

# **Plan to Redevelop School Sisters of Notre Dame Property Newly Revised by Mandel Group**

**Elm Grove News - Independent, July 2020**

**By Lisabeth Passalis-Bain**

The School Sisters of Notre Dame established Notre Dame of Elm Grove in 1859 to provide an orphanage for area children, which later evolved into its current-day residence for elderly and ill sisters. SSND, earlier this year, entered into an option-to-purchase agreement with the Mandel Group, Inc. of Milwaukee, with the sale of the 30-acre property at 13105 Watertown Plank Road contingent upon the receipt of re-zoning and other approvals by the Village of Elm Grove.

After recently listening to a presentation of the proposed plan and posing a variety of questions, I received a detailed letter, dated June 25, 2020, from **Phillip Aiello**, Senior Vice President for Development at the Mandel Group. As typical with any proposed re-development project, this will inevitably be a long, drawn out venture, with time for numerous discussions by area residents, Mandel, and the Village before any conclusion is reached.

The project is currently in flux. It is NOT a “done deal”. The best reporting is accomplished by going directly to a source for answers. This month’s best source is the Mandel Group. A letter (unedited) to the *News-Independent* follows.

**Mr. Aiello wrote:** “The School Sisters decided to divest of their large campuses across the Central Pacific Provenance due to the difficulties of maintaining these properties with their declining population. After a request-for-information process at the end of 2017 garnered interest from numerous developers, the School Sisters selected five developers to be part of a request-for-proposal process. Mandel Group had the fortune of being selected by the School Sisters to redevelop the campus with the process culminating in a contract to purchase the campus if certain contingencies, including securing zoning approvals from the Village of Elm Grove, are met.

The attached plan depicts the original concept plan as presented to the neighbors immediately adjacent to the campus, the Elm Grove Business Association, the Elm Grove Junior Guild, and a number of residents on an individual basis. This original concept plan was the same plan included in our response to the School Sisters request-for-proposal process and was intentionally not modified until we could speak with residents of the community to obtain their feedback. This outreach will continue throughout July in anticipation of putting forth a concept plan to the Plan Commission on August 3, 2020. We originally planned for this submittal in July but delayed it until August to garner more feedback from residents. Please note that this step is the first step in a long zoning approval process. After the conceptual review, there will be a lengthy detailed plan review by the Plan Commission and the Village Board that we anticipate occurring during the fourth quarter of 2020 through the first quarter of 2021.

The plan is evolving based on the conversations with residents and based on the natural refinements that occur during the initial design of a development. The important potential changes include the reduction from 66 to approximately 30 apartment homes in Notre Dame and Maria Halls, commonly referred to as “the castle;” replacing 34 side-by-side duplexes with approximately 12 single-family homes along Red Barn Lane and Stephen Place based on conversations with neighbors adjacent to the campus; replacing

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100 senior-living apartments (which do not create much traffic or noise) with approximately 18 single-family homes on the south part of the campus, also based upon conversations with the adjacent neighbors. The attached plan summarizes these potential changes. We cannot commit to any of these changes until we understand the design and economic feasibility of the changes. We will make these decisions prior to submitting to Plan Commission for conceptual approval in August.

Some residents have speculated that a luxury apartment community is incongruous with the charm of the Village. In fact, we are seeking to develop a community that is consistent with that charm. Mandel Group has a history of designing apartment communities with attractive buildings in beautiful settings that fit the character of the neighborhood. From downtown suburban developments, Mandel Group's developments have stood the test of time. Mandel Group has a history of developing in Elm Grove, specifically the frequently-complimented and widely-admired, three-story condominiums known as The Watermark, located directly across from the School Sisters campus. These condominiums were woven into the fabric of the downtown area.

The School Sisters selected Mandel Group in part due to our plan to steward the land consistent with their principles. Through walking paths and bike paths, beautiful landscaping, and preservation of the historic buildings along Watertown Plank Road, Mandel Group will develop a charming community that creates synergies with the downtown area. We have engaged with Engberg Anderson, an architectural firm with fine design sensitivities and a history of preservation. We also have engaged with Applied Ecological Services, a renowned consultant that has surveyed all of the trees on the property, will guide us in preserving many of these trees, and will enhance the landscape and wildlife habitat through their design.

With tall historic buildings on the north, a cemetery to the west, railroad tracks to the south, and a thick, tall wooded area along most of the eastern boundary, the School Sisters campus provides an ideal location for the addition of housing options for residents that would like to remain in the Elm Grove area without the difficulties of home ownership. We anticipate the residents of our community to be empty nesters with the wherewithal to support average rents of \$2,500 per month. If you look around the Elm Grove community, our future residents could be you, your neighbors, family, or friends.

Much has been said about the impact on the value of single-family homes, particularly the homes closest to the campus. However, studies have shown that apartment communities do not negatively impact single-family home values close to or far from apartment communities. One such study analyzed specific home sales relative to distance to apartment communities in Waukesha County. A link to that study can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/ydavhz6y>. Elm Grove is an attractive place to live. The community we develop will enhance that attractiveness.

We have studied the impact our community would have on traffic along Watertown Plank Road. The study was conducted by Ayres and Associates, a renowned traffic engineering firm that has done work for the

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Village in the past. The Traffic Impact Analysis indicates that our development will have little to no impact on wait times at intersections along Watertown Plank Road. Apartments and single-family homes are not significant traffic generators like office or retail. As is common in many municipalities, we welcome the Village to confirm the results of the traffic study.

Elected officials and staff are looking at the redevelopment of the School Sisters campus as an opportunity to utilize the taxes from the new development to pay for long segments of a municipal water system thereby significantly reducing the cost for residents desiring municipal water in lieu of well water. As part of that discussion, we will be discussing tax increment financing with the Village once we confirm our concept for our development, advance the design, and obtain construction cost estimates. That is to say, we have a long way to go before we are able to have a meaningful discussion with the Village staff. We should note that the municipal water could be an extension of the Brookfield system already in use in Elm Grove, a new agreement with the City of Wauwatosa, or a new agreement with the City of Milwaukee. Residents clearly have a preference for an agreement with the City of Wauwatosa or City of Milwaukee as Lake Michigan is the source of that water. The Village staff is at the nascent stages of discussions with each of these municipalities and will make a decision based upon their ability to work out agreements with municipalities and the relative economics of these options.

Much has been said about the impact of this development on schools, emergency medical services, police, and fire department. We have discussed this development with the superintendent of schools, and he indicated that his models would not anticipate many children from our apartment community because of the income levels needed to live within the community. His indication is consistent with our study of other similar suburban Mandel Group communities. The fire department also indicated that the impact of this apartment community will be minimal to them, particularly given that the buildings will have a fire sprinkler system. We will be reaching out to the EMS and police departments shortly.

This community will have a positive impact to the downtown area by encouraging people to walk to downtown and patronize local businesses. This patronage will encourage retailers and restaurateurs to locate in the downtown area. Indeed, additional community members on the street will contribute to the livelihood and neighborly charm of Elm Grove.

There are only three people at Mandel Group working on this development. As such, we can reach residents of Elm Grove with only a finite speed. We have engaged with Lanser Public Affairs to help increase the speed with which we can reach out to the Elm Grove community. We will be transparent throughout this process both before and during the approvals process with the Village. We are looking forward to continuing the dialogue with the community to enhance this development. We do not have a specific date for our next presentation yet, but any residents interested in the development can contact me at [paiello@mandelgroup.com](mailto:paiello@mandelgroup.com) to be included in an upcoming presentation.

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Thank you for reaching out to me regarding the redevelopment of the School Sisters of Notre Dame's Elm Grove campus. The School Sisters decided to divest of their large campuses across the Central Pacific Provence due to the difficulties of maintaining these properties with their declining population. After a request-for-information process at the end of 2017 garnered interest from numerous developers, the School Sisters selected five developers to be part of a request-for-proposal process. Mandel Group had the fortune of being selected by the School Sisters to redevelop the campus with the process culminating in a contract to purchase the campus if certain contingencies, including securing zoning approvals from the Village of Elm Grove, are met.

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