



**Town of Sullivan's Island, South Carolina  
Board of Zoning Appeals  
Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, May 8, 2025**

A Board of Zoning Appeals Meeting was held on the above date at 4:00 p.m., all requirements of the Freedom of Information Act having been satisfied.

Present were:

Elizabeth Tezza, Chair  
Jeremy Graves, Board Member  
Arthur Hanlon, Board Member  
Cindy Kirkland, Board Member

Charles Drayton, Director of Planning and Zoning  
Bridget Welch, Staff Member

**I. Freedom of Information Act Requirements**

Chair Elizabeth Tezza called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and stated the press and public had been notified in accordance with State Law. There were over forty-five (45) members of the public present and no members of the media present.

**II. Approval of Minutes-February 13, 2025**

**Motion was made by Arthur Hanlon, seconded by Cindy Kirkland, to approve the Board of Zoning Appeals Meeting Minutes of February 13, 2025, passed unanimously.**

**III. Special Exception Requests – Religious Institution**

1. **1112 Osceola Avenue, 1118 Osceola Avenue, and 1204 Middle Street (Application):**  
ee fava architects, applicant, is requesting approval of an RS-District Special Exception to formally establish the religious institution campus for the Stella Maris Catholic Church and Parish Center, in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance §21-20 C (3) and §21-78. (PIN#s 523-07-00-058 & -063 to -065).

Charles Drayton presented the staff report, providing a map, background information, and the regulations for religious institutions as provided in Town ordinances. He also provided historic evidence of the area being used as a church site for Stella Maris since its construction. Staff recommends approval of the special exception for all four parcels presented. Mr. Drayton noted the Board can add conditions should they choose to approve the request. It was noted that are four parcels are used for religious purposes, making them all special exceptions to their normal use.

Eddie Fava presented for ee architects, outlining the firm's plans should the special exception be granted. He also gave a brief history of his own relationship with the church and Father McInerny, as well as the history of the four parcels on the church campus. He mentioned they are not dissolving any property lines, and the property would revert back to residential should it ever be sold. He reviewed the plans for the new additions as well as what areas would remain the same. He stated most of the plans are still conceptual at the moment. Mr. Fava also stated improving drainage and addressing stormwater issues in the area would be included with the new plans. He stated that there would be a new gated area for parking so that it would not be used as beach parking. Prior to the meeting, the firm gave notice to the surrounding neighborhood of the proposed plans. He showed a map of properties that support the project, noting there are still some that are opposed. Many of the oppositions have to do with the proposed parking lot. He then took questions from the Board.

#### **Public Comment:**

In support of approving the special exception:

- Father Msgr. McInerny, Stella Maris Church
- Gary Visser, 2924 Middle Street – stated the church is a great asset to the community.
- Father Tim Tebalt, 1112 Osceola Avenue – stated the church has the right under federal law to use the property for religious purposes.
- Kati Eller, 1118 Middle Street – feels the parking will be much more organized with the proposed parking lot.
- Kathy Joyner, 1118 Middle Street – the new parking plan will be an asset.

Not in support of approving the special exception:

- David Russell, 1102 Middle Street – does not want the property converted to a parking lot and requested the Board table their decision until a compromise is made. He feels it will create more traffic, as well as stormwater run-off into neighboring properties.
- Neil Garfinkle, 1001 Middle Street – feels allowing the parking lot to exit onto Osceola will create more traffic problems.
- Paige Morris, 1106 Middle Street – stated there will be a significant impact on traffic if the parking lot is allowed to exit onto Osceola.

Father McNerny spoke again in support of the project, stating some of the information in previous comments was false, including the idea that the project would create more flooding for the neighbors. The Town and SC DOT requires a stormwater mitigation plan before approval.

Chair Tezza stated the Board received all written correspondence prior to the meeting. Board member Jeremy Graves questioned whether the church would be able to continue expanding into the residential zones of the Island and convert it as a special exception to be used for religious purposes. Mr. Drayton stated yes, that would be a risk. Mr. Graves also stated that he believes the special exception would affect the property values of the nearby area, though it is yet to be seen if it will have a positive or negative impact. Mr. Graves also voiced his concerns about whether the request would not actually hinder vehicular traffic or if it will impact the values of the surrounding properties and if the federal law supersedes the approval of this special exception. Mr. Drayton's understanding is that federal law allows the church to use their property for religious purposes. Mr. Drayton also stated the current parking situation is already a hinderance to vehicular traffic and pedestrian movement. He also stated that the Town requires a stormwater management plan, certified by an engineer or landscape architect, that guarantees the project will not create adverse effects to adjacent or downstream properties.

Chair Tezza stated because the church owns the parcel, it is used for religious purposes. Mr. Drayton pointed out the church owns another lot that is not included in this special exception request.

Chair Tezza passed the Chair to Mr. Graves

**Motion was made by Elizabeth Tezza, seconded by Cindy Kirkland, to grant the special exception request for religious institution for 1112 Osceola Avenue, 1118 Osceola Avenue, and 1204 Middle Street, an RS-District special exception to formally establish the religious institution campus for the Stella Maris Catholic Church and Parish Center, in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance §21-20 C (3) and §21-178. We find that it does meet the special exception standards of §21-178 in the setbacks, fences, and buffered or planting strips to protect adjacent properties from possible adverse influence of the proposed use will be in place, that we believe vehicular traffic and pedestrian movement on adjacent roads shall not be hindered or endangered, that it may, in fact, improve off-street parking, that off-street parking and loading areas and the entrance and exits of these areas shall be adequate in terms of location, amount, design, and construction to serve the proposed use (ADA unloading), and that all new parking be pervious surface; in**

**addition we put a contingency on that all civil engineering, Department of Transportation and Town ordinances for ingress and egress be followed, and the proposed use shall be compatible with existing uses to the extent that such use will not adversely affect the level of property values, general character, or general welfare of the nearby area and that the granting of this special exception is not precedential, but other churches on this Island have used this special exception for religious institution, passed unanimously.**

#### **IV. Variance Request**

1. **1204 Middle Street (Application):** ee fava architects, applicant, is requesting variances from §21-20 C (3)(a) – to allow 2 buildings on one lot, §21-25 B – to increase the principal building coverage on the lot beyond the maximum allowable, §21-27 B – to increase the principal building square footage beyond the maximum allowable, and §21-20 (f) & 21-22 (C) (1 & 3) – to reduce the required side yard setback and eliminate the side façade requirements, to replace the existing parish hall on the Stella Maris Church Campus, in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance §21-179. (PIN# 523-07-00-058).

Mr. Drayton presented photos and descriptions of the current state of the church buildings. The current parish hall encroaches into the side and rear setbacks but was built before the setback zoning ordinances were established. He stated the variance is to allow two buildings on the lot, instead of one; and that it will continue to not meet the setback and lot coverage standards of the RS District. The proposed plan brings the building further from the setback and will decrease total lot coverage, it will increase pervious surfaces with the removal of the asphalt parking lot. He outlined in detail why the variances are requested. He then took questions from the Board and stated this proposal will also need to be approved by the Design Review Board before final permit approval. Staff recommends approval of the variance requested to enable the redevelopment of the Stella Maris Parish Hall because it meets the four hardship requirements for a variance request.

Mr. Fava presented the five variances associated with this request and agreed with Mr. Drayton that the ordinances were created with residential structures in mind and are not compatible with the religious campus. This request applies to the existing structures at 1204 Middle Street only and seeks to improve the Parish Hall, as the current one is in terrible condition and is overdue for an update. He reiterated what Mr. Drayton said, that there are existing nonconformities on the property and these would improve those and backs up to another institution, Fort Moultrie. He provided some design elements, though those will need to be approved by the Design Review Board. He also stated the neighbors directly adjacent to the property have voiced approval for the project. He then took questions from the Board.

Public Comment:

- Father Msgr. McInerney, Stella Maris Church – stated the Hall was originally on three lots.
- Tracy Hahn, 2662 I'On Avenue – spoke in support of the project, stating it was a place for parishioners to gather as well as an investment in the Island community. She also voiced support for the proposed parking plan.

Chair Tezza stated the variances are necessary for a church building and appreciates that the plan will increase the previous surface. Mr. Graves feels the building should be smaller than 18,000 square feet because it would negatively affect the neighborhood. It was stated the DRB will review neighborhood compatibility and the BZA is there to approve or deny variance requests.

**Motion was made by Jeremy Graves, seconded by Arthur Hanlon, to table request, passed 3-1, with Chair Tezza voting no.**

Mr. Hanlon questioned if it would be possible for the firm and church to look to see if there were areas that it would be possible to decrease the footprint of the building.

**V. Adjourn**

**Motion was made by Jeremy Graves, seconded by Cindy Kirkland, to adjourn the Board of Zoning Appeals Meeting at 5:45 p.m., passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Bridget Welch  
Board of Zoning Appeals Staff

  
Chair, Elizabeth Tezza