

Walden School Project

Public Comment

July 8, 2026

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

We are writing to highlight continued 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.

Our initial concerns were outlined prior to and at the meeting on April 23, 2026. While we appreciate that some of these concerns have been addressed in the updated plans from District 109, there are still significant concerns regarding this project.

In our opinion, the following concerns have not been adequately addressed, which merit against issuance of a Special Use Permit:

- **Compatibility with Existing Development:** 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 character of the current neighborhood park. The new development is not harmonious with the established residential structures and landscape topography. Given the size of the proposed building and the elevation, the new structure will negatively impact the architectural cohesiveness of the neighborhood.
- **Lot of Sufficient Size:** Unlike the other schools involved in this plan, Walden is unique in that it is positioned with residential homes around the entire perimeter. The Walden school lot and park are not conducive to a two-school transition plan. The lack of outdoor space during construction and while both school buildings are housing students is unreasonable in our opinion. The adoption of the swing site process has resulted in a building form that is less than ideal. We respectfully request that the commission carefully consider whether this proposed rezoning aligns with the village's comprehensive plan and longterm vision for preserving established residential neighborhoods.
- **Effect on Neighborhood:** The proposed scale and timeline will negatively impact the students, teachers, and the community. The loss of the Park District land over three years will leave people of all ages without a community park to gather, play ball, and enjoy the outdoors close to home.

We have not seen convincing evidence that alternative swing-site locations have been seriously considered. Use of temporary trailers, using Wilmot as a swing site, or a combination would allow the district to build a size-appropriate school in the same location as the existing school. The proposed plan puts a great deal of resources into a school project that is not as good as it could be. Deerfield deserves better! Once again, we are relying on the Village to protect our community while working with the school district to devise a more agreeable solution.

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

Daniel Nakahara, AICP

From: jason wright <lifewas777@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 7, 2026 9:06 PM
To: Plan Commission Comment
Cc: Daniel Nakahara, AICP; Jeffery Ryckaert, AICP
Subject: [PUBLIC COMMENT] Walden park special use.
Attachments: thumbnail-1.jpg; thumbnail.jpg

[EXTERNAL EMAIL]

I am writing to formally express my concerns regarding the proposed Special Use Permit for Walden Park located near my home at 709 Ambleside Dr. for the purpose of constructing a two-story school building adjacent to the existing school building.

Specifically, I am concerned about the following issues, which merit the issuance of a Special Use Permit: Effect on Neighborhood, Lot of Sufficient Size, and Compatibility with Existing Development.

I'm very concerned about the effect on students' health, safety, security, and lack of green space or any play space for them, and the community, during the construction phases. Phase 1 has no public access from the spring to summer timeline. Walden community is an isolated area with only one large park space (Walden). This plan would force the Walden community kids to cross Waukegan rd to access alternate park spaces during the prime summer time. Phase 2 cuts Walden students to just a small relocated park equipment and limited green space. Depending on the weather, there will be no outdoor play space as teacher limit access to wet/snowy fields. At phase 3, the Walden space will have two operating schools with 900 students in a space not meant for that many individuals. That total number of students in the Walden space even surprised the planning board's president at the pre-filing meeting. Even with staggered times, moving kids to and fro will have an increase in safety concerns. As a large workforce on the job site, unauthorized individuals could enter the site. Limited space, and extremely close construction sites, are factors that will likely have mental health and safety impacts. The district's plan is hardest on the Walden students and community as this limited access to outside space and some version of construction will involve a large portion of the students' tenure at Walden school.

Then the effect on homeowners' property values. When we purchased our home, the location to the park was a major factor as it was truly steps away. If we were to sell today, that would be a major selling point. If the special use is to pass without changes to where the new school is placed, there would be a direct change to our home's value in the negative. Having a two-story building 45' and a service road 17' from our kitchen window would have a change in our property value. This does not reflect the Deerfield community and how the planning board is meant to protect its residents. The DPS plan doesn't consider the property depreciation and that is unrealistic and my hope is that the Planning board takes this factor into consideration.

Lot of sufficient size & compatible with existing development.

Questions that were asked at the pre-filing planning meeting that still have limited answers in the new filing paperwork:

A question that we in the Walden community asked at many open houses, as well as a Planning board member at the pre-filing was: what options were researched for a swing site? How much time was devoted to that? Cathy K did say at the meeting that they spent a couple of weeks. Which seems woefully short for a project of this size. How many bids for spaces were there? Hopefully more than one. Why are mobile classrooms not a good option? Did DPS consider shifting some kids into other DPS schools, and use a limited number of mobile classrooms? Were other nearby communities contacted?

A point to consider with the use of mobile classrooms is that they are used in many communities in this situation and they are used very successfully. The impact to students from Walden/Kipling would just be for one full school year. Compared to Walden students having some version of disruption for the duration of the project, three years or more as in this plan. Think, limited outside play space and adjacent to construction. Then move into new the school and share the limited space with 900 students and teachers for regimented outside times, drop-off/pickups. Finish that off with limited outside space and removal and construction of a parking lot. For a district that wants to limit disruption to students, another swing site or mobile classroom sounds much less disruptive.

More importantly, why hasn't Wilmot School been considered as a serious alternative as a possible main swing site for the duration of the project? Using Wilmot would meet all the state/school districts' requirements. It has multiple entrance/exit points for normal and emergency vehicles. DPS renewed its lease with St. Gregory's Episcopal Church to use its parking. This would alleviate some of the shuffling of teachers via busing them to work. It is not surrounded by community homes on all sides so its impact to them isn't as great. There is no real loss of play/green space during the majority of the phase construction at Wilmot.

Why hasn't DPS still provided the details on these questions related to swing sites, mobile classroom in the new filing?

What is the reasoning of a two-story building that is not consistent with the community? The current single-story footprint may be undersized yet Deerfield schools rank high in educational excellence. I'm not saying that we shouldn't build a new building yet is it truly necessary for a two-story structure that is not harmonious with the community? Our student population is not increasing so wouldn't it be smarter to design a building that better reflects its neighborhood?

Walden's large blacktop space not being redesigned back into the new space. During bad weather days teachers only allow the outside play on the large blacktop spaces. This blacktop top play space being removed in this new project and only at Walden. If you kept the school in its original footprint you would be able to keep or redesign one. I've included images showing this usage current us in bad weather days.

Where is the traffic or pedestrian study of the Ambleside walking path? It's not an official drop-off point yet is used by many in the community now. Any parent would recognize once Phase 3 has started, and the new Walden is in place, Ambleside will become a drop-off point. Why would a parent want their student after dropping them off to have to walk around the old Walden to access the new, when they can, and will, have a shorter path via the Ambleside Dr.? How is DPS going to address this?

In the beginning planning stages, why would you place a new two-story building 45' from residential homes? Shouldn't the designer(s) have looked at the existing space and try and meet the same, if not better, spacing? The current design in its zig-zag shape, how are they not able to move the 45'

spacing, so 20', somewhere else in the design? Why not just push the boundaries in proximity to residential homes?

Again, I understand and respect the importance of supporting our local school district and planning for future educational needs. Reusing the existing space, building a new single-story centralized building surrounded by green/blacktop play spaces. This centralized location optimizes a larger buffer for a safer, secure, and disruption-free learning environment related to the pre-existing residential homes that surround this space. Although it's not ideal for a portable swing site or mobile classroom, it is a better option for students' safety, security, and mental health. A project that represents a 75-year investment deserves more than a couple weeks of research for a swing site, compared to rushing to an artificial finish line. The district has secured the funding for the overall project and now has time to address issues for Walden students and the community that reflect Deerfield. The purpose of zoning is to set guidelines and expectations for real property to prevent incompatible land uses and to protect landowners so that their investments can't be ruined overnight. Any new school should be built in the current location of Walden (in the middle of the park) to alleviate the concerns raised below.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns and your time and consideration of them.
Jason Wright



