

## **ZONING HEARING BOARD MEETING**

### **SUMMARY**

**JANUARY 6, 2025**

The Zoning Hearing Board of Bethel Park came to order at 7:30 p.m.

**ROLL CALL:** PRESENT: REGAN, WILLETTS, KANON, DUFF

ALSO PRESENT: VINCE KELLY, DAVE MONTGOMERY, KIM  
STRNISA

#### **APPROVAL OF SUMMARY:**

1. Mr. Regan asked if there were any changes, additions, corrections and/or deletions to the summary of November 4, 2024. Mr. Willetts made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Mr. Duff. There was no further discussion on the Motion. Roll was called and the Motion passed unanimously.

#### **COMMUNICATIONS:**

1. Invoice from Kim Simms-Strnisa – A Motion was made by Mr. Willets to approve invoice received from Kim Simms-Strnisa in the amount of \$275 for attendance fee for the November 4, 2024 meeting. The Motion was seconded by Kanon. There was no discussion on the Motion. Roll was called and the Motion passed unanimously.
2. Invoices from David Montgomery – A Motion was made by Mr. Willets to approve invoices received from David Montgomery in the amounts of \$ 204 for ZHB Solicitor services provided from 09/03/2024 to 09/30/2024 and \$444 ZHB Solicitor services provided from 10/01/2024 to 11/07/2024. The Motion was seconded by Mr. Kanon There was no discussion on the Motion. Roll was called and the Motion passed unanimously.

**OLD BUSINESS: NONE**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**Case # 2866**

**APPLICANT: REDEEMING GRACE CHURCH OF PITTSBURGH**  
**LOCATION: 7189 BAPTIST ROAD**  
**SUBJECT: VARIANCES TO REPLACE THE EXISTING OFF-STREET PARKING LOT AND EXPAND IT BY 45 PARKING SPACES, CONSTRUCT A TRASH ENCLOSURE, AND RELOCATE THE EXISTING PLAYGROUND AT ITS PLACE OF WORSHIP**

It is hereby requested that the Zoning Hearing Board hear an application for a variance. The land involved is 7189 Baptist Road. Current Zoning Classification is R-1. Involved Ordinance or Legislative Act: Ord. 7-12-93A Sections: 69.23.4.4 and 69.35.4.3

**Variance Type:**

The Zoning Hearing Board should grant the following relief: The appeal of Redeeming Grace Church of Pittsburgh, Inc. requesting variances to replace the existing off-street parking lot and expand it by 45 parking spaces, construct a trash enclosure, and relocate the existing playground at its place of worship located at 7189 Baptist Road, also known as Tax Parcel ID: 0475-D-00020-0000-01. The applicant is requesting dimensional variances to Zoning Ordinance Sections: 69.23.5 pertaining to the 20% Maximum Lot Coverage allowance for buildings and accessory uses so as to permit lot coverage of 44.58%; and Sections 69.23.4.4 and 69.35.4.3 pertaining to the required 20' wide minimum buffer yard so as to encroach into the buffer yard by .84 of a foot for the proposed trash enclosure and at a distance of .8.25' for the relocated existing playground. The property is zoned R-1 One-Family Residential in Ward 4

**Applicant's Petition:** Our firm (Strassburger McKenna Gutnick & Gefsky) has the pleasure or representing Redeeming Grace Church, Inc. ("Redeeming Grace"), the record owner of 7189 Baptist Road, Bethel Park, PA 15101, also known as Parcel I.D. No. 0475-D-00020- 0000-01 ("Property") The property is a 3.0441-acre parcel situated in the One Family Dwelling ("R-1") District. Redeeming Grace is a Christian church that has been in operation since 2016 and has called the Property its home since November of 2021.

The Property contains a 1-story brick and stone church building with a basement ("Church"), a detached block garage located on the northeastern corner of the Property, and a small playground, The Property is subject to multiple drainage, utility, and pipeline easements, which limit the buildable area of the Property.

Presently, the Property contains two one-way paved asphalt driveways, one on each side of the Church, which connect the 63-space parking lot located in the rear of the Church ("Parking Lot") with Baptist Road. The Parking Lot's condition is deteriorating, and while it is paved, it is in need of significant improvements-large portions of the Parking Lot are comprised of broken asphalt and gravel, and the Parking Lot provides insufficient parking for members of Redeeming Grace's church community.

**Applicant's Arguments:** Redeeming Grace proposes to replace the existing Parking Lot, increase the size of the Parking Lot by 45 spaces, construct a trash enclosure to permit safe storage of refuse, and relocate the existing playground to accommodate for the much-needed improvements to the Parking

Lot. However, the size and shape of the Property proscribes strict compliance with the provisions of the Ordinance.

The Ordinance requires that off-street parking must be provided as required under Article x. Ordinance, & 69.23.6. Churches have the same minimum off-street parking requirements as assembly halls a minimum of one parking space per 25 square feet of movable seating area. see Ordinance, & 69.40.1.6.b, 69.40.1.6.a, 69.40.1.6.b. To satisfy these requirements, and to accommodate sufficient parking for Redeeming Grace's members, Redeeming Grace seeks to increase the number of total parking spaces to 108, including 5 handicapped accessible parking spaces. See also Ordinance, & 69.38.17 (requiring 5 handicapped accessible parking spaces for lots with 101 to 150 parking spaces). However, the size and shape of the Property, coupled with the existing easements upon the Property, prevent Redeeming Grace from complying with all provisions of the Ordinance. As such, Redeeming Grace requests three variances to allow Redeeming Grace to provide adequate parking and comply with Article X of the Ordinance.

First, The Ordinance requires that all uses in the R-1 District "shall cover not more than 20% of the area of the lot." Ordinance, & 69.23.5. Currently, the Property's lot coverage is nonconforming. Pursuant to the provisions of Article X, The Property is only permitted to have a total lot coverage of 0.6088 acres (20%). However, the Property's existing lot coverage totals approximately 0.9479 acres (31.14%) of the total lot area. In order to accommodate Article X's parking requirements, as proposed, the lot coverage would increase to 1.3570 acres (44.58%) of the lot area. Therefore, Redeeming Grace requests a variance from Section 69.23.5 to permit lot coverage of 1.3570 acres (44.58%)

Additionally, a 20-foot landscaped buffer yard is required pursuant to Sections 69.23.4.4 and 69.35.4.3 of the Ordinance. While the proposed replacement of the Parking Lot will be in the same location as the existing Parking Lot, the additional parking spaces would force Redeeming Grace to situate the proposed trash enclosure and relocate the existing playground within the 20-foot buffer area. AS such, Redeeming Grace requests two variances from the buffer requirements of Sections 69.23.4.4 and 69.35.4.3 of the Ordinance: a variance of 0.84 feet to permit the construction of the proposed trash enclosure 19.15 feet from the rear property line, and a variance of 8.25 feet to permit the relocation of the existing playground 11.75 feet from the side property line on the Property's northern side.

The Property's limited size and shape, as well as the easements existing on the Property, present unique physical circumstances that create an unnecessary hardship on Redeeming Grace. This hardship makes reasonable development of the Property in strict conformity with the Ordinance impossible. The hardship exists as a result of the conditions of the Property and are not self-inflicted. The hardship would not alter the essential character of the neighborhood and would instead improve the existing Parking Lot's deteriorating condition. The variances requested represent the least modification of the Ordinance possible for Redeeming Grace's reasonable use of the Property. Additionally, the Protection of Religious Exercise in Land Use and by Institutionalized Persons Act ("RLUIPA"), 42 USCA 2000cc, which, inter alia, prohibits the Municipality from imposing or implementing a land use regulation that imposes a substantial burden on the religious exercise of a person, even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability, form a basis of support for the requested variances.

The Redeeming Grace community has continued to grow since it moved into the Church, and additional parking is needed to accommodate its members and bring the parking lot into conformity with the Ordinance. It is a necessity that Redeeming Grace be able to provide the members of its church community with a safe area that provides adequate parking for all who wish to attend.

Redeeming Grace has additionally engaged a parking expert who will be participating the hearing.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,  
Gretchen E. Moore

This application was presented by Alan Shuckrow, Christopher Richardson, and Josh Tancordo.

**There were no proponents in this case:**

**There were no opponents in this case:**

A Motion was made by Mr. Duff to approve the case #2866 as amended by the applicant at the hearing to include only the lot coverage variance for expanding the parking lot and excluding the other two (2) that were withdrawn. Mr. Willetts seconded the motion. REGAN – yes, WILLETTS – yes, KANON – yes, DUFF – yes. Motion passes 4-0.

A motion was made to adjourn by Mr. Duff and seconded by Mr. Willets. REGAN – yes, WILLETTS – yes, KANON – yes, DUFF – yes. Motion passes 4-0.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 P.M.