

FINDINGS

Conditional Use Findings

- 1. That the project will enhance the built environment in the surrounding neighborhood or will perform a function or provide a service that is essential or beneficial to the community, city or region.**

The project involves the construction, use, and maintenance of a new public charter elementary school campus for Valor Academy Elementary School ("VAES") with a maximum enrollment of 552 students for grades Transitional Kindergarten (TK) to Fourth grade. Proposed improvements include 28 classrooms within a new one- and two-story building, a multi-purpose room, and an existing house which will be preserved and incorporated as administrative and support space.

Valor Academy Elementary School is an existing public charter elementary school which has been operating in the San Fernando Valley since 2016. Currently, the elementary school is located approximately three (3) miles away from the subject property at a temporary location leased by the Applicant, Bright Star. Since 2016, the school has already moved once in order to accommodate its needs. The school's current location is limited in space with 16 classrooms and an enrollment of 380 students with a wait list. The proposed project would allow for VAES to have a larger capacity, with 28 classrooms and a maximum enrollment of 552 students. The proposed project would also allow VAES to have a permanent location which is close to the middle school and high school operated by Bright Star, thus completing its North Hills cluster. The middle school and high school are already permanent locations, so the location of the proposed elementary school is ideal to facilitate drop-offs and pick-ups of families with children in different schools and help ease the transition as students matriculate from one school to the next.

VAES is a public charter elementary school that has been serving the North Hills community for the past six years, providing free high-quality education to local families. The project site is currently developed with a historic single-family residence and otherwise vacant and unimproved land. The proposed project would be improving the land to align with the most recent Mobility Plan policies and Municipal Code requirements. Additionally, the project would be preserving and renovating the existing historic house. Previous renovations done to the house to date have not followed any preservation guidelines, but the project would follow the Secretary of Interior Standards to preserve any character defining features as advised by a qualified historic consultant and architect. The proposed project will be constructed with high quality materials and has been designed with respect to the Plummer Street frontage and existing character of the neighborhood.

Therefore, the project will enhance the built environment in the surrounding neighborhood and will perform a function that is beneficial to the community, city and region.

- 2. That the project's location, size, height, operations and other significant features will be compatible with and will not adversely affect or further degrade adjacent properties, the surrounding neighborhood or the public health, welfare, and safety.**

The project site is a relatively flat parcel of land consisting of two (2) adjoining lots, totaling approximately 89,629 square feet (approximately 2.06 acres) in size. The subject property fronts Plummer Street to the north and is further bound by Orion Avenue to the west, Sepulveda Boulevard to the east, and Vincennes Street to the south. The western lot (approximately 1.30-acres in size) is currently undeveloped and covered with grasses, shrubs,

and various mature trees. The eastern lot (approximately 0.76-acre in size) is currently developed with a one-story single-family residence with similar vegetation as the other lot. The on-site single-family residence located at 15526 West Plummer Street was built in 1914 and is listed in SurveyLA. Therefore, the residence is recognized by the City as having historic significance. The residence would remain on the site as part of the project but would be converted into additional administrative space for the proposed school.

The subject property is located in the North Hills area, an established suburban neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley developed mostly in the early- to mid-20th century. The site fronts the southerly side of Plummer Street where the property's front yard is located. The surrounding neighborhood primarily consists of low-density residential uses and single-family residences. The subject property is surrounded by single-family residences within the RA-1 Zone on the eastern, southern, and western sides. Properties to the north, across Plummer Street, are also zoned RA-1 and developed with single-family residences. Further out, a three-story multi-family apartment complex is located three parcels east which is adjacent to various commercial uses. Several parcels west of the project site is the 405 Freeway.

The project involves the construction, use, and maintenance of a new public charter elementary school campus for Valor Academy Elementary School ("VAES") with a maximum enrollment of 552 students for grades Transitional Kindergarten (TK) to Fourth grade. Project improvements include 28 classrooms within a new one- and two-story building, a multi-purpose room, and an existing house which will be preserved and incorporated as administrative and support space, as described above. Proposed buildings will total 36,157 square feet of gross floor area and rise to a maximum height of 26 feet and six (6) inches.

The project complies with all objective zoning standards and involves a use that is allowable in the RA-1 Zone with a Conditional Use Permit. The project's maximum building height is 26 feet and six (6) inches which is well within the 30-foot height limit of the site. The two-story portion of the school would be located at the center/interior of the site, at times up to 75 feet away from abutting properties, to provide privacy and not tower over adjacent residences. The project's proposed Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is 0.40 to 1 which is significantly less than the 3:1 FAR allowed on the site. The project's low building coverage and massing allows the project to fit harmoniously into the scale of the existing residential neighborhood and also provide abundant landscaping and open areas. The project meets required setbacks for the rear and side yards while exceeding the minimum setback in the front yard. The project is required to provide at least a 25-foot front yard setback but provides a minimum 31-foot setback to remain compatible with the existing single-family house and maintain the same feel as the prevailing Plummer Street frontage. The project is required to provide 28 parking spaces but exceeds this amount by 21 spaces for a total of 49 parking spaces. The project proposes a single long driveway that leads to a designated drop-off/pick-up area and surface parking lot located towards the rear of the site. The provision of parking and the proposed circulation plan are intended to ensure that traffic activities are streamlined within the site rather than on the adjacent public streets. In addition to the site planning of the project, an eight-foot block wall and tall hedges are proposed along the sides and rear property lines to buffer the school uses. Play areas with equipment are proposed towards the center of the campus where potential noise impacts will be buffered by buildings, fences, large setbacks, and landscaping.

Operation of the school will not result in a significant impact to the community. The project has been conditioned, including the imposition of mitigation measures, to minimize impacts onto the surrounding properties. The proposed school will not have bells, loudspeakers, PA systems, or any other type of intercom system which may cause potential noise impacts. All facilities will only be used during operating hours by students and staff of the school. Any potential environmental impacts have been analyzed thoroughly and mitigated to a less than significant extent.

As such, the project's location, size, height, operations, and other significant features will be compatible with and will not adversely affect or further degrade adjacent properties, the surrounding neighborhood or the public health, welfare, and safety.

3. That the project substantially conforms with the purpose, intent and provisions of the General Plan, the applicable community plan, and any applicable specific plan.

The subject property is located within the Mission Hills – Panorama City – North Hills Community Plan Area which is one of the 35 Community Plans that make up the Land Use Element of the General Plan. The Community Plan Area Map designates the subject property for Low Residential land uses corresponding to the RE9, RS, R1, and Zones. The project site was previously zoned (T)(Q) RE9-1, in accordance with the designated land use, but because the Zone Change was never effectuated, the subject property reverted back to its underlying RA-1 zoning. The property is not located within the boundaries of or subject to any Specific Plan, Community Design Overlay, or Interim Control Ordinance.

The Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) permits the use of public charter schools within the RA Zone with the approval of a Conditional Use Permit subject to certain findings. Therefore, the requested Conditional Use Permit for the proposed school use is permissible per the underlying zone and land use designation of the project site. The project is consistent with the following specific goal, objective, and policy of the Mission Hills – Panorama City – North Hills Community Plan:

GOAL 6: Appropriate locations and adequate facilities for schools to serve the needs of the existing and future population.

Objective 6-1: To site schools in locations complimentary to existing land uses, recreational opportunities and community identity.

Policy 6-1.1: Encourage compatibility in school locations, site layout, and architectural design with adjacent land uses and community character, and, as appropriate, use schools to create a logical transition and buffer between differing uses.

Policy 6-1.2: Site schools in a manner which compliments and preserves the existing stable single family and multiple-family residential neighborhoods.

GOAL 16: Preservation and restoration of cultural resources, neighborhoods, and landmarks which have historical and/or cultural significance.

The project is further consistent with other elements of the General Plan, including the Framework Element. The Framework Element was adopted by the City of Los Angeles in December 1996 and re-adopted in August 2001 and provides guidance regarding policy issues for the entire City of Los Angeles, including the project site. The Framework Element also sets forth a Citywide comprehensive long-range growth strategy and defines Citywide policies regarding such issues as land use, housing, urban form, neighborhood design, open space, economic development, transportation, infrastructure, and public services. The project supports the following goals, objectives, and policies of the Framework Element:

GOAL 9N: “Work constructively with LAUSD to promote the siting and construction of adequate school facilities phased with growth.”

Objective 9.32: “Work constructively with LAUSD to promote the siting and construction of adequate school facilities phased with growth.”

Policy 9.32.1: “Work with the Los Angeles Unified School District to ensure that school facilities and programs are expanded commensurate with the City’s population growth and development.”

Policy 9.32.2: “Explore creative alternatives for providing new school sites in the City, where appropriate.”

The project will enable Valor Academy Elementary School to continue to provide and expand a valuable public service for the region. The existing public charter elementary school currently operates out of a temporary leased location with a church. The current school is a much smaller facility with only 16 classrooms for an enrollment of 380 students with a waitlist. The proposed project will enable VAES to vacate its current location and establish an independent and permanent campus. The new campus will provide additional amenities, all of which will enhance the quality of education that is available to the community. The project will also enable the school to accept new students while growing into a larger facility and keeping the student to teacher ratio low. The location of the project is ideal for current students and families of those who attend the Bright Star middle and high school which are in close proximity. Thus, the project would serve the existing and future families in the neighborhood.

The project will be developed in a manner that meets all applicable zoning parameters, including setbacks, height, FAR, and parking. In many cases, the project will be developed far below the allowable development limits in order to keep the school in character and scale with the surrounding residential neighborhood. In addition, the existing single-family residence which is listed in SurveyLA as an eligible resource and designated as a Historical-Cultural Monument will be preserved and rehabilitated. The project will be repurposing the house as administrative space in accordance with the Secretary of Interior Standards to ensure that any contributing characteristics are not degraded. The proposed project will be a free public charter school that will both serve the community and maintain harmony with the existing built environment. The project has been conditioned to ensure compliance with all applicable regulations and to ensure that there will be no negative impacts on the surrounding community. Therefore, the project substantially conforms with the purpose, intent, and provisions of the General Plan.

Site Plan Review Findings

4. That the project is in substantial conformance with the purposes, intent and provisions of the General Plan, applicable community plan, and any applicable specific plan.

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proposed project will enable VAES to vacate its current location and establish an independent and permanent campus. The new campus will provide additional amenities, all of which will enhance the quality of education that is available to the community. The project will also enable the school to accept new students while growing into a larger facility and keeping the student to teacher ratio low. The location of the project is ideal for current students and families of those who attend the Bright Star middle and high school which are in close proximity. Thus, the project would serve the existing and future families in the neighborhood.

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5. That the project consists of an arrangement of buildings and structures (including height, bulk and setbacks), off-street parking facilities, loading areas, lighting, landscaping, trash collection, and other such pertinent improvements, that is or will be compatible with existing and future development on adjacent properties and neighboring properties.

The project involves the construction, use, and maintenance of a new public charter elementary school campus for Valor Academy Elementary School ("VAES") with a maximum enrollment of 552 students for grades Transitional Kindergarten (TK) to Fourth grade. Project improvements include 28 classrooms within a new one- and two-story building, a multi-purpose room, and an existing house which will be preserved and incorporated as administrative and support space. Proposed buildings will total 36,157 square feet of gross floor area and rise to a maximum height of 26 feet and six (6) inches.

The subject property is located in the North Hills area, an established suburban neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley developed mostly in the early- to mid-20th century. The project site is located midblock between Orion Avenue to the west and Sepulveda Boulevard to the east. The site fronts the southerly side of Plummer Street where the property's front yard is located. The surrounding neighborhood primarily consists of low-density residential uses and single-family residences. The subject property is surrounded by single-family residences within the RA-1 Zone on the eastern, southern, and western sides. Properties to the north, across Plummer Street, are also zoned RA-1 and developed with single-family residences. Further out, a three-story multi-family apartment complex is located three parcels east which is adjacent to various commercial uses. Several parcels west of the project site is the 405 Freeway.

Vehicular ingress and egress will occur off Plummer Street on the western portion of the site. The project will provide 49 on-site vehicular parking spaces within a surface parking lot and designated drop-off/pick-up area. The project will provide 16,366 square feet of landscaping and 50,228 square feet of paved area or hardscape which includes green spaces and recreation areas for students. A single pedestrian entrance will be located off Plummer Street through the main office near the preserved historic home. The project proposes an eight-foot-

high block wall along the side yards and rear yard. A fence and gates will be provided along the front yard (Plummer Street). The subject school will also have secondary fencing around the perimeter of the buildings to limit access to students, staff, and other authorized visitors onto the campus.

Height, Bulk, and Setbacks

The proposed project meets all objective height, FAR, and setback requirements per the underlying RA Zone and Los Angeles Municipal Code zoning. The project's maximum building height is 26 feet and six (6) inches which is well within the 30-foot height limit of the site. The two-story portion of the school would be located at the center/interior of the site, at times up to 75 feet away from abutting properties, to provide privacy and not tower over adjacent residences. The project's proposed Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is 0.40 to 1 which is significantly less than the 3:1 FAR allowed on the site. The project's low building coverage and massing allows the project to fit harmoniously into the scale of the existing residential neighborhood and also provide abundant landscaping and open areas. The project meets required setbacks for the rear and side yards while exceeding the minimum setback in the front yard. The project is required to provide at least a 25-foot front yard setback but provides a minimum 31-foot setback to remain compatible with the existing single-family house and maintain the same feel as the prevailing Plummer Street frontage. In addition to the arrangement of buildings, an eight-foot block wall and tall hedges are proposed along the sides and rear property lines to buffer the school uses. Play areas with equipment are proposed towards the center of the campus where potential noise impacts will be buffered by buildings, fences, large setbacks, and landscaping. Therefore, the height, bulk, and setbacks of the project are consistent with existing development in the immediate surrounding area and will be compatible with the existing and future developments in the neighborhood.

Parking

The project is required to provide 28 parking spaces but exceeds this amount by 21 spaces for a total of 49 parking spaces. Vehicular ingress and egress will occur off a single curb-cut and driveway off of Plummer Street on the western portion of the site. The project is designed with a single long driveway that leads to a designated drop-off/pick-up area and surface parking lot located towards the rear of the site. Once vehicles enter the property, cars will continue to loop around until reaching a right-turn only exit. The long drive aisle is designed to accommodate queuing on the property and locate drop-off and pick-up activities directly in front of the entrance to the school to keep students close to their play areas and classrooms, away from wandering onto the street. Conditions have also been imposed to require designated staff to monitor and manage traffic during morning and afternoon hours. The provision of parking and the proposed circulation plan are intended to ensure that traffic activities are streamlined within the site rather than on the adjacent public streets. As such, the parking facilities will be compatible with the existing and future development in the neighborhood.

Lighting

Lighting is required to be provided per LAMC requirements. The project proposes lighting at parking lot entrances and exits. The project is required to provide outdoor lighting with shielding, so that the light source cannot be seen from adjacent residential properties. The Project would also comply with LAMC lighting regulations that include the following: approval of street lighting plans by the Bureau of Street Lighting; limited light intensity from signage to no more than three foot-candles above ambient lighting; and limited exterior lighting to no more than two foot-candles of lighting intensity or direct glare onto specified sensitive uses,

under the terms of the LAMC Section 93.0117(b). Therefore, the lighting will be compatible with the existing and future developments in the neighborhood.

On-Site Landscaping

The project features landscaped areas and open recreation areas throughout the site. The project would include 16,366 square feet of landscaped area, in addition to two play areas (13,060 square feet) and a kindergarten play area (1,300 square feet) resulting in a total of 30,726 square feet of open space and landscaping. The project includes approximately 50,228 square feet of hardscape and paved areas. The existing conditions of the project site include 56 on-site trees/shrubs, of which four (4) are dead and will be removed. In addition, 41 trees/shrubs will require removal, which consist of nine protected native trees/shrubs and 32 non-protected significant trees. The project would retain 12 existing non-protected significant trees (two of which are street trees) and one protected native tree. Development of the project would result in the planting of 68 new trees on-site for a total of 79 trees including the existing trees. Existing mature trees were retained along the perimeter of the site where feasible. The project will feature extensive landscaping to both provide open green areas for the students as well as beautify views of the project from the public rights-of-way. Therefore, the on-site landscaping will be compatible with the existing and future developments in the neighborhood.

Loading/Trash Area

The project will provide a 400 square-foot loading area in accordance with the Municipal Code requirements. The loading area will be located along the primary driveway and designated pick-up/drop-off area for convenient access and queuing. The project provides a trash enclosure towards the rear of the site, adjacent to the multi-purpose room and contained within a five-foot-tall wrought iron fence. The provision of loading and trash areas will allow vehicles to have plenty of space to turn on-site and keep any truck traffic off of Plummer Street.

As such, as proposed, the project is compatible with existing and future development on neighboring properties.

6. That any residential project provides recreational and service amenities to improve habitability for its residents and minimize impacts on neighboring properties.

The proposed project does not contain any residential uses and thus this finding does not apply.

Environmental Findings

- 7. Environmental Finding.** Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15074(b), after consideration of the whole of the administrative record, including the Mitigated Negative Declaration, No. ENV-2022-5866-MND, circulated on November 23, 2022 ("Mitigated Negative Declaration"), and all comments received, with the imposition of mitigation measures, there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment.
- 8. Flood Insurance.** The National Flood Insurance Program rate maps, which are a part of the Flood Hazard Management Specific Plan adopted by the City Council by Ordinance No. 172,081, have been reviewed and it has been determined that this project is located in Zone C, areas of minimal flooding.