

IN RE: APPEAL OF M-POWERMENT RELATIVE TO A PROPERTY LOCATED AT 1801 FORREST STREET, CITY OF READING, BERKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA	: BEFORE THE ZONING HEARING : BOARD OF THE CITY OF READING, : PENNSYLVANIA : : APPEAL NO. 2606-0013 : : VARIANCE, INTERPRETATION : AND/OR SPECIAL EXCEPTION
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**DECISION OF THE ZONING HEARING
BOARD OF THE CITY OF READING**

AND NOW, this 5th day of August, 2026, a hearing having been held on July 8, 2026, upon the application of M-Powerment, notice of such hearing having been first sent and advertised in accordance with the provisions of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and the City of Reading Zoning Ordinance, as amended, the Zoning Hearing Board of the City of Reading (hereinafter referred to as the “Zoning Board”) renders the following decision:

FINDINGS OF FACT

The Zoning Board finds the following facts:

1. Applicant is M-Powerment with a principal address of 1024 Daisy Drive, Temple, Berks County, Pennsylvania (hereinafter referred to as the “Applicant”).
2. Applicant has a leasehold interest in the property located at 1801 Forrest Street, City of Reading, Berks County, Pennsylvania 19606 (hereinafter referred to as the “Subject Property”).
3. The fee simple owner of the Subject Property has granted Applicant permission to seek the requested relief.
4. The Subject Property is located in the Preservation Zoning District as that term and district is defined by the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Reading, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the “Zoning Ordinance”).
5. Applicant was represented at the hearing by Leah Rotenberg, Esquire, of Mays & Rotenberg, LLP, 1235 Penn Avenue, Suite 202, Wyomissing, Pennsylvania 19610.

6. Applicant seeks a variance to use the existing recreational center as a private school for students with special needs. In addition, Applicant is seeking an appeal of the determination by the zoning administrator.

7. Applicant seeks relief from Sections 600-813 and 600-1603.A.(34)(a)(b) of the Zoning Ordinance and all associated variances, special exceptions and interpretations.

8. A school is not a permitted use in the Preservation Zoning District.

9. M-Powerment is a licensed private academic school licensed by the State of Pennsylvania to offer special education services to students from all over Berks County.

10. The building on the Subject Property is controlled by the Olivet Boys and Girls Club of Reading & Berks County (“Olivet”) and was constructed approximately 20 years ago with the City’s permission to provide services for youth.

11. Applicant states the unique nature of the park and the building create a hardship in that there are few businesses or organizations that could effectively use the space in a manner consistent with the park and building’s mission.

12. The specific address for the building on the Subject Property is 330 S. 19th Street, Reading, Pennsylvania.

13. The Subject Property is located within Pendora Park, which is preserved parkland and recreational space.

14. Applicant has entered into a Lease Agreement with Olivet for the space to be utilized by Applicant.

15. The school will accommodate approximately 36 children in grades 8 through 12 with behavioral needs with a staff-student ratio of about 3.6 to 1.

16. Applicant will be providing important services for the children in accordance with their IEPs and with support from the sending school districts.

17. Applicant will be staffed with behavior coaches and mental health professionals.

18. The school will be open from 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. beginning at the end of August until early June every year.

19. Applicant has developed security measures, including alarms on the doors, and appropriate policies for elopement and other things to make sure the children and the community are safe.

20. Applicant will not be making any changes to the Subject Property.

21. There are 15 available parking spaces at the Subject Property.

22. Applicant has a policy that the students are not allowed to drive to the school and the students will be bused to the school by their home school districts by approximately four to six school vans.

23. Applicant states there is ample parking for the school staff.

24. The school will operate only when Olivet is not in session so Applicant's parking requirements will not overlap with the Olivet's needs.

25. Applicant states it does not intend to make much use of the park located at the Subject Property other than occasionally for outdoor recreation and there would be total supervision.

26. The school will not have any night-time activities.

27. The proposed use is both a service to local students and a source of revenue for Olivet.

28. Applicant does not anticipate that the granting of the use variance will cause any negative impacts on the surrounding community.

29. Applicant states because the proposed school will allow much needed educational opportunity for students with special needs, it advances the public welfare; and because the building in question is already in use as a center for children, the proposed school is a modest adjustment of the zoning requirements for the area.

30. A neighboring property owner submitted a letter to the zoning office requesting that the relief be denied.

DISCUSSION

Applicant seeks a variance to use the existing recreational center as a private school for students with special needs. In addition, Applicant is seeking an appeal of the determination by the zoning administrator. Applicant seeks relief from Sections 600-813 and 600-1603.A.(34)(a)(b) of the Zoning Ordinance and all associated variances, special exceptions and interpretations. The Board finds the proposed relief will not be a detriment to the health, safety and welfare of the neighborhood of the zoning district in general.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. Applicant is M-Empowerment.
2. The Subject Property is located at 1801 Forrest Street, City of Reading, Berks County, Pennsylvania 19601, with the building to be used by Applicant bearing an address of 330 S. 19th Street.
3. The Subject Property is located in the Preservation Zoning District.
4. Applicant seeks a variance to use the existing recreational center as a private school for students with special needs. In addition, Applicant is seeking an appeal of the determination by the zoning administrator.
5. Applicant seeks relief from Sections 600-813 and 600-1603.A.(34)(a)(b) of the Zoning Ordinance and all associated variances, special exceptions and interpretations.
6. The Zoning Board incorporates the findings of fact as though fully set forth at length herein.
7. The Zoning Board is permitted to grant applications for variances and/or special exceptions and to interpret the Zoning Ordinance.
8. After reviewing the Applicant's request in detail, the Zoning Hearing Board enters the following Decision:
 - a. Applicant is granted the requested relief.
 - b. The students are not allowed to drive to the school.

c. Applicant shall attend a One Stop meeting with the building and fire inspectors to ensure compliance with all applicable Building and Fire Code requirements.

d. Applicant shall apply for all required building, trades and fire permits and submit to all inspections deemed necessary.

e. Applicant shall provide signage information according to Sections 600-1703(F) and 600-1712(A) for approval by the Zoning Administrator.

f. Applicant shall comply with all relevant building and occupancy codes and ordinances as well as the plans and testimony submitted before the Zoning Board.

g. Applicant may not use, expand, alter or otherwise use the Subject Property inconsistently with the contents of this Decision without making application requesting further relief from the Zoning Board.

h. Failure to comply with any of these above-referenced conditions shall mean the immediate revocation of the relief granted herein.

The decision of this Board is by a vote of 3 to 0.

**ZONING HEARING BOARD OF THE CITY
OF READING**

Recused

PHILIP RABENA

/s/ Thomas Fox

THOMAS FOX

/s/ Jeffrey Gattone

JEFFREY GATTONE

/s/ Charles Jones

CHARLES JONES