



**ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT**  
**Thursday, June 15, 2017**  
**APPROVED MINUTES**

*You couldn't pick a better place.*

**OPENING:** The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jonathan Rardin, at 7:30 PM.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Led by Chairman Jonathan Rardin.

**OPMA STATEMENT:** Read by Chairman Jonathan Rardin in compliance with the Sunshine Law.

**ROLL CALL**

- **Members in attendance:** Jonathan Rardin, Daniel DiRenzo, Jr.; Wyatt Sklar; Ivy Rovner; Larry Terry, Sr.; Nacovin Norman and Jeff Potter.
- **Professionals in attendance:** Jacob Richman, PP, AICP Planner; and Matthew Wieliczko, Esq., Zoning Board Solicitor.

**ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS**

*Adoption Meeting Minutes from June 1, 2017.* Mr. Sklar made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Rovner, to adopt the Meeting Minutes from June 1, 2017. Affirmative votes by Rardin, Sklar, Rovner, Terry and Potter. Minutes are approved.

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

**16-Z-0019**

Block(s) 592.01 Lot(s) 5

Zone: Industrial Restricted (IR) Zone.

*Relief Requested: A bifurcated use D(1) variance application to convert a residence into a facility that provides support services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.*

**Life Steps, LLC**

10 Lakeside Avenue

Cherry Hill, NJ

**Applicant's Representatives:** Jason Sunkett, Esq. – Applicant's Attorney; Robert Hunter, PE, PP – Applicant's Engineer & Planner; and Ashier Respes – Applicant.

**Exhibits Submitted:** A-1: Site Plan; A-2: Aerial Photograph; and A-3: Landscape Plan.

Mr. Sunkett introduced the Use (d) Variance application for Life Steps and turned the testimony over to the applicant's professional Engineer and Planner, Robert Hunter. Mr. Hunter submitted exhibits A-1 and A02 and gave an overview of the surrounding area. Mr. Hunter explained that the majority of the uses in the immediate area are non-residential but that there are still a few remaining residential uses. Mr. Hunter noted that the zoning of the neighborhood was once residential but that it is now zoned Industrial Restricted (IR). Mr. Hunter explained that the existing structure on the subject site is a vacant residential use; however, the applicant proposes to convert the residence into a school that teaches life skills to individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. The applicant proposes to provide ADA access to the structure along with a fenced in yard and trash enclosure. Mr. Hunter stated that significant improvements are being made to the property which will help enhance the look of the neighborhood. Mr. Hunter submitted Exhibit A-3 and discussed the proposed landscaping and lighting improvements around the property and the proposed trash enclosure. Mr. Hunter noted the conditions of approval listed in the Department of Community Development's review letter and agrees to all of the noted conditions if the Use (d) Variance is granted. Mr. Hunter read into the record Life Steps' operations/mission statement. Mr. Hunter described the various courses offered, the ability for off-site hotel respite, and transportation services. Mr. Hunter stressed that the organization will not have behavioral or violent offenders at this location.

Mr. Hunter stated that Life Steps provides similar services of that of a school and a daycare and that Life Steps is able to service students ages 6 and up. Mr. Hunter explained that the State of New Jersey used to provide these services but the operation has since become privatized; as such, Life Steps received funding through the State. The applicant will provide their licensure to the Department of Community Development as a condition of approval. Mr. Hunter explained that the only difference between the Life Steps operation and a school is that Life Steps is a for-profit organization. Mr. Hunter added that Life Steps meets the definition of a childcare facility except for the age requirements. Mr. Hunter stated that the use is a benefit to the society and then discussed the negative criteria. Mr. Hunter noted that the neighborhood

became a hodgepodge of uses since the PATCO line was installed. Mr. Hunter believes this use is compatible with the area. The only traffic generated will be by employees and the employees driving in the students (as well as the occasional field trip). Traffic will be spread out as classes are offered in 2-hour increments. The site location is also easily accessible by car or train. Mr. Hunter noted that the subject site is approximately 15,000 SF in size where the IR zone has a minimum requirement of 20,000 SF. Mr. Hunter explained that most of the permitted uses for the IR zone would not fit on this site.

Mr. Respes stated that Life Steps will operate from 9am to 5pm and explained that they can have a 6 to 1 ratio of students to teachers in the building and a 4 to 1 ratio in the community. Life Steps will hold 3 to 4 classes (at 2 hours each) per day with 4 to 6 students in each class. Mr. Respes explained that the individuals they serve are high functioning and that no one is severely disabled (many live on their own). Multiple classes will be held at a time, specifically, upwards of 3 at one time may be offered but not throughout the entire day. Mr. Respes stated that Life Steps has to follow the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) guidelines and then detailed what a typical day on-site will look like for those attending Life Steps. The day will consist of indoor and out in the community classes. Students will only be on-site for a portion of the day. Mr. Respes clarified that students are brought in or they can take public transit to the site. Mr. Respes stated that they anticipate having 12 students, 3 teachers, and 2 staff; however, they can accommodate 20 students and 6 staff and as such, request and agree to have no more than 20 students and 6 staff. Mr. Respes explained that the State requires that classes must be separated by students over 21 and students under 21/ Mr. Respes explained that he does not currently have a license to serve individuals under 21 but hopes to get a new license in the future. Mr. Respes assured that Board that while students under 21 and over 21 can be in the same building, they will be split up into different rooms and they will always be under supervision. Mr. Respes stated that the purpose of the Life Steps program is to promote independence, and as such, individuals can travel on their own. The idea is that they will be able to function in a social, work, and everyday environments. Mr. Respes stated that they will have 4 minivans to transport students (no more than 4 students per minivan) and that 2 of the minivans would stay on the site overnight. Mr. Respes clarified that students will not drive themselves to the site. Mr. Respes gave an overview of his credentials and his experience running a life skills program. He explained that he used to run in office in Somerdale and that they would run their operations in the community; however, this would be the first opportunity for the program to have a physical location where structured classes could be taught.

Mr. Hunter stated that there will be no footprint changes to the existing structure but that there will be a number of ADA, lighting, and landscaping improvements. Mr. Respes clarified that the hours of operation will be Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm and Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 2pm. Mr. Sunkett stressed that part of the program involves getting out into the community and improving ones social and life skills. Examples of places they may go include the grocery store, the library, and on mock job interviews. Mr. Sunkett stated that the property was vacant when the applicant bought it but that it was previously utilized as an office for a contractor. The applicant stated that the outdoor space on the property will be used, mostly as an eating area, but that it will be fenced in. Mr. Hunter noted that the site is on septic. Mr. Respes stated that students will bring in their own food but that they will also have cooking classes. Staff will be trained to get food from the grocery store. There will be no deliveries except for occasional parcel service. There will be no after-hours activities. Lastly, the applicant agreed that any approval granted tonight that the conditions will carry over to the site plan application.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Motion:** Following a review of the application and conditions of approval by Solicitor Wielizcko, a motion was made by Ms. Rovner and seconded by Mr. Potter, with affirmative votes for approval by Rardin, DiRenzo, Sklar, Rovner, Terry, Norman, and Potter for the approval of the Use (d) Variance with conditions. Motion carries 7-0.

#### **RESOLUTIONS**

None.

**Meeting Adjourned:** at 8:41 PM.

**ADOPTED:** 7/6/17

**ATTEST:**

  
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**LORISSA LUCIANI, PP, AICP**  
**ZONING BOARD SECRETARY**

  
**DANIEL DIRENZO, JR., VICE-CHAIRMAN**