

MEETING OF NOVEMBER 16, 2004



AGENDA ITEM NO. ___

Application I.D.: PA2003-0099

Application Type: Mitigated Negative Declaration and Conceptual Development Plan to construct an activity center building and an addition to an existing multipurpose building

Location: 1405 Solana Drive

Applicant: Mary Lou Orr

Owner: Charles Armstrong School

APN: 045-122-190

Zoning: PD [Planned Development]

General Plan Designation: IN [Institution]

Environmental Determination: Mitigated Negative Declaration

PROJECT SUMMARY

Application to consider an amendment to the Conceptual Development Plan for Charles Armstrong School. The proposed Conceptual Development Plan would allow new school activities and construction of approximately 15,600 square feet of additional gross enclosed floor area to the existing 29,540 square foot private school campus. The proposed additions would include the construction of a new 14,700 square foot Activity Center with a 900 square foot addition to the existing multi-purpose building. The maximum height of the proposed building would be 34 feet (current building heights range up to 27 feet). Vehicular access for the site would continue from the existing Solana Drive driveways. The number and configuration of the existing on-site parking areas would not be changed with this project.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission open hearing, take testimony and continue item for any additional research the Commission may deem necessary.

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PROCEDURE FOR PROJECT REVIEW

The project is a request to amend an existing Planned Development approval and is subject to the review provisions of Section 12 (Planned Unit Development or “PD” District) of the Belmont Zoning Ordinance. Unlike properties in other zoning districts, properties seeking a PD designation are governed by a two-step review process: First, general issues of land use, site plans and circulation plans are reviewed by way of an application for a Conceptual Development Plan (CDP). After approval, more detailed issues – such as building architecture, landscaping, parking layout, and lighting – are evaluated by way of an application for a Detailed Development Plan (DDP). (A copy of Section 12 is attached as Attachment 1)

Conceptual and Detailed Development Plans

The Conceptual Development Plan is the core of the PD zone designation. PD designations are assigned only in response to a specific project application, and each PD-zoned site includes a Conceptual Development Plan. The CDP includes a schematic layout of, “proposed land uses, location of building, structures and building groups...proposed circulation systems...proposed parks, playgrounds, school sites and other open spaces...proposed landscaping...any existing trees to be removed...proposed off-street parking”.¹ A CDP also includes tabulations of densities, floor area ratios and maximum building heights; an economic feasibility analysis (commercial projects, only); delineation of any phasing; and discussion of relations to future land use in surrounding areas. Because CDP’s and PD’s result in zone changes, CDP’s must be approved by the City Council after a review and recommendation from the Planning Commission.

The second stage of PD review is the Detailed Development Plan, which does not occur until after a CDP is approved. The DDP review focuses on “...elevations and perspective drawings of all proposed structures...location and type of plant materials...finished grades...off-street parking”.² Other features of the DDP include a description of how recreation and open space areas are used (including ownership and maintenance), traffic regulation devices and plans for public utilities. DDP’s are reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission. The City Council only reviews DDP applications if an appeal is filed after Planning Commission action.

In summary, project approval under a PD zone designation requires two applications, and these are well described by their titles. The first level of review is conceptual in nature: Overall land uses, building sizes and locations and general circulation layouts are the focus of attention on a CDP application. The second level DDP review zeroes in on the details: Architecture, landscaping, lighting, signage, etc.³ This approach is also used for amendments, as discussed below.

Amending a PD-designated Site

Amendments to a site zoned PD are treated in a similar two-stage manner. First, the property owner applies for an amendment to the Conceptual Development Plan. Section 12.3.2 of the Belmont Zoning Ordinance addresses how CDP amendments are evaluated, as follows:

“12.3.2 Changes in Conceptual Development Plan shall be considered as changes in the Zoning Ordinance and shall be made in accordance with Section 16 of this Ordinance.”

Section 16 of the Belmont Zoning Ordinance contains the regulations for zoning amendments. In addition to requiring public hearings and Planning Commission recommendation, it states the following

¹ Belmont Zoning Ordinance, Section 12.3A, excerpts

² Ibid., Section 12.5.A.6, excerpts

³ The next section of this staff report – “Prior Actions” – describes how a CDP and DDP were approved for Charles Armstrong School.

with regard to how amendments are to be judged:

“16.7 ...The Council shall make a specific finding as to whether the proposed Amendment is required to achieve the objectives of the Zoning Plan and the General Plan for the City. (excerpt)”

This is the only finding applicable in evaluating an amendment to a Conceptual Development Plan, and is the only basis for evaluating the Charles Armstrong School application, at this stage. The staff report considers this finding after discussion of the existing conditions and proposed project.

Should the CDP zoning amendment for Charles Armstrong School be approved by the City Council, the school’s application to amend its Detailed Development Plan is reviewed. Section 12.9 of the Belmont Zoning Ordinance directs DDP amendments to be processed, as follows:

“12.9 AMENDMENT OF DETAILED DEVELOPMENT PLAN – Changes in any Detailed Development Plan shall be treated as amendments to the CUP and Design Review and considered per Section 12.4.”

Section 12.4 of the Belmont Zoning Ordinance identifies how DDP’s are approved.⁴ Therefore, in amending a DDP, a project follows the same process and requires the same findings for approval as an original DDP application. (This is in contrast to the CDP, where an amendment follows rules, that are different from the original CDP approval process).

Staff has reviewed the Charles Armstrong School application under these provisions, recognizing that only the PD / CDP amendment is under consideration at this stage. Therefore, only the proposed project features related to the Conceptual Development Plan are evaluated in this staff report. If the City Council approves this amendment to the CDP, the remaining issues of the Detailed Development Plan will be reviewed as an amendment to the DDP. Staff notes that some issues fall into both CDP and DDP review. In such cases, staff has tended to review those issues earlier – at the CDP stage – to provide a more comprehensive and integrated treatment of the project.

⁴ “12.4 APPROVAL OF USES AND DEVELOPMENT – A Conditional Use Permit shall be required for any and all uses in a PD District, and Design Review shall be required for any and all improvements, as determined below:
A For all commercial, institutional, multiple family residential, institutional and similar developments, the principles of Section 13.5.3 shall be followed.
...
C In addition, the Planning Commission shall not grant a Use Permit for any use or uses in a PD District, unless it finds:
1 Such use or uses substantially conform to the adopted General Plan of the City of Belmont.
2 Such use or uses are as shown on the approved conceptual Development Plan for the particular PD District.
A Detailed Development Plan, as described in Section 12.5 shall be submitted as part of any application for a Use Permit / Design Review”

Environmental Review

The decision to amend either the CDP or the DDP is subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which guides the City in evaluating a project's impacts on the physical environment. Under CEQA, both amendments are considered "projects" and each is subject to a determination of environmental impact prior to final action. Staff has prepared a draft environmental clearance for consideration by the Planning Commission (for recommendation to the Council) on those issues raised by the CDP amendment. Environmental issues related to the Detailed Development Plan amendment will be evaluated as part of the review process for the DDP amendment, should it occur.

In summary, the review procedures for the Charles Armstrong School project tracks as follows:
CDP Amendment (*Zone Change*)

1. Planning Commission recommendation on environmental clearance and CDP amendment request
2. City Council decision on environmental clearance
3. City Council decision on CDP amendment

DDP Amendment (*Conditional Use Permit and Design Review*)

4. Planning Commission decision on environmental clearance
5. Planning Commission decision on DDP amendment

This staff report is prepared for Step 1: Planning Commission recommendation on environmental clearance and CDP amendment request.

GENERAL PLAN & ZONING CODE DESIGNATIONS

The Belmont General Plan designation for the subject site is Institutions (In); the private school campus is a compatible use under this designation. The site is zoned Planned Development (PD). The procedure section above details the amendment process to change the adopted CDP.