

# Wilmette allows Mather expansion

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By Brian L. Cox, Special to the Tribune  
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The Wilmette village board has signed off on a slew of zoning variances sought by Mather LifeWays for an ambitious \$23.5 million expansion and renovation of its Wilmette senior living facility.

The vote came despite the village's zoning board of appeals' previous rejection of the request and complaints by some residents in the area that the expansion project will hurt their property values and quality of life.

The village board voted 7 to 0 during their May 13 meeting to grant Mather LifeWays the zoning variances it needs to renovate and expand Mather Place of Wilmette, a move the nonprofit organization said is essential to support Wilmette's growing demand for senior housing.

"A public good is served in creating more senior housing," said board President Bob Bielinski. "Mather is a wonderful place and we're lucky to have it."

But neighbors of the senior living facility at 2801 Old Glenview Road in the north suburb told the board that they fear the expansion and renovation project will add noise and traffic problems. They said the facility will loom over their residential neighborhood.

"We are being dwarfed," resident Irv Leonard told the board. "It's our property and our property values we are concerned about. I don't think it's fair to property owners."

Earlier this year the village's zoning board voted against giving Mather the zoning relief it was seeking, saying it did not meet the standards required by the village for zoning variances.

Mather's requests included asking for and getting a special-use amendment to expand an existing special use, and a 0.53 floor area increase, a 1-foot height increase, a one-half-story height increase, a 20-foot rear yard increase and an 11-space parking reduction to permit construction of a three-story addition to the existing building.

The expansion and renovation project, which will begin in early 2015, is projected to cost approximately \$23.5 million, and includes the construction of 39 new apartment homes, bringing the total number of apartments in the facility to 174.

It also calls for construction of an indoor swimming pool a cafe, an "all season" gazebo in a newly landscaped courtyard, a glass-enclosed space linking two corridors to encourage exercise and group interaction, as well as to bring more natural light into community spaces. The project also includes an additional walking path around the community.

"I'm very excited. We're very pleased with the unanimous approval of our proposed expansion," said Mary Leary, president and CEO of Mather LifeWays. "Our residents are very pleased as well."

She said that Mather needs to do the expansion and renovation to remain competitive and to attract new people to the senior housing rental facility, which first opened in Wilmette in 1989.

In order to overturn the zoning board of appeals' vote, at least five village board members had to vote in favor of giving Mather the zoning relief it was seeking.

All seven board members voted in favor of the project, saying they did not feel it would have a big impact on the nearby residential neighborhood and that Mather continues to be a good fit for the community.

"Mather has to be able to attract new people," said Trustee Carol Ducommun. "I would really like this community to be viable in the long run."

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BRIAN L. COX, FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Mary Leary, right, president and CEO of Mather LifeWays was congratulated by seniors living in Mather Place in Wilmette.

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