

SITE CONDITIONS

The 213,880 square foot school site (4.91 acres) is an irregularly shaped polygon lot that was formerly the McDougal Elementary School; the property does not include the grass playfield (now City owned McDougal Park). The existing structures are three long narrow school buildings placed in parallel down the contours of the slope and one multi-use building to the west of the classrooms/ offices (28,030 square feet of total existing floor area). The site has a 364-foot street frontage along Solana Drive to the north and an average slope of 7%. The northeast corner of the campus includes an approximate 36% slope down to the southwest to a graded parking lot and the upper building, then seven feet down (approximately 17% slope) to the middle building, down seven feet (approximately 15% slope) to the lower building, then sloping gradually through the rear blacktop area to McDougal Park. The school buildings are roughly thirty feet below the grade of Solano court or the rear yards of the homes along Altura Way (to the east). The surrounding uses are:

North - Solana Drive and single-family residences

South – City of San Carlos (single family residences along Dartmouth Avenue & K/8 charter school)

East – Single-family residences

West – McDougal Park and single-family residences

The site has three separate parking areas accessed by two driveways off of Solana Drive. The upper parking area, visible from Solana Drive has 39 parking spaces. A second driveway from Solana Drive

provides access past the multipurpose building to the lower parking area, McDougal Park ¹ and the school's two blacktop play areas. Currently six parking places are striped near the multi-purpose building and 25 parking spaces exist in the lower parking lot. South of the lower parking area is access to the rear blacktop areas, which are used for the student drop-off and afternoon pick-up as well as informal overflow parking for large gatherings.

The rear blacktop areas are painted with white boundary markings for various student sports activities including basketball, four square, handball and tetherball. Some of the ball courts have permanent poles installed in the blacktop, which are wrapped in reflective tape for safety.

Landscaping for the site is established around the three parking areas and in between the school structures. The two-blacktop play areas are separated by a row of mature trees. Trees are also found along the perimeter of the site.

There are 19 temporary storage sheds around the campus that house various school resources. Ten of the sheds are approximately 10 x 10 "Tuff" shed structures and nine are 3 x 4 "Rubbermaid" sheds. None of these sheds are indicated on the CDP site plan. No building permits is required for a shed of 120 square feet or less.

The existing school facilities and yard areas were developed by the Belmont School District, before Charles Armstrong School purchased the property in 1987. The school has been maintained with tenant and parking improvements but not expanded beyond existing building footprints.

The neighborhood around the school campus is a set of four cul-de-sacs (Solana Court, Desvio Way, Solana Drive, and Altura Way) that utilize Solana Drive to access Chula Vista Drive. Solana Drive is not a through road. All Charles Armstrong School traffic utilizes the western end of Solana Drive and Chula Vista Drive (a major collector road) to access near by Alameda de las Pulgas and Ralston Avenue (arterial roads).

Access Easement to McDougal Park

An existing condition of the project site is an easement allowing limited public access to McDougal Park. Staff notes that the evaluation of "...recreation and open space areas [including] proposals for ownership, development and maintenance" are reserved for the Detailed Development Permit.² However, because the easement has a direct bearing on the overall site plan and description of land uses, including circulation and parking, staff has decided to include a discussion of the access easement with the Conceptual Development Plan.

Prior to 1985, the park was owned by the Belmont School District and existed as the play field for

¹ A detailed description of the access agreement between the City and the private school for access of McDougal Park follows on page 14 of this report.

² Belmont Zoning Ordinance Section 12.5.A (6) (g).

McDougal Elementary School, in a conventional grammar school campus layout. The field was separated from the developed portion of the campus in 1985, after the District leased the school buildings and surrounding grounds to Charles Armstrong School, and sold the play field to the City.

The field directly abuts the school site along its western boundary, but has no direct frontage along any public street. In order to allow public use of the field as a park, an access easement across the school site was created and recorded with the District's sale of the field to the City in 1985.³ The easement's recorded legal description includes, 1) a driveway of approximately 20 feet in width from Solana Drive along the north edge of the school site and, 2) the lower parking area to which the driveway leads. Presently, the easement area provides parking for approximately twenty-five vehicles.

The purchase agreement recorded with the sale describes the rights granted to the City by the easement, as follows:

"3. a) ...a non-exclusive easement for ingress and egress and public access to the playing fields on the McDougal School site as described in Exhibit G attached hereto. Said easement shall provide that it can be used by City only after 4:00 p.m., Monday through Fridays, during the school year of the Armstrong School and after 12:30 p.m. during the Armstrong School Summer Session; provided, however, that there shall be no limitation on the use thereof by City maintenance personnel and maintenance vehicles and equipment for the purpose of servicing the playing field. Should the Armstrong School or its assigns or successor in interest cease to be a tenant and fail to exercise this option or purchase the property, the above limitations or the use of the easement shall terminate.

"b) The parties hereto understand and agree that the School District has leased part of the McDougal School site to the Armstrong School. The provision of the lease gives to the school the right to the exclusive use of the playing fields between 8 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. during the regular school year and prior to 12:30 p.m. during the summer session. In addition to the lease, the Armstrong School has an option to buy the property it is leasing. It is agreed that in the event the Armstrong School or its successor or assigns does not exercise its option to purchase the property and it ceases to be a tenant of the School District, the right of the Armstrong School or its successors and assigns to the exclusive use of the playing fields shall cease and terminate. The City agrees that in the event the school site is leased or sold to another private or public school, the City will negotiate hours of playfield use by the students of such school during school hours. The City will not unreasonably withhold the use of the fields by the students during school hours."

In order for the easement record to be as complete and unambiguous as possible, a complementary set of rights regarding the play field and access easement was granted to Armstrong School in 1984 when

³ On June XX, 1985, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 5911 in which it indicated its interest in purchasing the McDougal Elementary School play fields for a public park.

they leased the McDougal School site. A “Reciprocal Easement Agreement for Access, Parking and Exclusive Use” was executed and recorded by the School District, granting to Armstrong School:
“a perpetual exclusive easement for ingress, egress and use of, over, upon, through and across that portion of the District property described in Exhibit ‘E’ attached here to and incorporate by reference herein as the ‘playing fields’”.

The reciprocal agreement also reserved the access driveway and lower parking area on the school site to the District (which it later deeded to the City with the sale of the fields).

In summary, with the sale of the school to Armstrong School and of the playing fields to the City, a new public park was created which could only be accessed across the school campus. Based on the easements recorded with the two sales, the park might best be described as a “part-time” public park since access is permitted only, as follows:

Monday through Friday during the Armstrong School regular session:

- Before 8 a.m. and after 4 p.m.

Monday through Friday during the Armstrong School summer session:

- Before 8 a.m. and after 12:30 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday, throughout the year:

- No limit

The remaining time, the fields are part of the Charles Armstrong School campus. The following chart provides a summary of the time limits, including the Municipal Code time limits for all City parks ⁴:

Daily Time Intervals	M–F Regular Session	M–F Summer Session	Weekends
Midnight to sunrise	Closed	Closed	Closed
Sunrise to 8 a.m.	Public Use	Public Use	Public Use
8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.	School Use Only	School Use Only	
12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.		Public Use	
4 p.m. to sunset	Public Use	Public Use	
Sunset to midnight	Closed	Closed	Closed

Representatives at Charles Armstrong School indicate that they have allowed public access outside the limits of the easement, including additional campus parking outside the easement area, as well as access to the bathrooms within the school. However, such permission is at the discretion of Charles Armstrong School and not provided by the specific rights granted to the City. Staff will evaluate this additional parking and use activity in the section “Project Analysis – Proposed off-street parking”, below.

PLANNING COMMISSION PRELIMINARY DESIGN REVIEW

As noted in the “Prior Actions” section above, the applicant submitted an expansion plan similar to the present proposal for Preliminary Design Review, which was conducted by the Planning Commission on May 20, 2003. At that time the proposal included a new 16,000 square foot gymnasium building, a

⁴ Section 16-33 of the Belmont Municipal code states that all public parks are, “...closed to the public between one-half hour after sunset and one-half hour before sunrise...”

1,000 square foot addition to the existing multi-use building, and two smaller future buildings (a 510 square foot storage building adjacent to the upper bar building and a 1,800 square foot education building adjacent to the middle bar building). The Commission made the following comments:

- Consider moving the gymnasium to another location on the site – closer to existing structures and or the to the east (into the slope).
- Reduce building height and bulk – consider submerging the floor
- Consider removing pavement around trees rather than removal of distressed trees.
- Request that the applicant reduce the impacts on the community.
- Request that staff prepare a comparison with new gymnasiums in San Carlos and Belmont areas.

The present application to amend the CDP differs from the preliminary plan by 1) omitting the plan for additional building square footage to the east of the upper and middle row buildings, 2) reducing the proposed floor area for the addition to the existing multi-use building by 100 square feet, and 3) reducing the proposed floor area for the Activity Center/ gymnasium by 1,300 square feet.

NEIGHBORHOOD OUTREACH

The applicant held six outreach meetings in order to gather neighbor comments on the proposal. The issues raised at the meetings were further documented in the neighborhood comments letters from the environmental review. Analysis of these neighbor concerns were included in the environmental review via the Addendum to the Charles Armstrong School Campus Plan Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration, prepared by the environmental consultant, Geier & Geier (see Attachment 5). These issues are:

- Campus parking on the street
- Design compatibility of the gym
- Light pollution of the site
- Location of the gym
- Noise pollution of the gym
- Park access during school
- Park parking
- Safety issue with alley behind gym
- School compatibility with General Plan and residential neighborhood
- Size and bulk of gym
- Size and bulk of lobby
- Traffic increase from gym use
- Tree removal - change of view from park

The neighbor inquiries about the project received by city staff or the applicant have been attached to this report (See attachment 6). It appears the applicant has achieved the neighborhood outreach strategy tasks.

CEQA STATUS

The project is subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). An environmental impact assessment was prepared for the project and determined that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, adherence to mitigation measures by the project proponent will reduce the impacts to less than significant levels. Based on the environmental impact assessment, a Mitigated Negative Declaration was prepared and made available for public review began on May 8, 2004 and ended on May 28, 2004. Comments received by the deadline have been included as part of this staff report to the Commission.

Discussion of Mitigations

When adopting a Mitigated Negative Declaration, the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15074.d) require that the Lead Agencies adopt a program for reporting on or monitoring the changes that it has required in the project or made a condition of approval to mitigate or avoid significant environmental effects.

The following sections identify the project mitigations that modify the Conceptual Development Plan in order to avoid significant environmental effects. The Initial Study, Addendum and Mitigation Monitoring Program can be found in Attachment 5.

Aesthetics

- 1. As part of the project's landscaping plan, screening trees will be planted along the southern property boundary to screen the project from residents along Dartmouth Avenue. The trees will be maintained by the project's owners/administration to ensure the expeditious enhancement of screening between the proposed Activity Center and adjoining residential properties. The trees' screening effects will increase as the trees and other landscape plantings mature.*
- 2. With regard to the size and form of the Activity Center, the proposed project design is consistent with the character of the existing institutional use of the site. To achieve the objective of the General Plan for institutional uses, the project design shall ensure that the proposed facilities are integrated into the community, and in a manner that preserves and enhances the character of the surrounding residential neighborhood as specified by the General Plan.*

These measures will be deemed successful if the conditions of the City's Tree Ordinance for survival of replacement trees are met, and the project design has been implemented as approved by the City. The report findings and mitigations have been included as part of the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration study for the project.

Air Quality

- 1. Water all active construction sites at least twice daily.*
- 2. Cover all trucks hauling soil, sand, and other loose materials or require all trucks to maintain at least two feet of freeboard.*

3. *Pave, apply water three times daily, or apply (non-toxic) soil stabilizers on all unpaved access roads, parking areas, and staging areas at construction sites.*
4. *Sweep daily (with water sweepers) all paved access roads, parking areas and staging areas at construction sites.*
5. *Sweep streets daily (with water sweepers) if visible soil material is carried onto adjacent public streets.*
6. *Stationary equipment shall be located as far from school and residential receptors as possible.*
7. *Stationary sources of air emissions such as pumps, compressors, generators, etc. shall be line-powered; use of portable generators shall be avoided to the extent feasible.*
8. *Idling time of construction equipment and trucks shall be minimized (e.g., five minute maximum) when located adjacent to existing school facilities and adjacent residential receptors.*
1. *Construction equipment shall be properly tuned and maintained. A schedule of low-emissions tune-ups should be developed and performed on all equipment.*

These measures will be deemed successful through confirmation of compliance with these mitigation measures by the City Building Division.

Biological Resources

12. *Recommendations made by the City's arborist, Walter Levison (see Attachment 4) will be implemented to reduce the project's potential effects on the site's protected trees: provision of protective fencing as mapped in Levison's report; silt fencing around Tree #13; provision of supplemental irrigation during and after construction; selection of appropriate native species for replacement trees (emphasizing drought tolerance); installing trees and shrubs using the individual pit dig method only (no trenching); use of drip emitters/bubblers only; planting a minimum of 30 native oaks (15-gallon size) to mitigate removal of ten protected Aleppo pines; provision of adequate setbacks between replacement trees and the PG&E electrical utility lines along the southern project boundary; implementation of appropriate weed abatement/maintenance if hydroseeding of native mixes is proposed; and acquisition of a tree removal permit.*

This measure will be deemed successful through confirmation of compliance with these mitigation measures by the City Building Division.

Geology and Soils

13. *Geotechnical Plan Review. The Project Geotechnical Consultant shall review and approve all geotechnical aspects of the final project drainage, grading, and construction plans (i.e., site*

preparation and grading, site drainage improvements and design parameters for foundations and retaining walls) to ensure that their recommendations have been properly incorporated.

The results of the plan reviews shall be summarized by the Project Geotechnical Consultant in a letter and submitted to the City for the City Engineer/Building Official, prior to issuance of building permits.

14. *Geotechnical Field Inspection. The Project Geotechnical Consultant shall inspect, test (as needed), and approve all geotechnical aspects of the project construction. The inspection shall include, but not necessarily be limited to: site preparation and grading, site surface and subsurface drainage improvements, and excavations for foundations and retaining walls prior to the placement of steel and concrete. The consultant shall inspect the progress of excavations, especially where cuts are made for retaining walls, for signs of instability. Any observed instability could result in the need for temporary bracing of cuts, or sequential excavation and construction of shorter wall segments.*

The results of these inspections and the as-built conditions of the project shall be described by the Project Geotechnical Consultant in a letter and submitted to the City for review and approval prior to final (granting of occupancy) project approval.

15. *The City will require implementation of all design recommendations outlined by Michelucci & Associates in their February 26, 2003 study (see Attachment 6) and any subsequent studies, which will reduce identified potentially significant geotechnical constraints to less-than-significant levels.*

These measures will be deemed successful upon approval by the City after final inspection of project improvements.

Hydrology and Water Quality

16. *For new development and construction projects, the City requires the implementation of Best Management Practices for Construction (BMP's) to ensure the protection of water quality in storm runoff from the project site. In brief, the measures presented in the BMP handbook address pollution control and management mechanisms for contractor activities, e.g. structure construction, material delivery and storage, solid waste management, employee and subcontractor training, etc. The handbook also provides direction for the control of erosion and sedimentation as well as the establishment of monitoring programs to ensure the effectiveness of the BMP's. The Best Management Practices guidelines are available at the Belmont City Hall. The City shall also require an agreement with the applicant that ensures the permanent and on-going maintenance of water quality control improvements by the applicant and/or project site owner(s).*

The applicant's design team shall incorporate Best Management Practices (BMPs) for stormwater quality protection into site design to the extent that conditions allow. Examples of such measures include but are not limited to the following:

- a) For walking and light traffic areas, permeable pavements shall be used where feasible. Typical pervious pavements include pervious concrete, porous asphalt, turf block, brick pavers, natural stone pavers, concrete unit pavers, crushed aggregate (gravel), cobbles and wood mulch.*
- b) Parking lots shall include hybrid surfaces (pervious material for stalls only), concave medians with biofilters (grassy swales), and landscaped infiltration/detention basins as feasible.*
- c) The landscape design shall incorporate biofilters, infiltration and retention/detention basins into the site plan as feasible.*
- d) For outdoor work areas including garbage, recycling, maintenance, storage, and loading, applicable stormwater controls include siting or set back from drainage pats and water ways, provision of roofing and curbs or berms to prevent run on and run off. If the area has the potential to generate contaminated run off, structural treatment controls for contaminant removal (such as debris screens or filters) shall be incorporated into the design.*

City review of the project design will determine whether other appropriate BMP's shall be required and incorporated into the project plans.

This measure will be deemed successful through compliance with the BMP conditions at the completion of the project construction.

Land Use and Planning

- 17. In order to conform to the objectives and intent of the General Plan for institutional uses on the subject property, the student enrollment and activities program for the proposed project shall be limited to the existing approved enrollment level and the existing activities program (2003-04 academic year). In order to ensure that the school adheres to these conditions, the school shall provide a quarterly report to the City's Community Development Department. This requirement supplements and/or augments the existing conditions of approval of the school's Conditional Use Permit.*
- 18. With regard to the size, form, and location of the Activity Center, the proposed project design is consistent with the character of the existing institutional uses on the site. To achieve the objective of the General Plan's Goal 2 for institutional uses, the project design shall be reviewed to ensure that the proposed facilities are integrated into the community, and in a manner that preserves and enhances the character of the surrounding residential neighborhood. Potential design modifications that should be re-considered include:*

- a) *Relocation of attached storage structures to the west side of the gymnasium;*
- b) *Decrease in paved area at the north side of gymnasium, with concurrent increase in setback from southern property line. This would increase the buffer area between the Dartmouth Avenue properties and the new Activity Center. This design modification would also reduce or eliminate the east-west view corridor that would result from the currently proposed design. Relocation of the gymnasium closer to existing school buildings would also need to be coordinated with the fire department.*
- c) *Re-orientation of proposed classroom facilities to increase separation between Dartmouth Avenue properties and the Activity Center.*

This measure will be deemed successful upon completion of project plans as approved by the City. The applicant agrees to mitigate the impacts of the campus by planting screening trees along the southerly boundary of the campus, and through design details for the Activity Center and lobby addition (to be reviewed at the DDP) that minimize noise impacts on the neighborhood.

The Initial Study concludes that the project applicant has attempted to reduce the potential impacts of the project design on neighboring residential properties, but that additional measures are available to actually minimize such impacts. Mitigation Measure 18 provides direction and guidance for project modifications that should be considered to reduce potential compatibility impacts to a less than significant level.

Noise

19. *The south wall of the Activity Center (or fencing along the southern boundary) should be constructed as early as possible to help reduce construction-related noise levels at adjacent residential receptors to the south. Alternatively, temporary wood fencing should be constructed along the southern boundary at the existing residence where there is no wood fencing.*
20. *Trucks shall not be allowed to queue and idle on Solana Drive, along the western driveway, or within 100 feet of adjacent residences to the west or south. Larger setbacks shall be provided wherever possible. Flagpersons shall direct traffic to ensure that trucks travel through the western driveway as quickly as possible rather than allowing them to idle at length along this driveway.*
21. *Windows on the south side of the Activity Center (gymnasium, lockers, and classrooms) should be fixed to minimize noise impacts on adjacent residents. Operable windows should be located on the north side of the Activity Center. If cross-ventilation is desired in the gymnasium, operable windows should be located on the west and east sides of the gym to minimize impacts on the closest residences to the south.*
22. *Mechanical equipment associated with the proposed Activity Center should be vented on the north side of the building, not the south to minimize noise impacts on adjacent residences. Vents should be baffled and designed to ensure that operation of mechanical equipment (fans, etc.) shall not increase ambient noise levels at the southern project boundary.*
23. *The doors on the west side of the lobby addition should be designed to close automatically and should be signed to prohibit users from propping these doors open during an event.*

These measures will be deemed successful through compliance with these conditions at the completion of the project construction and will be reviewed at the DDP stage.

Public Services

24. *The project will comply with the following Belmont Police Department conditions of approval to ensure public safety:*
- a) *Flag persons shall be positioned at both ends of blocked traffic lanes.*
 - b) *A 24-hour written notice to the Police Department is required before any lane closure.*
 - c) *No debris boxes or building materials shall be stored on the street.*
 - d) *All activities shall be subject to the requirements of the Belmont Noise Ordinance.*
 - e) *A parking plan for special events occurring in the gymnasium shall be submitted to the Police Department.*
 - f) *A stop sign shall be installed at the campus driveway for vehicles exiting the campus onto Solana Drive.*
 - g) *A plan for traffic flow patterns on/through the campus shall be submitted for review by the Police Department.*
25. *The project will comply with the following South County Fire Authority conditions of approval to ensure public safety:*
- a) *Fire department access roads shall meet the requirements of the South County Fire Protection Authority. Minimum unobstructed width is 20 feet; minimum unobstructed vertical clearance shall be 13.5 feet; and the surface shall be capable of supporting 61,000 pounds. Roads shall be all weather, asphalt, or concrete. Identification of fire lanes is also required. A 40-foot outside and 21-foot inside turning radius shall be provided. Grade to the road shall not exceed 15%. Maximum dead-end shall not exceed 150 feet.*
 - b) *New fire hydrants are required; the amount of new hydrants shall be in accordance with the 2001 California Fire Code (CFC), Appendix III-B. The agency specifies a total of four (4) new hydrants.*
 - c) *The required fire-flow shall be in accordance with the 2001CFC, Appendix III-A: 2,500 gallons per minute required.*
 - d) *An approved automatic fire sprinkler system meeting the requirements of the South County Fire Protection Authority current ordinance shall be provided.*

- e) *Address numbers shall be illuminated and visible on all new buildings. Rear addressing is/may also be required. Size of lettering and illumination shall meet South County Fire Standards.*

These measures will be deemed successful upon inspection/approval by the City and the applicant has agreed to incorporate these mitigations.

Transportation/Traffic

- 26. *To maximize the remaining space on the lower schoolyard and minimize the impact to the surrounding area, implementation of parking management strategies is recommended. These strategies include:*

- a) *Providing valet parking to fully utilize on-site parking supplies*
- b) *Directing vehicles to park at the neighboring Tierra Linda School and providing a shuttle connector, if necessary*
- c) *Encouraging carpooling for special events*
- d) *Continuing to discourage on-street parking by the campus population.*

- 27. *The school should continue to implement the existing operating scheme for drop-offs and pick-ups: monitoring traffic flows through the provision of a driveway attendant; directing all private vehicle student drop-offs and pick-ups to occur on campus; and staggering dismissal times. In order to ensure maximum efficiency of the pick-up area, the new internal campus roadway should be posted with "No Parking" signs to ensure that two-way travel is maintained at all times. Additionally, pull-out areas should be provided along the curb adjacent to the school buildings to ensure that vehicles waiting for students do not block other through traffic.*

These measures will be deemed successful upon approval by the City after final inspection of project access improvements and parking management plans.

Utilities and Services

- 28. *To minimize the generation of solid waste and disposal requirements, the City of Belmont shall require the implementation of recycling program as part of the project. Implementation of this program will reduce potential solid waste impacts to a less than significant level.*

This measure will be deemed successful upon approval of the recycling program by the City. In summary, the potential environmental impact of the project has been assessed in the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration, and its Addendum. The project applicant submitted a comment letter in response to the analyses and mitigation measures presented in the Initial Study for the proposed project. The applicant's comments indicate agreement to and acceptance of 26 of the 28 mitigation measures presented in the Initial Study. Concerning Mitigation Measures 2 and 18, the applicant identifies compliance with other design mitigation measures listed by the Initial Study as the project's mitigation for aesthetic and land use impacts. The project applicant does not address the design

recommendations provided by Mitigation Measure 18 in regard to the relocation and/or re-orientation of the proposed Activity Center.

Additional public comments could be received during public hearing(s) used to review the potential environmental effects of the project and the appropriate mitigation measures that would reduce such impacts to less than significant levels.