



Division of Development Administration and Review

City of Pittsburgh, Department of City Planning

412 Boulevard of the Allies, Second Floor

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15219

ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

Date of Hearing: October 2, 2025
Date of Decision: December 11, 2025

Zone Case: 129 of 2025
Address: 630 North Aiken Avenue
Lot and Block: 83-A-46, 47
Zoning Districts: R2-M, H
Ward: 11
Neighborhood: East Liberty

Request: Construction of Student Living Building

Application: BDA-2025-06720

Variance	Section 911.02	Unlisted use similar to "Dormitory" not permitted in R2-M or H Districts
	Section 905.02.C	50% maximum area of disturbance; 65% proposed (4,400 sf)
	Section 914.02A	A total of 6 on-site parking spaces required for dormitory use; 4 on-site parking spaces proposed
	Section 912.04	Front yard parking is prohibited

Appearances:

Applicant: Alison Brush, Scott McLaughlin, Ryan Shedlock, Adam Ventura

Opposed: Joanne Monroe, Stephanie Akers, Benita Harris

In Support: Malachi Holden, Josie Bankston

Findings of Fact:

1. The Applicant here is Boys Hope Girls Hope of Pittsburgh, Inc., which is now known as “Hope Ignites.”

• Description of the Subject Property

2. The Subject Property is located on North Aiken Avenue in East Liberty.

3. The Subject Property consists of three parcels: Parcel Nos. 83-A-46 and 48, which are in an R2-M (Residential Two Unit Moderate Density) District, with frontage on North Aiken Avenue; and Parcel No. 83-A-47, which is in an H (Hillside) District, at the rear of the other parcels, with no street frontage.

4. The dimensions of Parcel No. 83-A-46 are 50’ by 120’ (6,000 sf) and the dimensions of Parcel No. 83-A-48 are 35’ by 100’ (3,500 sf). A single-unit detached house and detached garage are located on Parcel No. 83-A-46 and Parcel No. 83-A-48 is vacant.

5. Parcel No. 83-A-47 has an irregular shape, with an area of 6,900 sf, and is vacant.

6. The Applicant owns Parcel Nos. 83-A-46 and 47 and holds an equitable interest in Parcel No. 83-A-48. As part of the project, the parcels are to be consolidated.

7. The grade of the site slopes downward from the frontage of Parcel Nos. 83-A-46 and 48 on North Aiken Avenue towards Parcel No. 83-A-47 at the rear.

8. The site is located across North Aiken Avenue from parcels in an LNC (Local Neighborhood Commercial) District, which are used for several multi-unit residential buildings and a senior housing complex.

9. The Subject Property is within a block of the Neighborhood Academy school.

10. North Aiken Avenue terminates at the end of block.

• Proposed Use of the Subject Property

11. The Applicant proposes to demolish the existing house and garage on Parcel No. 83-A-46 and to construct a new building that would be designed and used for residential housing for 16 high-school aged students who are participants in the Applicant’s “Residential Pathways” program.

12. Participants in the program would live in the building full-time, with occasional visits home on weekends and in the summer.

13. Staff members would be on-site during the day, and at least one staff member would be on-site at night.

14. The Zoning Administrator determined that the proposed use is one that is unlisted in the Code but would have characteristics similar to a “dormitory,” as the Code defines that use in Section 911.02.

- **New Residential Building Proposed**

15. The new building would extend across Parcel Nos. 83-A-46 and 48 and would have a small connecting section between two larger sections with hip roofs. As designed, the structure would have the general appearance of two attached houses on separate parcels.

16. An integral garage and driveway would be located on one side of the structure with access from a curb cut on North Aiken Avenue.

17. The area of the driveway in front of the garage would be large enough to accommodate off-street parking for two additional cars, as needed.

18. The proposed development would involve grading and the removal of existing vegetation, which would disturb approximately 65% of Parcel No. 83-A-47, within the H District.

19. The proposed development would otherwise comply with the site development standards for both the R2-M and H Districts.

- **Hearing Testimony**

20. Three witnesses offered testimony on behalf of the Applicant. Alison Brush, the Applicant's Executive Director, described the nature of the Applicant's mission, its operations and its intended use of the Subject Property.

21. Ms. Bush explained that the Residential Pathways program identifies academically gifted students who face barriers, and provides them with educational support, private school tuition and housing.

22. Ms. Bush noted that the Applicant currently operates the program, as limited to 8 participants who live at a house in Squirrel Hill. The new facility would allow the expansion of the program to serve 16 participants.

23. Ms. Bush generally asserted that the student residents would live in a family-style setting that would be consistent with the residential character of the surrounding neighborhood.

24. The student residents would not be allowed to have cars and would rely on transit and transportation provided by the program to get to school and extracurricular activities. Only staff members would typically make use of the on-site parking spaces.

25. The student residents would be required to follow a code of conduct, which includes a curfew and rules about making noise after dark.

26. Scott McLaughlin, the Applicant's project manager, provided information about the site and the design of the proposed structure.

27. Mr. McLaughlin described the shape and topography of the site and asserted that these conditions preclude the provision of on-site parking in strict compliance with the Code's requirements.

28. Mr. McLaughlin testified that the design of the building is intended to be consistent with the architectural style of nearby residential structures, and that the size of the structure is the minimum that would accommodate the proposed use.

29. With respect to the 65% disturbance of Parcel No. 83-A-47, Mr. McLaughlin asserted that the intended area of disturbance would be the minimum that would accommodate the development in the context of the site, and that the proposal would not have a detrimental impact on the steep sloped portions of the site.

30. Ryan Shedlock, the Applicant's realtor, testified that the Subject Property is ideally suited for the proposed development because of its size, location in a residential neighborhood, and proximity to a school and public transportation.

31. Three witnesses described their objections to the proposed use: Joanne Monroe, the owner of property at 714 North Aiken Avenue; Stephanie Akers, the owner of the property at 632 North Aiken Avenue; and Benita Harris, a resident of the property at 622 North Aiken Avenue.

32. The objectors expressed general concerns about the impact of the proposed development on traffic, parking and property values in the neighborhood. They also expressed concerns about potential impacts from construction on nearby properties.

33. Malachi Holden, the owner of a property on North Aiken Avenue, appeared at the hearing to support the request.

34. Josie Bankston, an alumna of the program, provided testimony in support of the request.

35. Anissa Gilbert, another alumna of the program, submitted a letter of support for the request.

36. Councilperson Khari Mosley, Councilperson Erika Strassberger, the Village Collaborative, the Bloomfield Garfield Academy, and Central Catholic High School submitted letters of support for the request.

Conclusions of Law:

- **Applicable Code Provisions**

1. The Zoning Administrator determined that the Code does not specifically define the proposed use and that the use is most similar to a "dormitory."

2. The Code defines "dormitory" as "use of a zoning lot for occupancy by groups of people who are not defined as a family and who are registered students at a college, university or other institution of higher learning, on a weekly basis or longer, and is managed by the institution at which the students are registered."

3. Pursuant to Section 911.02, the "dormitory" use is not permitted in R2-M or H Districts. Where permitted as a special exception, the dormitory use is subject to the criteria set forth in Section 911.04.23.b, which include the submission of an operation and management plan.

4. The site development standards for H Districts, in Section 905.02.C, limit the maximum area of disturbance to 50% of the total lot area.

5. Pursuant to Section 914.02, 4 on-site parking spaces are required for the dormitory use.

6. Pursuant to Section 912.04.L, parking pads are not permitted within front setbacks.

7. The Board agrees with the Zoning Administrator's determination that the proposed use is unlisted in the Code and is most similar to the defined "dormitory" use because it involves occupancy by a group of 16 high school-aged students, who are not defined as a "family" and who are to attend schools on a long-term basis.

8. Because two of the parcels that comprise the Subject Property have been used for residential uses, as permitted in the R2-M District, the Applicant cannot demonstrate that any unique conditions of the site prevent its use for any of uses permitted in R2-M Districts, as consistent with the general considerations for approval of a variance under Section 922.09.E. Although the property is "uniquely" suitable for the Applicant's proposed use, that "unique condition" is not relevant and does not create an "unnecessary hardship" under the variance standards.

9. However, the use proposed also has characteristics of the residential use permitted in R2-M Districts and, in granting a variance, the Board has the authority to attach reasonable conditions and safeguards to implement the purposes of the Code.

10. Based on the evidence presented, the Board concludes that approval of a variance to allow the proposed use is appropriate, subject to the conditions set forth in the decision below, which are intended to address the potential impacts of the use's "dormitory" characteristics.

11. With respect to the request for a variance from Section 905.02.C to allow a maximum area of disturbance of 65%, the Applicant submitted sufficient evidence of the unique conditions of the site and the need for a limited increase in the permitted area of disturbance.

12. The Applicant also requests variances from Sections 914.02A, the number of on-site parking spaces required, and 912.04.L, the prohibition against on-site parking in the front setback. The Applicant seeks to use the driveway for 2 on-site parking spaces, so that, with the 2 spaces in the integral garage, it can maintain that it has provided the 4 required on-site spaces.

13. The Applicant presented sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the 2 on-site parking spaces in the garage will be sufficient to support the proposed use and that a variance from Section 914.02A to reduce the required number of on-site parking spaces to 2 is appropriate. Although the driveway may be used for additional on-site parking, as needed, the Applicant did not present sufficient evidence to support a variance from Section 912.04.L and the driveway shall not be identified as permitted front yard parking spaces.

Decision: The Applicant's request for a variance from Sections 911.02 to allow the unlisted student residential use, as described to the Board, is APPROVED, subject to these conditions:

- **The number of students participating in the program and living at the Subject Property shall not exceed 16;**
- **At least one program staff member must be on site whenever student residents are also on site; and**
- **The Applicant shall submit an operation and management plan which describes the operation and management of the residential program; the code of conduct for student residents; and responsibilities of on-site staff members. The operations and management plan shall be updated as necessary.**

The Applicant's request for a variance from Section 905.02.C to allow a maximum area of disturbance of 65% (4,400 sf) is also APPROVED. The request for variances from Sections 914.02 and 912.04 to a reduction in the number of required on-site parking spaces and parking within the front setback is APPROVED in part, to reduce the number of on-site parking spaces to 2, and DENIED in part, to prohibit identification of parking spaces on the driveway as additional on-site parking spaces.

s/Alice B. Mitinger
Alice B. Mitinger, Chair

s/Lashawn Burton-Faulk
LaShawn Burton-Faulk

s/ John J. Richardson
John J. Richardson

Note: Decision issued with electronic signatures, with the Board members' review and approval.