



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

Ord. No. 2026-032: To amend Ord. No. 2023-174, adopted June 26, 2023, which authorized the special use of the property known as 3601 Seminary Avenue for the purpose of a day nursery for up to 64 children, within a church, to allow for up to 74 children, upon certain terms and conditions. (3rd District)

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: February 3, 2026

PETITIONER

Mary Thornton, The Cottage School

LOCATION

3601 Seminary Avenue

PURPOSE

The applicant seeks to increase enrollment of childcare from the previously conditioned 64 children to 74. A Special Use Permit Amendment is required to authorize this request.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff finds that the subject property is designated as Corridor Mixed-Use on the Future Land Use Map in the Richmond 300 Master Plan. Daycares within churches are an appropriate use for this area's designation.

Staff finds that the day nursery has been operating at this location since adoption of the original SUP in 2023, and the proposed addition of 10 children will not substantially change the use of the property.

Staff concludes that the proposed ordinance conditions substantially satisfy the safeguards established in the City Charter concerning the granting of Special Use Permits. Specifically, staff finds that the proposed use would not be detrimental to the general welfare of the community involved and would not create congestion in the streets in the area involved.

Therefore, staff recommends approval of the Special Use Permit request.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Site Description

The property is in the Ginter Park neighborhood, on the corner of Seminary Avenue and Walton Avenue. The property is currently a 102,457 sq. ft. (2.35 acre) parcel of land.

Proposed Use of the Property

Increasing the permitted enrollment from 64 children to 74 children for a day nursery within a church.

Master Plan

The City's Richmond 300 Master Plan designates a future land use for the subject property as Corridor Mixed-Use, which is found along major commercial corridors and envisioned to provide for medium- to medium high-density pedestrian- and transit-oriented development.

Development Style: The building size, density, and zoning districts for these areas may vary significantly depending on historical densities and neighborhood characteristics. Future development should generally complement existing context. Uses may be mixed horizontally in several buildings on a block or vertically within the same building. Developments continue introduce a gridded street pattern to increase connectivity.

Ground Floor: Ground floor uses engage with, and enliven, the street. Monolithic walls are discouraged, while windows, doors, storefronts, and other features that allow transparency and interaction between building and street are encouraged. Active commercial ground floor uses are required on street-oriented commercial frontages.

Mobility: Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access are prioritized and accommodated. Bike parking is provided. Driveway entrances are required to be off alleys whenever possible; new driveways are prohibited on priority and principal streets. Parking areas are located within the structure and to the rear of buildings and require screening; shared parking requirements are encouraged.

Intensity: Buildings generally ranging from two to ten stories, based on street widths, and depending on the historic context and stepping down in height adjacent to residential areas. New buildings that are taller than historical buildings should step back from the build-to line after matching the height of the predominant cornice line of the block.

Primary Uses: Retail/office/ personal service, multi-family residential, cultural, and open space.
Secondary Uses: Single-family houses, institutional, and government

Zoning and Ordinance Conditions

The current use is permitted by Special Use Permit Ordinance Number 2023-174, which permitted the use and excepted some yard requirements for day nurseries. The underlying zoning for this property is R-1 Single-Family Residential and R-48 Multifamily Residential.

If approved, this special use permit would impose development conditions, including:

- The Special Use of the Property shall be as a day nursery, for up to ~~[64]~~ 74 children, within a church, which may include a preschool program.
- The outdoor play area, substantially as shown on the Plans in the area labeled "Playground," shall be enclosed within a continuous fence or wall not less than four feet in height, which may be (i) located within a required front yard or a required side yard; (ii) opaque or non-opaque, or (iii) a chain-link fence.
- The hours of operation of the Special Use shall be limited to the hours between 6:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.
- The day nursery shall be licensed by and operated under the requirements of the Virginia Department of Education or its successor agency.
- In addition to signs permitted in all districts, pursuant to section 30-505 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended, one sign not exceeding eight square feet in area shall be permitted on the Property for the Special Use. The sign shall not be internally illuminated.

Surrounding Area

The parcel is located along Chamberlayne Avenue in an area that primarily single-family residential with some other institutional uses within a half-mile radius.

Neighborhood Participation

Staff notified the Ginter Park Residents Association, area residents and property owners. A sign was posted on the property. Staff received a petition to support the SUP with the application.

Staff Contact: Madison Wilson, Planner, Land Use Administration, 804-646-7436