

**PUBLIC COMMENT
REGARDING
WALDEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT
APRIL 22, 2026**

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Village of Deerfield
Plan Commission
850 Waukegan Road
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Via Electronic Mail
plancommissioncomment@deerfield.il.us

Re: District 109 Walden School Development

Dear Plan Commission Members:

Thank you for your dedication to Deerfield and protecting the individual residents that call Deerfield home. You have a crucial function in preventing overreach and preserving the property values of every resident.

District 109 pursued a tax referendum on March 17, 2026, for an aggressive renovation/rebuild of 4 elementary schools and 2 middle schools. Despite considerable opposition to the new tax proposal as well as the lack of specificity of the design plans, the referendum passed with 3700 votes. The suspected argument of District 109 in support of the plan is that the community voted for the plan so the Village should approve it. But the vote was for funding not the specifics of the plan. In fact, the specifics of the plan were never divulged by the district and even the plan submitted Friday 4/17/2026 lack details. At every information session, District 109 stated that the plans were just conceptual, not final, and subject to change. Actual construction plans or architectural drawings had not been produced.

Renovation of the schools is not controversial. The community has always supported the schools. However, the plan for Walden School and surrounding park permanently negatively affects the park space as well as the neighbors of those parks. While each site of the school project (Kipling, Wilmot, South Park, Walden, Caruso, Shepard) has its own challenges, there is no question that the greatest challenge is that of the Walden location. The neighbors of Walden have been sounding the alarm regarding the initial non-final conceptual plan for the Walden site from the very first presentation by District 109. District 109 admits that Walden is the most challenging site. This is because Walden school and the surrounding park is small and has residential properties in very close proximity on all sides. It is unique. I write as a contiguous neighbor of Walden Park for 26 years to request careful consideration of the impact to the neighborhood of the Walden neighbors and to suggest alternatives to the current plan that will not drastically affect the current site. The neighbors are not arguing about temporary inconvenience but do have issues with the safety and health of the school children during construction and the permanent negative effects on the area if the project is allowed to proceed in its current form.

District 109 proposes to build a new Walden school adjacent and to the north of the existing school while keeping the existing school operational. Despite the obvious risks to children's safety, and learning distractions while next to a construction site, there will also be a complete shutdown of outdoor space during construction. The land for this new school is owned by the Deerfield Park District and requires a special use permit from the Village. The plan changes the proposed building site from parkland to an 88,000.00 square foot two story structure and dramatically changes the use and enjoyment of the park as well as the quiet use and enjoyment of residential properties to the north and west of the park. The plan presented to the public stated that the current Walden School of 54,040 sq ft was 20,000 sq feet too small to provide adequate space for learning. The submission to the Plan Commission states that the current Walden School is already 75,000 sq feet with proposal to increase to 88,640 sq ft. The plan exceeds the original required need.

Residents who purchased property on a park will be forced to have a 2 story building encroaching on their back yard under the proposal which will diminish the property value of those properties. Placing a new school on roughly the same footprint of the current school, solves the problem as the change to the neighbors would be minimal. Those who bought a house next to the school would remain next to a school and those who purchased a house on a park would also remain on a park.

After the groundswell of opposition to the first plan, District 109 revised the plan, but the opposition continued not just from the neighbors of Walden but also those who are concerned about putting children in a construction site for safety reasons, learning reasons, ingress and egress reasons, construction traffic reasons, and lack of sufficient play areas during construction. Most agreed with either renovation or a new school due to the ageing infrastructure but wanted the children to learn in a different location, a temporary "swing site" in a non-construction zone setting for the children and teachers during the rebuild. District 109 told attendees of subsequent meetings that it was their **number 1 priority** to find a swing site to temporarily house the children off the construction site at Walden.

District 109 claims that they looked at every possibility, swing site, modular classrooms and other existing school sites but none could be found. They claimed it would cost 10 million dollars to get another existing facility, (like Holy Cross, a currently empty K-8 facility also within the Walden attendance layer) up to safety standards although there is no basis for that estimate at least published in any fashion. We have not been advised of any real analysis of offsite properties considered or the cost to temporarily retrofit the locations consistent with the Illinois School Code for temporary sites while a new school is being built. The School Code understands school renovation and building issues and allows for certain waivers on a temporary basis during construction. District 109 also claims modular classrooms cost \$150,000.00 per classroom per year. If there are 2 classes per grade and 6 grades K-5 at Walden School, the cost would be 1.8

million but would require a temporary location somewhere other than Walden Park during construction. The current Walden School footprint is 2.6 acres. The Walden attendance layer as defined in the Traffic study submitted by District 109 (pg. 42 of the redevelopment plan) includes Maplewood Park (7 acres) or Jewett Park (12.5 acres). These would be viable modular classroom sites or a combination of them. Instead of diligently pursuing these options, District 109 has elected to place K-5 students at risk of injury or even death if a construction mishap occurs not to mention contamination by construction hazards like dust, noise and construction traffic. The Walden site is land locked; it is not like the Wilmot site which sits on 15 acres and has 2 major roads as access points. The children at the smaller Walden are sitting ducks in an emergency and it is an unreasonable risk just to save 1% of the budget (\$2,000,000.00) or even up to 5% of the budget (\$10,000,000.00). Construction sites are dangerous, they are not for little kids to be anywhere near-especially in a small area without easy escape routes What are the increased insurance costs for keeping children next to a construction site on a daily basis in a land locked location? What is the impact of construction dust on the HVAC system of an occupied old school or vibration on the old infrastructure that we are told is failing? What is the impact of noise and vibration on learning or even just visual distraction of construction next door to an operating school in an enclosed neighborhood? This has not been well thought out.

The Plan Commission and Village are the final check and balance for the parks and residents. District 109 will argue that they have reviewed all of the school properties and considered all options leaving the current plan as the only viable option. They will argue that they have engaged the community, empaneled an independent task force, conducted open debate and followed the communities' recommendations. However, they have been working on this plan for 5 years and only started public notification of their plan on September 10, 2025. At that meeting, District 109 admitted that the Walden site was the most challenging due to its small size and proximity to the surrounding neighbors. They admitted that they did not engage with any contiguous neighbors of Walden Park and had not discussed the plan with the Park District or the Village. District 109 stated that they would bring the plan to the Park District and the Village before seeking a referendum. They did not. Instead, they proceeded with their informational sessions and pursued the referendum on a low turnout election day. The neighbors of Walden Park attended most of the information sessions and were finally asked to meet with the architect and the school board. The concerns were voiced and instead of putting the new school essentially on the lot lines of all of the properties to the north, they moved the school closer to the current location but refused to pursue the alternatives noted above which would alleviate any safety concerns, learning distractions, construction traffic issues and also allow the Walden School to be built in conformance with his current location and thus minimally impacting the park space as it current sits and minimally impacting the neighbors of Walden park and school. It solves all problems.

Please carefully consider the Special Use Criteria for the Walden Park property:

Is the special use **Compatible with Existing Development?** Consideration of the nature and intensity of the activities involved, and the size, placement and design of any structures proposed

must be planned so that the Special Use will be compatible with the existing development and will not impede the normal and orderly development or improvement of surrounding property. This criteria is not met. A two story (actually 44 foot, is more like 4 stories) building in a park location closer to the neighboring residential properties is not compatible with the existing development. It is a drastic change, and it does not improve the surrounding properties, it devalues them. The change in sight lines is detrimental, storm drain issues will increase despite any underground detention, and property values will be depleted. Plus, there are viable alternatives.

Is the **Lot of Sufficient Size**? Consideration of the size of the lot must also include park layout and the park space is reduced despite the Park District being a joint applicant. Plus, the construction phase will completely eliminate any usable park space.

Is the **Traffic** affected? Will there be adverse effects on surrounding properties that are not minimal? The traffic during construction will be a large impact on the community especially if two schools are operating in Walden Park. But the greater issue is ingress and egress in the event of an emergency. This can be avoided completely with an off campus site for the year of construction.

Is **Parking and Access** an issue? Parking areas will be of adequate size for the particular use and properly located, and the entrance and exit drives will be laid out so as to prevent traffic hazards and nuisances. Parking and access will be affected temporarily by the plan. In fact, it will most likely be non-existent on the site, so what is the plan for the surrounding streets?

Is there an **Effect on Neighborhood**? The Special Use must not be significantly or materially detrimental to the health, safety and welfare of the public or injurious to the other property or improvements in the neighborhood, nor will it diminish or impair property values in the surrounding area. This criteria is not met. Property values will diminish for properties that along the north and west sides of the park with a drastic change of having a park behind their house to having a large building and the impact of storm water increase, and flooding exist.

Are there **Adequate Facilities**? Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage and/or other necessary facilities are being met? No, there are issues with building the school in an area of natural drainage which will push the storm water further north and east creating flooding which currently does not exist. In 2015, The Supreme Court of Illinois found that a School Board is bound by zoning ordinances and storm water ordinances. Deerfield has adopted the Lake County Watershed Development Ordinance. The proposed school at Walden must comply with the requirements as it will disturb more than 5,000 square feet. A Designated Erosion Control Inspector must be part of the inspection process. The Plan commission should not accept any plan that alters the current natural drainage. More than 26 years ago, a berm was built along the north edge of the park and storm drains installed to prevent excess water from the park going into the north neighbors' yards

and basements during heavy rainfall. The park, as currently situated, does not flood the neighbors as least as long as the current storm drains are maintained by the park district. Storm water naturally follows the contour from West to East along the north side of the park. There is no underground detention, none is needed. The system works great. Moving the school further north will change the natural drainage and will increase the volume of water run off to the north and east. This would violate the Lake County Watershed Development Ordinance. No drainage studies have been provided to the park neighbors. District 109 proposes to install underground detention systems promising to eliminate any storm drainage water issues. More study needs to be done to determine if such a system is viable. If the underground detention system raises the park elevation, the properties along the north lot line will still be underwater from school and park runoff regardless of underground detention. What if the underground detention fills and does not have time to drain, the north neighbors will be underwater. What is the cost of the underground detention system, how is it maintained, what the cost of the maintenance, who is responsible for its maintenance? My property is lower than the existing park. The elevation of the park needs to be lower not higher than the properties to the north. Will District 109 and or the park district install drains in the north properties to prevent increased flooding from the change in the location of the school? The simple solution is to save the money from the underground detention system, house the school on a different property during construction, and build the new school on the location of the old school.

Is there **Adequate Buffering**? Adequate fencing and/or screening shall be provided to ensure the enjoyment of surrounding properties, to provide for the public safety or to screen parking areas and other visually incompatible uses. Screening does not address a 44 foot structure build closer to the property lines. And the new plan submitted by District 109 has never before disclosed information. A 2 foot wall 11 feet from the north property lines with a fence on top of the wall. Why? That is completely unacceptable. The properties behind that wall are at lower elevation than the park. A wall and a fence on top of the wall would enclose the properties and feel like we are in a hole. Plus, in the nice weather children walk to school through the back yards. Please do not allow this plan to go through.

Thank you for your consideration of these very important issues.

To Members of the Planning Commission (plancommissioncomment@deerfield.il.us),

We are writing to formally express our concerns regarding the proposed Special Use Permit for Walden Park located adjacent to our home at 629 Ambleside Drive for the purpose of constructing a two-story school building adjacent to the existing school building.

We understand and respect the importance of supporting our local school district and planning for future educational needs; however, we are deeply concerned about the impact this rezoning and subsequent development would have on child safety, property values, and the surrounding residential neighborhood. The purpose of zoning is to set guidelines and expectations for property to prevent incompatible land use and to protect landowners' investments. Any new school should be built in the current location of Walden to alleviate the concerns raised below.

Specifically, we are concerned about the following issues, which merit against issuance of a Special Use Permit:

- **Health, safety and welfare:** Ongoing construction and noise from the construction project immediately adjacent to the existing school will negatively affect students trying to learn. Safety issues will likely arise from increased traffic on the one road entrance. There does not appear to be sufficient space in this small park to build a new school adjacent to the existing school in a safe and responsible manner.
- **Compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood:** The proposed two-story 350-foot-wide school in the proposed location represents a significant change in land use and scale compared to the existing zoning and character of the current neighborhood park, which is not harmonious with the adjacent pre-existing residential homes and neighborhood. A two-story school does not belong so close to residences – especially when there are other options.
- **Property value and privacy:** A multi-story structure so close to residential properties will have negative effects on property values and result in reduced privacy.

Walden School is the only school that is surrounded by residential homes on all four sides and is truly unique, yet the school district's plans do not take this into account. We respectfully request that the commission carefully consider whether this proposed rezoning aligns with the village's comprehensive plan and long-term vision for preserving established residential neighborhoods. The contemplated plans need to work for the community for generations to come and not merely serve the short-term plans of the school district.

We ask that alternative swing-site locations be evaluated to mitigate potential impacts on nearby homeowners and families so that Walden school can be rebuilt in its existing location. We are relying on the Village to protect our interests while working with the school district to devise a more agreeable solution. One that benefits all concerned parties.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective. We appreciate your time, service to the community, and thoughtful consideration of the concerns raised by local residents.

Sincerely,

Rod and Tracy Winn