

ODWNA Meeting re Sale of 2208 Winchell Avenue

Date: Monday, February 9, 2026

Place: Third Christian Reformed Church, Fellowship Room
2400 Winchell Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI

Board Members Present: Stephanie Watkins (President); Barry Olson (Vice President); Christopher Bovid (Secretary); Jim Freeman (Treasurer); Agshin Jafarov; Ellen Foley; Christopher Shook (Past President)

Excused: Todd Ellis, Paul Scott



Approximately 52 attendees.

I. **CALL TO ORDER** – Stephanie Watkins, President 5:07 PM

II. **Stephanie Watkins gave a meeting plan overview:**

- A. Each person should take up to 3 sticky notes. Write down your ideas (one per sticky note) for what you would like to see happen with the space at 2208 Winchell Avenue and place them in a pile on your table.
- B. Ashley Yonker, realtor, will then discuss the property and the space and address questions for the seller and the building/property
- C. Pete Eldridge, City of Kalamazoo Zoning Administrator, will then discuss zoning for the space and address questions.
- D. The attendees will then work in small groups at your tables to review and discuss and organize the 'idea' sticky notes.
- E. Three main goals of this meeting: 1) get the information about the property; 2) share ideas; 3) create a list of shared values for the neighborhood – what do we hold important as concepts and values for the property.
- F. General group agreements for this meeting: You might hear ideas you like or don't like but let's listen to each other and be respectful. Please keep your questions to the presenters brief – we want all to have the opportunity to share their perspectives but we only have two hours at most.
- G. Does anyone have any questions about all that? None were raised.

III. **Introduction of Ashley Yonker, Realtor, Listing Agent for 2208 Winchell Avenue – 5:10 PM**

- A. The property is on 3.88 acres.
- B. There is frontage on three City streets (Winchell Avenue, Aberdeen, and Watterworth).
- C. The parcel is zoned RS-5 (single family residential homes).
- D. There is a possibility of splitting off some of the property.
- E. The building was designed by Alden B. Dow, a protégé of Frank Lloyd Wright.
- F. The building has 18,600 square feet of space with 9,300 square feet on each level. Most of that is usable space.
- G. Downstairs and upstairs are finished except for utilities and stairwells.
- H. Original structure built in 1950. Additional educational wing added on after that.
- I. Sanctuary built with windows on both sides intentionally to bring light into the sanctuary.
- J. The sanctuary can accommodate 384 people.
- K. There are 2 offices, one for the pastor and one for the secretary. There is also a library room on the main level that could be a third office.
- L. There are several classrooms in the educational wing. There is a divider wall that can be moved into place to split a room into multiple rooms.
- M. Main level has 2 bathrooms.
- N. There is an elevator that functions between the two levels.
- O. The downstairs level is a walkout.
- P. There is an enormous reception room.
- Q. There are two rooms used for storage.
- R. Two bathrooms and a separate shower on the lower level as well.
- S. There is an amazing kitchen with a pass through window, huge island, unbelievable amount of cabinetry, a commercial stove, everything you could want for an event.
- T. The original building has gas forced air heating and central air conditioning.
- U. The addition has a boiler and window units.
- V. There is parking for 102 vehicles in the paved parking lot.
- W. Questions?

Q: Could you elaborate on what you mean by the property could be split?

A: originally congregation thought maybe continue with services and split off some land and sell that. Possibly 3 lots could be split off and still have main parcel and still have required green space. 3.88 acres in the heart of winchell is very special and probably won't happen again.

Q: What interest has there been so far? What are their interests so far?

A: There are a lot of interests so far. Without divulging information the congregation doesn't want to divulged, there are people who have come several times and are ready to make offers on the property. There are a lot of people from out of the area (including Detroit) that are inquiring. There are at least 50% of the people calling from places that are not Kalamazoo.

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Q: Are the inquiring parties interested in developing the parcel for single family homes or do they have other interests in developing it?

A: Some of the inquiring entities do not intend to do any development. Some of them have hinted they would not develop it for a number of years. Those inquiring parties aren't all Ashley's clients so she doesn't know what they are thinking but a number of them are not intending to redevelop the property. The congregation would rather see it not developed. They'd rather see a community organization or have another church go there.

Q: What is the asking price?

A: \$1.9MM is still the asking price. There are a lot of things in the church that will remain. Numerous chairs – probably 300. Pews. 3 pianos. The sound system (worth a couple thousand dollars). Desks upon desks. There are a lot of things the congregation is willing to and wants to leave with the property rather than try to sell or gift those items.

Q: Do you know if the seller is willing to consider seller financing?

A: They can't. It's an older congregation. They don't know how long they'll be around. The youngest member is in their 60s.

Q: For those not interested in developing it, what purpose would they use?

A: One of the interested parties was looking at it for use as their church. She doesn't know what the others who have said they don't want to develop it would be using it for.

Q: Does the seller have any specific desires for the property?

A: The congregation members have gotten married in it, baptized their kids there, held events there, etc., so the existing building has a lot of meaning for them. And it has Frank Lloyd Wright's fingerprints on it. So having it continue to have and use the building and not have that destroyed is a desire of theirs.

Q: Any idea what the cost of utilities and maintenance and taxes per year is? Utilities are about \$4,000 per month. There are not currently any property taxes because it is owned by a tax exempt religious entity and used for tax exempt purposes.

The church's head trustee had told the ODWNA that the utility cost is low thanks to a discount program from Consumers Energy. The head trustee also informed the ODWNA that with utilities and insurance and maintenance costs the current operating expenses are typically in the range of \$5,000 to \$7,000 per month.

Note: *If the property is not owned by a tax exempt organization and used for tax exempt purposes such that property taxes start being owed, that would add several thousand dollars more per month to the operating costs (an estimate based on applicable tax millages and a \$1.9MM sales price / \$950,000 SEV is \$65,075 annually or \$5,422.92 monthly).

Q: What would the congregation do with the sale proceeds?

A: They haven't made any final decisions.

Q: Would the congregation be interested in setting up an endowment with the sale proceeds?

A: Ashley does not know. She would have to ask the congregation about that.

Q: Is there a number set for an auction agreement?

A: No. Everything the congregation does, they do it at a meeting held after a church service occurs. So action items are to be listed on their meeting agenda and then they go through their process.

Q: Has the ODWNA shown any interest in trying to establish a consortium to purchase the property?

A: Stephanie Watkins says that this meeting is the first step in helping those in the neighborhood who might want to pursue that. The Board of Directors has discussed it and ODWNA is not in a position to purchase and operate the property but could potentially partner with a different organization that has the resources to devote toward those endeavors.

Q: Is there a grant that could be pursued for the purchase of the property?

A: Stephanie Watkins answered that it would be a massive undertaking to apply for and acquire grant funding for not only the purchase price but also to do fundraising for the operating costs - and it would require a person to champion that process.

Q: Is there a possibility to have the congregation give a right of first refusal for the neighborhood?

A: Ashley can't promise anything but will take to the congregation anything that someone wants to propose to them.

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Q: Can Ashley ask the congregation what the congregation might charge for a 6 month option to purchase?

A: She can do that.

Q: Has KPS inquired about purchasing the property?

A: No.

Q: At some point there was some discussion about the amount of money it would cost per home in the Oakland Drive-Winchell Neighborhood if the purchase price were divided between each. What was the per house cost to acquire it?

A: Ellen Foley stated that the estimate was \$1,209 per house (not including apartment households) to fundraise for the purchase price of it, but that does not include the costs to operate it.

IV. **Introduction of Pete Eldridge, City of Kalamazoo, Zoning Administrator – 5:32 PM**

- A. This 3.88 acre piece of property is the residential single dwelling zoning district. This whole stretch of Winchell is single family zoned, so single family homes are permitted by right.
- B. Other uses like schools, churches, community centers, drop in centers (like the YMCA) would be considered as special uses in this district, which means subject to additional review by the City before such a project could move forward.
- C. Those special use permits go through the Planning Commission.
- D. So very low intensity residential zone and anything other than that requires this additional review step.
- E. It is a large piece of property.
- F. There was an inquiry a short time ago – could part of it be split off? According to the Land Division Act it is eligible for 3 splits – meaning you could have 3 properties split off of it, for a total of 4 properties.
- G. Looking at a high level, since the north side backs up to Watterworth, could that green space be sold off for a few additional homes? Yes, potentially 3 additional homes while keeping what exists because that would leave enough required green space for church and parking lot.
- H. Maximum coverage for a parcel or lot in this area is up to 45% - so parking lot, driveway, etc. That means 55% of the property must be maintained as green space.
- I. It is a huge site and someone might come in and try to do something big here but even so they would still have to meet certain ordinance requirements including green space requirements and then go through the special use process if they wanted to do anything other than a low density residential project.
- J. Questions:

Q: If it were to be split and the existing repurposed for other uses, would there be any evaluation that takes place to make sure the existing parking lot is sufficiently sized for the new usage in the building?

A: The City wouldn't look at it from a parking standpoint – that would be more driven by the entity that is to purchase it. If they wanted to split off a piece of green space for development, that's their prerogative. The City just looks to make sure the remaining parcel meets the green space requirement.

Ashley Yonker stated that the 102 parking spots there are actually more than what is required by City code for the existing building occupancy.

Q: If someone were to move something into the building where the use starts overflowing the parking lot and filling up streets, would the business be required to add additional parking space?

A: Probably not.

Q: What does the future land use map show and is it consistent with the Neighborhood Plan?

A: Pete stated that he didn't review the Future Land Use Map before coming here but he is pretty sure it is low density residential.

Q: Did you say the building could be three different businesses all in one?

A: No, in talking about remaining parcel splits, Pete meant that the land can be split into three additional parcels – not the number of uses for the building.

Q: Special Use Permit – would drop-in center/child care be something that would need a special use permit?

A: There is a community center category in the City code that would need a special use permit. That would also cover if an entity like the neighborhood association was there and also paired up with, e.g., a daycare in the space. In that instance it would be looked at more like a community service center. So you could certainly group together some nonprofits to operate out of that building.

Q: If a developer purchased and violated zoning ordinances, what are the ramifications? There have been instances where developers violated code and just paid the fines because it was financially worthwhile.

A: As a practical matter, first, they wouldn't have a building permit to begin if the plans violated City code. There would also be special use permit review to get through, then site plan review to get through (water/sewer, driveway access, etc), then the City would issue building permits. So a bad actor developer would have to come in and just start building stuff. If

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someone were to actually do that, there would be tickets, daily fines, and ultimately a show cause hearing in front of a judge.

Q: If someone were to step up and buy the property for a community center, they would need to rezone it?

A: Yes, right now it is being used as a church so anyone using it for a different category would require the new owner to go before the Planning Commission for approval.

Q: Would that be a problem to get a special use permit for the site?

A: In Pete's experience, normally an owner doesn't put forth a project that they don't think is going to pass muster with the Planning Commission. If someone wanted to use it as a community center and have a couple nonprofits in the building that would be something the planning commission would need to listen their arguments and also listen hard to what the neighborhood had to say, especially if the proposal was put forth by a new owner from outside the city. Special Use Permit reviews require a public hearing.

Q: Are there parallels that could be learned and done with this property similar to KNAC's property downtown (formerly First Baptist Church)?

A: There could be some similarities there. In this building there is over 18,000 usable square feet – that's a lot of space for one nonprofit to operate. It could easily turn into a partnership. In regard to getting grants to support it – that was done for the KNAC project downtown and initially seemed like it would be successful but now the grant awards are potentially having funding issues as a result of the federal cuts by the current administration and elsewhere. Also, one major difference is that KNAC is in a commercial downtown zoning district. That is why there is a liquor license and a theater, etc.

Q: Could you describe the process that was done to change KNAC from a religious organization to what it is now?

A: The City looked at every floor in the building and there were a number of things that had to be upgraded, including some immediately in order to be able to continue to occupy certain spaces. They went through the site plan process and once certain parts of the building were approved for occupancy, the project kept moving forward. KNAC also renovated the kitchen. No special approvals were needed.

Q: Did the KNAC property have to be rezoned?

A: No.

Q: Was the KNAC property donated?

A: Pete believes it was donated at least in part. He says the congregation there is still holding services upstairs in the sanctuary but more so as though they are one of the "tenants" in the building.

Q: There was discussion earlier about three splits left for the 2208 Winchell property under the Land Division Act. Does that mean three new lots plus the remainder parcel, so four total parcels total?

A: Yes, that is one way it could go. There is also a subdivision control process where a developer lays out a plat and submits that subdivision plat to the State of Michigan for review and approval. If a developer were to remove the church building and go through that planning process with the State they could have more than just 3 new residential sites on the north end of the current parcel. Pete doesn't see that happening, though. He thinks someone will come in and use the building and parking lot that are there.



V. Introduction of Ellen Foley, ODWNA Board of Directors member – 5:51 PM

- A. Since there are people who want to be a part of an effort to explore paths to acquire this property (Ellen will not be part of the group – she is just here to help facilitate this meeting) the ODWNA wants to be able to put those people in contact with each other. Ellen has created a "Church Lot Champions" sheet and anyone wanting to be included in the group can add their name and contact info to the sheet and the ODWNA will make the list available to those who are interested in being in contact with one another on the topic.
- B. Otherwise, to channel our collective ideas and goals, we are asking the question, "What do you do with an opportunity like this?"
- C. A few neighbors (mostly neighborhood luminary organizers) have met multiple times to talk about that question.
- D. One of the things we have discussed is that someone could purchase the property tomorrow and depending on their use of it, the neighborhood residents might have no say with what happens.
- E. So unless someone brought a \$1.9MM check tonight, we are going to work together this evening on organizing and channeling our ideas for the property into documented community values that we can communicate to the seller and any buyer.
- F. The tables here tonight will each get a stack of sticky notes and will be asked to discuss them and come up with a list of values that those ideas show we want from this space. Each table will have approximately 15 minutes to talk amongst your group. All tables will get a big piece of paper to write out the values and then each table will be expected to share what they came up with and we will consolidate the named values on the big sheets of paper at the front of the room.

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- G. Then as everyone is leaving, we would ask that you take two “dot” stickers per person and place a dot by the two listed value that you support the most. This will create a “heat map” showing where the strongest interests are.

VI. **ADJOURNMENT – Stephanie Watkins, President – 6:45 PM**

