFHS. I fully support Project 2 as designed and hope you will vote in the affirmative regarding these variances.

Thank you,

Deborah Wess

208 S. East Ave., Oak Park
