



# City of Culver City

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## Staff Report Details (With Text)

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**PC - PUBLIC HEARING: Consideration of a Conditional Use Permit to allow continuation of an existing private school at 3430 McManus Avenue (Project).**

**Meeting Date:** May 25, 2022

**Contact Person/Dept:** Jose Mendivil, Associate Planner  
Erika Ramirez, Current Planning Manager

**Phone Number:** 310-253-5757

**Fiscal Impact:** Yes  No       **General Fund:** Yes  No

**Public Hearing:**       **Action Item:**       **Attachments:**

**Public Notification:** (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - Planning Commission (05/19/22); (Posted) City Website (05/04/22); (Mailed) Property owners and occupants within a 500-foot radius (05/04/22).

**Department Approval:** Sol Blumenfeld, Community Development Director, (05/12/22)

### RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission adopt a resolution adopting a Categorical Exemption and approving Conditional Use Permit P2022-0081-CUP, subject to conditions of approval, to allow the continued operation of an existing private school.

### PROCEDURES

1. Chair calls on staff for a brief staff report and the Planning Commission poses questions to staff as desired.
2. Chair opens the public hearing, providing the Applicant the first opportunity to speak, followed by the general public.
3. Chair seeks a motion to close the public hearing after all testimony has been presented.
4. Planning Commission discusses the matter and arrives at its decision.

## **BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION**

### Request

Echo Horizon School/Echo Foundation (“Applicant” or “School”) operates an existing private school with 19 classrooms serving 185 students in grades Pre-K through 6th Grade at 3430 McManus Avenue. The School includes students who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) as well as students that do not have hearing disabilities. Fifteen percent (15%) of Echo Horizon’s students are DHH and use hearing technology. The Applicant requests a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to continue operation of the School because the current CUP for the School use expires on June 30, 2022. Additionally, the Applicant requests an increase in School staff to ensure low teacher to student ratios for their special needs student body.

### Existing Conditions / Surrounding Area / Zoning / General Plan

The Project Site is a generally flat, 88,823 SF rectangular shaped parcel and is located just north of Syd Kronenthal Park with street frontages on both McManus and Roberts Avenues. It is developed with a 41,011 SF School building, playground facilities, and 41 surface parking spaces. The School building has a ‘Significant’ historic designation. The Project Site is zoned Residential Two Family (R2), has a Low Density Single Family General Plan Land Use designation, and is located within a 1 and 2 family residential neighborhood. A detailed description of existing conditions, the surrounding uses, and zoning is in the Project Summary (Attachment No. 3).

### Project Description and Background

The Project involves continuation of the existing private School that is operating under a CUP that expires on June 30, 2022. The Applicant does not propose changes to the maximum allowed 315 student body, current School operating hours, nor to the physical characteristics of the School facilities. The Applicant is requesting an increase of staff from 40 to 56 individuals. This increase in staffing is due to two key reasons: 1) the increased staffing needed to support the Echo Center Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) students who require additional services in listening and spoken language from trained DHH teachers, auditory verbal therapists, and audiologists; and 2) the additional staffing needed to ensure health, well-being, and learning services for the School’s diverse students with different learning and health profiles, particularly during pandemic and post-pandemic periods.

The Project Site was the location of the former Washington Elementary Public School which had a maximum enrollment of 330 students. The Culver City Unified School District Board of Education closed the School in 1983 due to low enrollment but maintained ownership of the Project Site. In July of 1983, the Planning Commission approved CUP, PL-1350, allowing the Applicant to operate a private elementary school and daycare center at the former public-school site for a period of five years with a maximum 250 student enrollment. The Planning Commission granted a series of short-term CUP extensions, running concurrent with the lease agreement between the Applicant and the Culver City Unified School District (“CCUSD”).

On January 26, 1994, the Planning Commission approved the Extension of and Modification to CUP, PL-1350, extending the CUP to June 30, 2022, coinciding with a 30-year lease agreement between CCUSD and the Applicant. The extension and modification to the CUP allowed the Applicant to increase student enrollment from 250 to 275 students and construct a small addition at the rear of the School building. A Historical Preservation Certificate of Appropriateness was required because the School building is designated as a "Significant" structure per the City's Historic Preservation Program. On January 12, 2005, the Planning Commission approved the current Conditional Use Permit Modification (CUP/M P-2004143) that allowed an increase in student enrollment from 275 to 315 students and 40 School staff members. This modification also approved a 5,935 SF addition along the Roberts Avenue frontage.

The Applicant's lease with CCUSD was extended to July 2032 with two 10-year renewal options. The current CUP request will not have an expiration date. CUPs run with the land and Culver City does not normally impose expiration dates on CUPs as long as the use remains active.

Project details and plan layout are provided in the Project Summary (Attachment No. 3), the Preliminary Development Plans (Attachment No. 4), School Background and Operations Plan (Attachment No. 5), Parking Demand Management Plan (Attachment No. 6), Circulation Drop-Off and Pick-Up Plan (Attachment No. 7).

## **ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION**

### **Zoning Standards (R2 Zone)**

Both the R1 and R2 Zones allow a private elementary school with an approved CUP on CCUSD surplus land. The Project Site is in the R2 Zone (R1 is the appropriate zone based on the Site's General Plan Land Use designation) and on CCUSD surplus land. Attachment No. 3 summarizes the Project's area, setbacks, height, and parking. These standards are intended for residential uses and the School building, constructed in 1934, does not comply with some of the standards. A building originally constructed as a public school does not necessarily align with residential massing. As noted, the Project Site's physical characteristics will not change.

### **Architectural Design**

According to the 1990 Culver City Historic Preservation Advisory Committee report, the School building is described as moderne in style with stucco cladding. The building is designed with large recessed, multi-paned windows with matching transoms. The centered entrance off McManus Avenue is recessed and reached by wide concrete steps and multi-paned double entrance doors. Along the first floor there are banks of five large multi-paned windows. The January 2005 addition, approved as part of the last CUP Modification to the original July 1983 CUP, follows similar building material finishes, color, and multi-paned window elements.

### **Vehicle Parking / Mobility and Transportation Demand Measures (TDM)**

Attachment No. 3 lists the Project's required 41 parking spaces which are provided on-site. The parking is based on the number of classrooms and the area of indoor assembly area. However, the applicant is requesting an increase in staff which under the current CUP is limited to 40 School staff. While this increase would result in 56 employees including full time and part time staff, the required parking remains the same. Staff has not observed Project related parking intrusion in the neighborhood but has requested a Parking Management Plan given the proposed Project changes as described below.

Attachment No. 6, the School's Parking Demand Management Plan, analyzed current staff mobility trends and suggested a menu of TDM measures. The Plan concluded that the list of measures is expected to have a

substantial effect on the parking demands of the Project and greatly reduce potential impacts to the surrounding neighborhood. There is major opportunity to shift a high proportion of faculty/staff to the pedestrian, bicycle, and transit modes because many faculty/staff live within a short radius of the School campus and several within a short radius of one another. Through implementation of the proposed TDM measures, the School believes it will generate lower automobile parking demands than the automobile parking supply and would, therefore, not generate off-site parking impacts. The Applicant has agreed to implement the measures summarized below and explained in further detail in Attachment No. 6. The School's Parking Demand Management Plan is designed to promote carpooling amongst employees, parents, and students:

- **Centralized Transportation Information Display** - A bulletin board, display case, or kiosk will display transportation information such as transit maps, transit routes and schedules, regional ridesharing agency contact information, ridesharing materials, and bicycle routes and facility information.
- **Employee Transportation/Carpool Coordinator** - The School will establish an Employee Transportation Coordinator (ETC) position. The ETC will be responsible for maintaining the transportation information display and providing services such as on-site transit pass sales, assistance with carpool matching, oversight of the preferred carpool parking program, and other services that include payment of a monthly stipend for employees participating in the carpool program - \$35 per month for each employee participating in a carpool and \$40 per month to be distributed evenly among the drivers of each carpool.
- **Priority Parking For Employee Carpools** - The ETC will establish priority parking for employee carpools, as needed, based on faculty/staff demand.
- **New Employee Orientation** - Every new employee will be required to participate in an orientation on alternative commute options such as transit and carpooling and an annual Employee Orientation will be offered for all employees.
- **Marketing** - Annual state- and regional-level events, such as Rideshare Week and Bike-to-Work Day will be advertised and potentially used as the setting for site-specific marketing events and/or transportation fairs.
- **Guaranteed Ride Home Program** - This program will offer registered alternative commute participants, a free ride home.
- **Discounted Transit Passes** - As warranted by employee demand, the ETC will negotiate with local transit (train and bus) providers to purchase transit passes in bulk at a discounted rate (e.g., through a Transit Access Pass, TAP program) and provide School faculty/staff with a minimum 50% discount on transit pass costs.

*Optional Measures:* The following TDM measures are optional and can be implemented by the School, if needed, to reduce automobile parking demands.

- **Parking Cash Out** - Full-time employees may be offered the option to be paid annually, a \$400 parking subsidy for any expenses associated with commuting to and from work through use of a non-automobile modes such as public transit, bicycling, or walking, in exchange for relinquishing a parking space.
- **Bicycle Tool and Repair Stand** - The School may install a bicycle tool and repair stand on site, in a well-lit area accessible to Project faculty/staff and near on-site bicycle parking.
- **Free On-Site Shared Bicycles** - The School may provide up to 3 free on-site shared bicycles to be used by Project faculty/staff.

- Long-Term Bicycle Parking Supply - The School may provide additional long-term bicycle parking spaces beyond the School's existing 10 short-term bicycle parking spaces.

The Project Site is within a Transit Priority Area (TPA) which precludes a VMT impact analysis to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Further, the proposed project is under the 250 net new trip threshold requiring supplemental transportation analysis and therefore potential impacts are considered less than significant.

#### Student Drop-Off and Pick-Up

The Applicant's current Student drop-off/pick-up and traffic circulation plan will continue and includes the following features:

- Drop-off/pick-up for carpools begins with vehicles entering from Roberts Avenue southbound, onto the one-way westbound queuing lane in the south parking lot, turning right onto McManus Avenue northbound, and turning right into the circular drive (at the front of the School) where children are dropped off/picked up.
- Parents with only one child in their vehicle must park in one of two Park parking lots (Syd Kronenthal Park) and walk their children into the School.
- School staff members assist children out of or into the vehicles.
- School staff members provide traffic control so that vehicles circulate easily from Roberts Avenue to the queuing lane, onto McManus Avenue, and into the circular drive.
- School staff members provide traffic control so that vehicles do not queue beyond the north property line along the Roberts Avenue frontage.

The circular driveway can accommodate approximately 4 vehicles. An additional 3 vehicles can be accommodated on McManus Avenue between the parking lot exit and the entry to the circular driveway. This Portion of McManus Avenue is adjacent to the School and does not affect residential street parking. A total of 31 vehicles can be queued before impacting Roberts Avenue, including the 7 noted above and the 24 vehicles that can fit along the south parking lot drive aisle. Attachment No. 7 shows the site plan with the drop-off/pick-up circulation route.

#### Landscaping

The Applicant does not propose changes to the landscaping and current landscaping will be maintained.

#### Noise

Current noise levels generated by students and School vehicle trips create incremental noise that does not significantly impact the neighborhood. Residential uses are not adjacent to the School parking lot that serves as the queuing area for drop-off and pick-up. This parking lot is next to Syd Kronenthal Park with weekend uses that do not conflict with weekday School operations. The south playground area immediately north of the parking lot is separated from residential uses, further north, by the School building. The north playground is separated from the residence immediately to its north by an existing eight-foot-high block wall. Normal School operations begin at 7:30 AM and end at 3:00 P.M. with after school programs ending at 6:30 PM, each weekday, before most people come home from work. Any unreasonable and unnecessary noise constituting a nuisance under the CCMC can be addressed through administrative code enforcement procedures. A CUP condition will require the School to undertake additional noise attenuation measures should it be deemed necessary.

#### Neighborhood Compatibility

The School operations are compliant with the current CUP and applicable Zoning Code standards. The School building existed as part of the local built environment for several decades. The School playground areas will remain in their current locations with no additional required space. The play areas along with the neighboring Syd Kronenthal Park will continue to compliment the single-family neighborhood. The drop-off and pick-up plan will remain and ensure the Project reduce potential impacts to the local community. Overall, the School building design as a historic resource and the number of allowed students conforms to the goals and functioning of Echo Horizon School as a vital community resource.

### Security

The Project's eight-foot-high black metal tube fence located at the south property line between the School and the park provides security for both neighboring residences and the School. The proposed fencing design visually enhances the area between the School and the residential area. Along the eastern portion of the north property line, adjacent to a residence, an eight-foot-high block wall provides added security and assists in dampening the noise from the playground.

### Summary of Key Project Conditions

Current project conditions that will be part of the new CUP include:

- A limit on the number of evening School events (up to six events per year).
- Continuation of the current drop-off/pick-up plan.
- Implementation of School's proposed Parking Demand Management Plan.
- A condition that prohibits the queuing of vehicles to extend beyond the School's northern property line on Roberts Avenue (a School staff member is positioned at this location to ensure this condition is enforced).
- An internal enforcement program to ensure parents obey applicable traffic controls, speed limits, and parking regulations.
- Posting of parking restriction signs on McManus Avenue adjacent to the School site.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

As part of the Project review process, a virtual community meeting was held February 3, 2022 at 7 PM. One person attended the meeting and supported the project. The individual lives in the neighborhood and works for the School. There are no meeting summary notes as there was no question-and-answer section, or comments, after the presentation, except for the individual noted above.

### Comments Received During Public Comment Period

A public notice was mailed to all property owners and occupants within a 500-foot radius extended to end of City block on 21 days in advance of the Public Hearing. As of the writing of this report, one verbal comment expressed concern about the Project's use of parking at Syd Kronenthal Park. The individual was informed that a Project condition would be imposed that prohibits use of the Park parking lot for School employees and that the file was available at City Hall for review.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION**

Pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines, initial review of the project by staff established there are no potentially significant adverse impacts upon the environment, and the project is determined to be Categorically Exempt pursuant to CEQA Section 15301, Class 1-Existing Facilities, because the CUP permits School operations at existing School facilities and will not result in expansion of the existing use.

## **CONCLUSION/SUMMARY**

Based on the proposed preliminary development plans and recommended conditions of approval, staff considers the Project compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, adequately served by public facilities and, consistent with the General Plan, Zoning Code, and all CCMC requirements. Staff believes that findings for Conditional Use Permit and Categorical Exemption, P2022-0081-CUP can be made as outlined in Resolution No. 2022-P009 (Attachment No. 1).

## **FISCAL ANALYSIS**

There is no fiscal impact from this project to the City

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. 2022-04-27\_ATT-1. Proposed Planning Commission Resolution No. 2022-P009 and Exhibits A and B.
2. 2022-04-27\_ATT-2. Vicinity Map.
3. 2022-04-27\_ATT-3. Project Summary.
4. 2022-04-27\_ATT-4. Preliminary Development Plans dated March 11, 2022.
5. 2022-04-27\_ATT-5. School Background and Operations dated April 25, 2022.
6. 2022-04-27\_ATT-6. Parking Demand Management Plan dated May 11, 2022.
7. 2022-05-25\_ATT-7. Circulation Drop-Off/Pick-Up

## **MOTION**

That the Planning Commission:

Adopt a resolution adopting a Categorical Exemption and approving a Conditional Use Permit for Case No. P2022-0081-CUP, subject to conditions of approval.