

**SYMMES TOWNSHIP  
BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS**

**STAFF REPORT**

FOR CONSIDERATION BY SYMMES BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS ON DEC. 1, 2025

**BZA CASE: SBZA 2025-14 (CONDITIONAL USE REQUEST)  
9781 FIELDS ERTEL PLAYGROUND**

**REQUEST:** CONDITIONAL USE approval for a school use located in an "A" Residence district

**PURPOSE:** To allow a preschool within an existing church building, including construction of a new playground on the existing property

**APPLICANT:** Kel'a Armstead, Nova Prep Academy (applicant), Faith Christian Fellowship of West Chester Ohio Inc. (owner)

**LOCATION:** 9781 Fields Ertel Road; on the south side of Fields Ertel Road, east of Stonebridge Way (Book 620, Page 70, Parcel 260)

**TRACT SIZE:** Approximately 27.4 acres

**ZONE:** "A" Residence

**SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION:** APPROVAL with Conditions

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**HISTORY:** A church has been operating on this site for a few decades with the current iteration being the SOZO Loveland Church. The church was previously called Living Word Fellowship with an associated preschool called the SonRise Learning Center. The Living Word Fellowship church was approved for an associated early childcare center and playground with a Zoning Certificate granted in 2004. However, the learning center was no longer present when it became SOZO according to Google Streetview photography from 2022. According to aerial photography, the playground's equipment and fencing were removed after 2021. A large canopy umbrella remains in the area of the former playground.

**PROPOSED USE:** The applicant is proposing to utilize existing rooms within the western side of the existing church building for a pre-school for children ages three through five. The leased space would not be affiliated with the church. The preschool would have a designated drop-off and pick-up lane which currently exists in front of the entrance

to the church. The preschool would operate Monday through Friday from 7am to 6pm. Additionally, the applicant is proposing to construct a 1,350 square-foot outdoor playground with 6-foot-tall fencing to be located in the southeastern portion of the property. The canopy umbrella is in that area and the applicant has indicated they intend to retain it. The applicant has indicated there would be additional play equipment and that they may install a mulch surface in the future. The applicant also plans to install a temporary sign to be attached to the existing freestanding church sign to advertise the preschool.

**ANALYSIS:**

The existing church is located in an "A" Residence district and therefore, any changes or additions to the property located in a residential district shall be reviewed under the Conditional Use sections of the Symmes Township Zoning Resolution.

Article XXXV, Conditional Uses, requires that a property occupied by a school zoned for residential use be subject to the requirements of Section 385 – General Considerations for Conditional Uses and Section 386 – Specific Criteria Pertaining to Conditional Uses. In approving a Conditional Use, the Board shall make a finding that the proposed development is appropriate in the location proposed based upon the following general considerations and specific criteria.

**Compliance with General Considerations as Per Section 385**

Spirit and Intent: The proposed use and development shall comply with the spirit and intention of the Zoning Resolution and with district purposes.  
*Findings:* School and church uses are permitted in residential districts through the Conditional Use process. The existing and proposed use would comply with the spirit and intent of the Zoning Resolution. Compliance with the specific standards for outdoor play areas is discussed in further detail below.

No Adverse Effect: The proposed use and development shall not have an adverse effect upon adjacent property or the public health, safety, morals and general welfare.

*Findings:* The proposed conditional use would likely not have an adverse effect upon adjacent properties as the proposed school use would be located within the interior of the building. The preschool would operate from 7am to 6pm with up to a maximum of 60 students, and it is likely that the proposed preschool would create limited additional activity with the picking up and dropping off students during weekday mornings and evenings. Further, the drop off/pick-up area would be located in front of the church and approximately 240 feet from the nearest residence. Additionally, the construction of the proposed playground would not likely have a negative impact on the adjacent properties. Due to existing mature vegetation and proposed fencing around the playground, the proposed playground would not likely be visible or have an adverse effect on the surrounding properties. The homes located to the east and south of the school and the church located to the west of the school are all located over 90 feet away with mature vegetation buffering the homes.

*The nearest residence off Stone Point Court would be located approximately 96 feet south of the playground. Additionally, the applicant has indicated only 12 students would be outdoors at a time that would be utilizing the playground. Therefore, staff finds that the proposed playground would not have an adverse effect on adjacent properties.*

Protection of Public Interests: The proposed use and development should respect, to the greatest extent practicable, the natural, scenic and historic features of significant public interest.

*Findings:* There are no known features of significant public interest on the property.

Consistent with Adopted Plans: The proposed use and development shall, as applicable, be consistent with objectives, policies and plans related to land use adopted by the Township Trustees.

*Findings:* Symmes Township has an adopted Land Use Plan for this area. The property is designated as Public/Semi-Public/Institutional, which allows for churches and schools and other related institutional or community uses.

#### **Compliance with Specific Conditional Use Criteria as Per Section 386**

School uses located in residential districts must also be reviewed in relation to the following specific criteria:

**Section 386(l)** – Measures shall be taken to minimize the impact of potential nuisances such as noise, odor, vibration, and dust on adjacent properties.

*Findings:* With the existing and proposed screening as identified on the plan and with the play area only being used during daylight hours when the preschool is open, any additional noise, odor, vibration, or dust from the proposed changes would be minimal. A preschool does not currently exist on the property but a play area for a previously existing preschool was on the property in a similar location until 2021. Further, there is an existing park to the west where noise is likely. The site is surrounded by mature vegetation which should assist in buffering any additional noise. Staff finds the applicant could be required to preserve this existing vegetation along the eastern and southern property lines to ensure additional noise is buffered for the adjacent residences. The applicant did not indicate the type of fence that would be installed but staff finds that a 6-foot-high privacy fence erected along the eastern and southern sides of the playground that face the adjacent homes would assist in minimizing noise. With the preservation of the existing vegetation and the erection of a privacy fence, staff finds that the potential nuisances such as noise, odor, vibration, and dust on adjacent properties would be minimal.

**Section 386(o)** – Landscaping shall be installed in accordance with one of the following buffers as described in detail in Article XXXII, Sections 326-331.2, inclusive.

**Findings:** *The existing streetscape buffer along Fields Ertel Road currently contains 4 canopy trees and there are 0 shrubs where 12 trees and 40 shrubs are required. Staff finds the streetscape buffer should be planted to comply with the Zoning Resolution as it would provide additional buffering for the proposed preschool and playground use.*

**Section 386(p)(3)** – One sign permitted at a maximum of thirty-two (32) square feet.  
**Findings:** *The applicant is proposing a temporary sign to advertise “Nova Prep Academy” to be attached to the existing sign advertising the church that is located adjacent to Fields Ertel Road. The applicant has not indicated the square footage of the proposed temporary sign and the size of the currently existing sign is not known. Temporary signs are permitted to have thirty-two square feet of signage with limitations on how long they can be erected. Staff finds that all temporary signage should meet the requirements of the Zoning Resolution.*

**Section 386(s)** – All exterior lighting shall be directed away from adjacent residential properties and not exceed 0.5 footcandles at the property line when abutting a Residential Use or Residential District.

**Findings:** *No new lighting has been proposed and any future lighting proposed on site should comply with the Zoning Resolution.*

## Zoning Compliance

### Section 353.4 – Location and Enclosure of Outdoor Play Space

This section establishes the requirements for the location and enclosure of outdoor play spaces which state all outdoor play spaces shall be located in the rear yard.

**Findings:** *The applicant is proposing the outdoor play area to be located within a portion of the eastern side yard and a portion of the rear yard where it is only permitted in the rear yard. Permitting a portion of the playground to be located within the side yard would result in a playground in relatively close proximity to the homes located along Farmstead Drive located to the east. However, moving the proposed playground entirely into the rear yard where permitted would place the playground closer to the residences on Stone Point Court located to the south. A significant portion of the rear yard is used for parking and there does not appear to be sufficient space to locate the entire playground behind the building. Regardless of the location, any playground would likely have an impact on the adjacent residents. However, staff recognizes that noise is likely already generated from the nearby park and ballfields. Further, as stated above, mature vegetation exists along this eastern property line. Again, with the existing vegetation preserved and the installation of a 6-foot-tall privacy fence west of this vegetation, the impact of the playground should be significantly mitigated. Therefore, staff supports a variance to permit the playground in a portion of the side yard as proposed.*

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**RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends approval of BZA case Symmes 2025-14; Fields Ertel Playground, a request for Conditional Use approval with the following conditions and variance:

Conditions:

1. That a landscape plan that complies with Sections 328-2.5 of the Zoning Resolution, and with Condition #2 below, shall be submitted prior to the issuance of a Zoning Certificate.
2. That the existing vegetation located on the eastern and southern property lines shall be preserved.
3. That all temporary signage shall meet the requirements of the Zoning Resolution.
4. That a 6-foot-high privacy fence shall be installed and maintained along the eastern and southern sides of the playground.
5. That no new lighting shall be installed on the site without approval of the Board.

Variance:

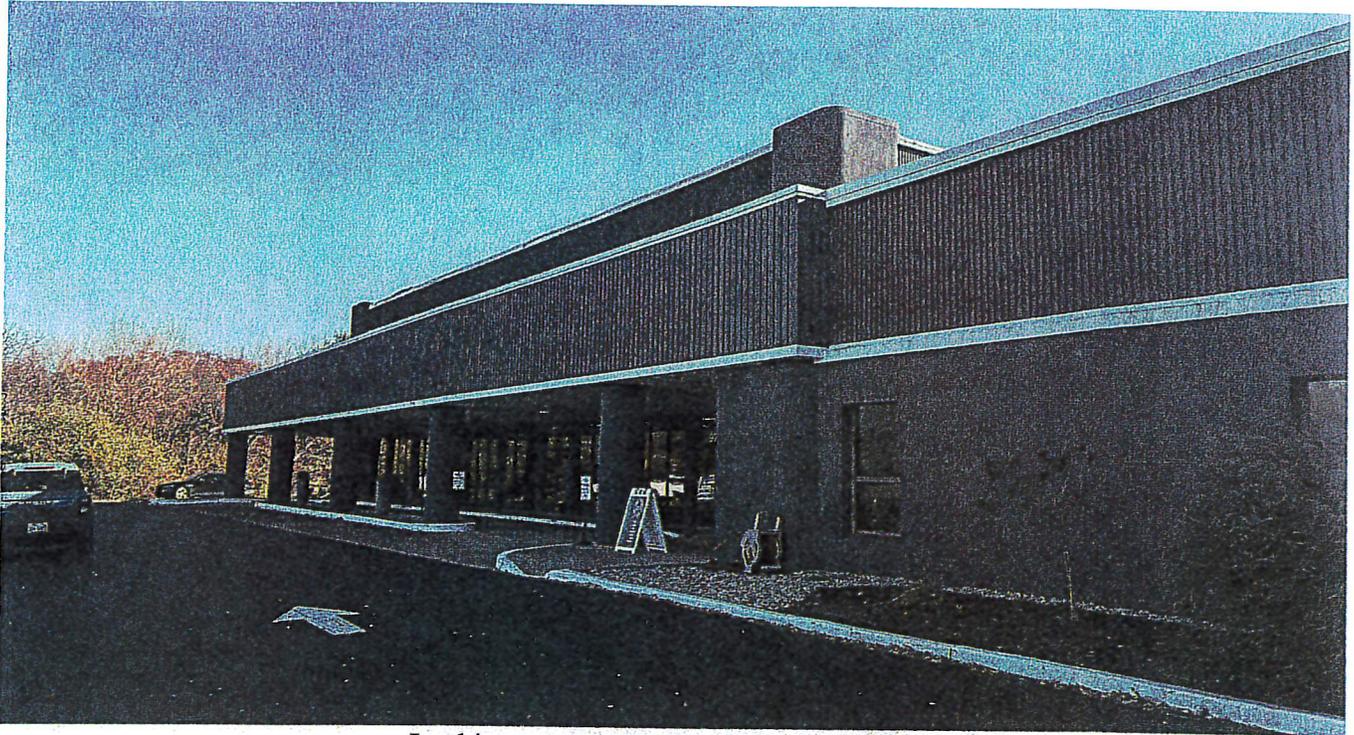
1. Section 353.4 – That the outdoor play area shall be permitted in the eastern side yard of the property where outdoor play areas are only permitted in the rear yard.

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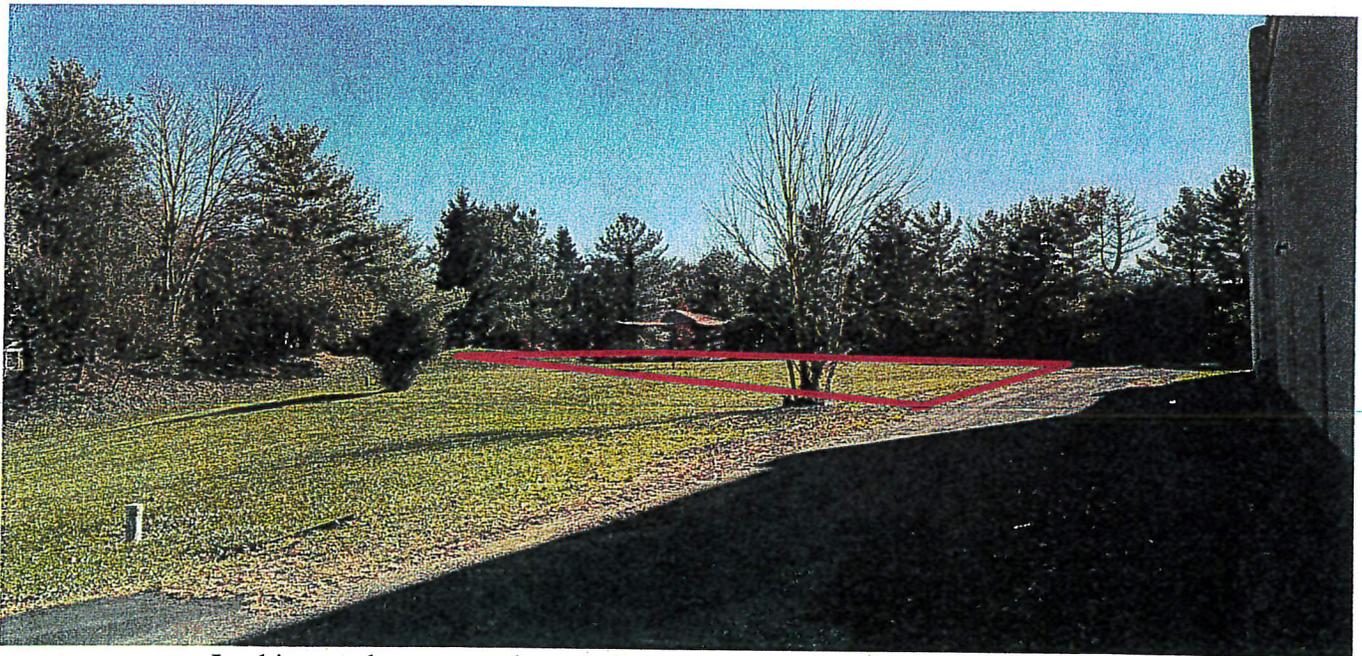
NOTE: Findings in this staff report reflect the opinions of the staff of the Hamilton County Planning and Development Department, but may not necessarily reflect the recommendation of any Board or Commission. This staff report is a technical assessment on the level of compliance with adopted zoning regulations including any required modifications or variances. The final decision of any commission or board may result in findings and conclusions that differ from the staff report.

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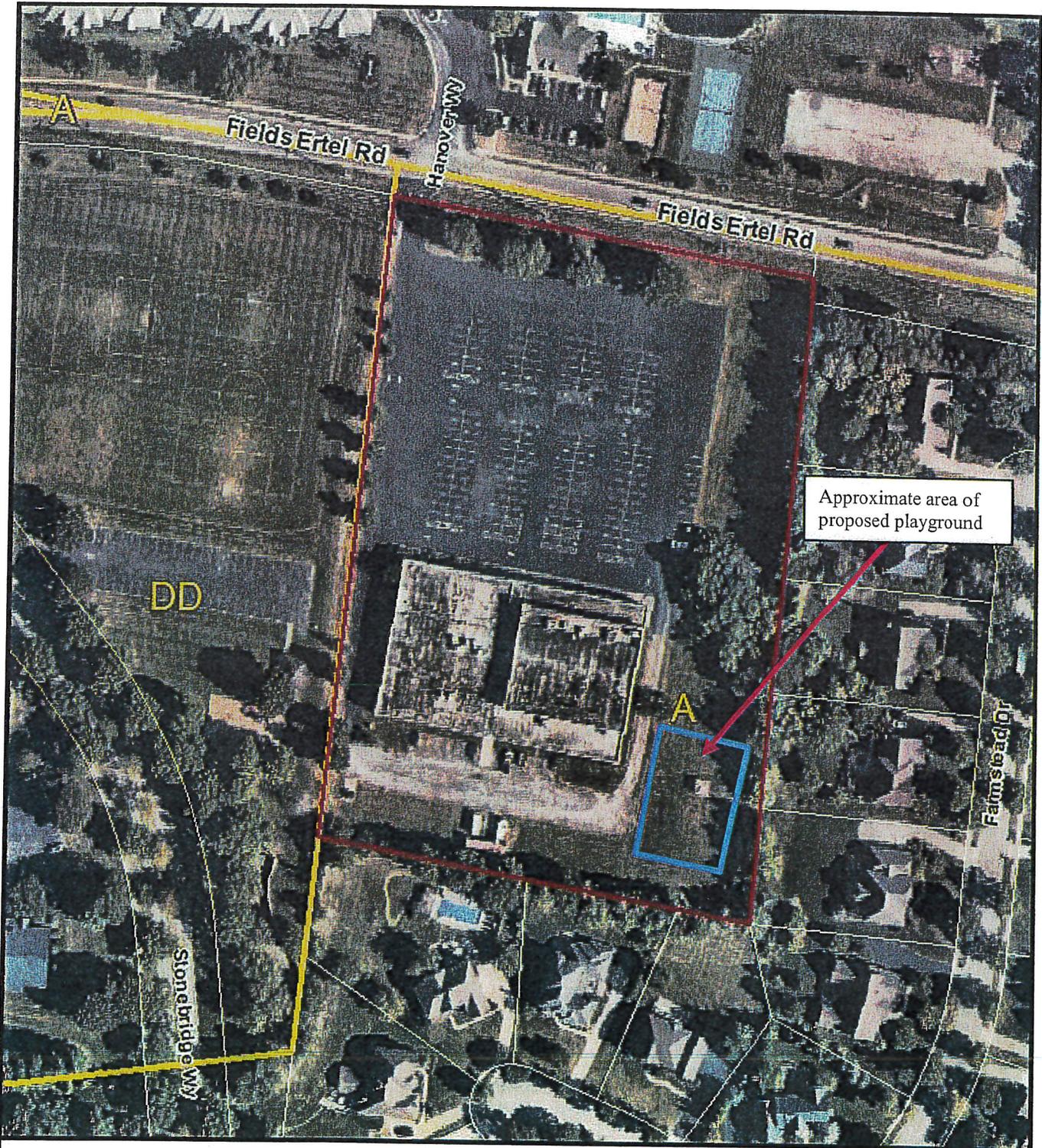
## SITE PHOTOS



Looking towards front entrance of building



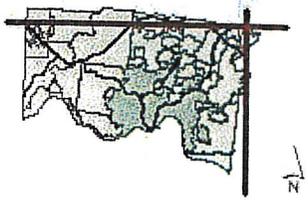
Looking southeast toward approximate area of proposed playground location



Approximate area of proposed playground

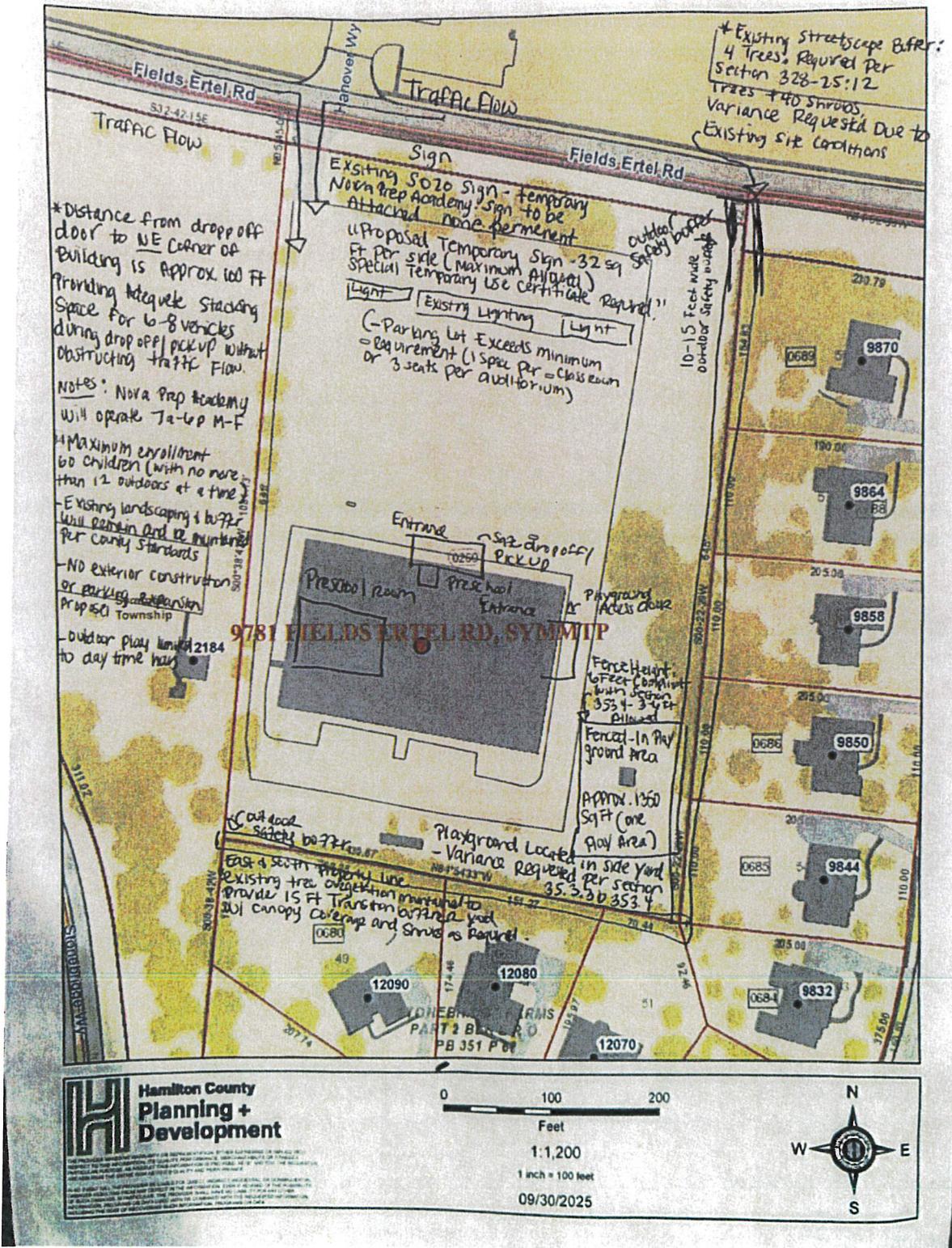
# VICINITY MAP

Case: SYMMES 2025-14: FIELDS ERTEL PLAYGROUND  
 Request: CONDITIONAL USE



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# PROPOSED SITE PLAN



## APPLICANT LETTER

Nova Prep Academy

9781 Fields Ertel Rd

Loveland, OH 45140

Date: [Insert today's date]

To: Hamilton County Planning and Development Department

Attn: Zoning Review Committee

Subject: Conditional Use Application – Nova Prep Academy

Dear Zoning Review Committee,

I am submitting this application on behalf of Nova Prep Academy, a proposed licensed preschool to be located within the existing Sozo Loveland Church at 9781 Fields Ertel Rd, Symmes Township, OH 45140.

Nova Prep Academy will serve up to 60 children ages 3–5 years old, providing a faith-based early childhood education program focused on kindergarten readiness, STEM, and character development. Our curriculum will include hands-on learning, creative expression, and a Portuguese language enrichment class.

The program will operate Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. We are not proposing any structural changes to the building. Minor interior updates may include classroom organization and safety enhancements. Exterior improvements will include installation of a fenced outdoor play area meeting state requirements and maintenance of the existing tree line to satisfy landscaping and buffer standards.

Traffic and parking needs will be fully accommodated within the existing parking lot, which exceeds the minimum zoning requirements. A designated drop-off and pick-up area has been identified to ensure

**APPLICANT LETTER (CONTINUED)**

safe and efficient vehicle circulation without obstructing traffic flow along Fields Ertel Road.

Nova Prep Academy's mission is to create a nurturing, high-quality learning environment that supports working families and prepares children for lifelong success. We believe this program will be a positive addition to the Symmes Township community, providing early education opportunities rooted in faith, growth, and community service.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or if additional information is required.

Sincerely,

Kel'a Armstead

Owner