

Laurel Tree Charter School Coastal Development Permit Modification

Record Number: PLN-2021-17206

Assessor's Parcel Number: 511-401-039

RECOMMENDED COMMISSION ACTION:

1. Describe the application as part of the Consent Agenda.
2. Survey the audience and commissioners for any person who would like to discuss the application.
3. If no one requests discussion, make the following motion to approve the application as part of the consent agenda

Adopt the Resolution to: 1) Find that the Planning Commission has considered the Addendum to the adopted IS/MND, 2) make all of the required findings for approval of the Laurel Tree Charter School modification of Coastal Development Permit, 3) approve the project subject to the recommended conditions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

History of the site: The originally approved project included development of a church and private school in three phases (CDP-07-067 - New Heart Community Church). Re-zoning and The CDP did not become effective until the Coastal Commission approved the project on January 14, 2011. Three extensions have been applied for and approved. The first in 2012, the second in 2014, the third in 2018 (including a Modification), and the fourth in 2020 which was set to expire January 14, 2022. The CDP is not vested. The project was never built, and the parcel is vacant. New Heart Community Church sold the parcel to Laurel Tree Charter School, a public K-12 school, in 2021.

Current Project: Modification of the CDP to develop a vacant parcel with an outdoor-focused education facility to be operated by a public school (Laurel Tree Charter School) serving children from Kindergarten through High School. The school is expected to serve between 180 and 200 children with approximately 24 employees. The school will move locations from Valley West in Arcata to this location. The parcel to be developed is approximately 4.5 acres in size and is served by public water and sewer.

Parcel Characteristics/Baseline Conditions: The parcel is vacant and is comprised of disturbed grasslands. It is located along the western boundary of the Murray Road southbound off-ramp of Highway 101. The Hammond Trail also borders the eastern boundary of the site. The parcel is part of the Pacific Sunset Subdivision: a neighborhood of three streets and 38 other parcels, all of which have single-family residences. The subject parcel was re-zoned to Public Facility Urban and its planning designation was changed to Public Facility in 2011 with approval of the Coastal Commission.

Proposed Facilities: The main buildings include: seven (7) 36 feet by 48 feet passive solar design classroom pods with two 980 square feet classrooms per pod with 6 restrooms and outdoor storage in central location, kitchen/office/janitorial building with classroom, and 16 foot by 24 foot barn with 4 single occupancy restrooms at north end of building with electrical and hose bib. Outdoor features include: a 16 foot by 50 foot outdoor kitchen, a children's stage with 40 foot conex box for storage/backstage space, 30 foot by 80 foot hoop house with hose bib, a 20 feet by 30 feet covered bike/skateboard/scooter storage, trash enclosure, impervious basketball court, tree fort area, 30 foot by 30 foot outdoor workspaces to have wind or solar power, 233 cubic yard capacity pond, access path to the Hammond Trail, entry fence with 2 automatic rolling gates, 8,400 square feet of pervious surface, gated walking path from Hammond Trail, gated entry to fire pit, and a sidewalk along Ledru Ave. The proposed permeable parking lot with 53 spaces includes 5 electric vehicle spaces and 3 accessible spaces, and a drive aisle for pick up and drop off.

Small Events: The outdoor stage/play area will host student presentations and creative plays. The space will also serve as venue for periodic small theatrical productions of student work. These types of events are expected to occur in the evening from 6-8pm, approximately 3-4 times a year. Events ordinarily include a potluck and attendance by approximately 80 parents is anticipated. The basketball court may be used for overflow parking for special events.

Daily Schedule: Designed to stagger arrival/departure times (180 students total and 24 staff)

7:00-8:00 before care available – some students arriving early

8:00- Primary students can be in classrooms. (most primary students arrive between 8:00 and 8:30)

8:30 School starts for primary, Kindergarten/1st (100 students)

9:00 School starts for middle and high school (80 students)

1:00 Kindergarten/1st pick up (30 students)

3:00 Primary (70 students) dismissed

3:30 Middle school (40 students) dismissed

3:45 High School (40 students) dismissed

5:30 After care ends

PUBLIC AGENCY REFERRAL: The project was referred to relevant agencies in June 2021.

The Department of Public Works recommended the consideration of using Ledru Avenue as a pick up and drop off point to keeping traffic flowing. Public Works is requiring that the applicant construct a sidewalk on Ledru Ave and Springer Drive along the front of the parcel. The applicant will be responsible for maintaining the proposed trail connection to the Hammond Trail, and be required to dedicate a public trail easement for the proposed trail connection to the County. The project shall comply with MS4 requirements as well.

Public Works responded that the school should consider using the residential side streets for pick up and drop off as the property has frontage on those roads. A loop using Ledru to Springer to Fortune would keep traffic flowing and allow parents to pick up and drop off students along the Ledru frontage.

Caltrans expressed concerns of queues backing up on Murray Road and potentially blocking the southbound 101 off-ramp. Caltrans suggested considering using the Murray Road driveway for ingress and having an egress point out Ledru Ave. They also recommended improvements to Murray Road for better bike and pedestrian connectivity and safety.

Public Works noted that when conditions warrant, they will consider the implementation of Caltrans' recommendations.

All other referral agencies and departments that responded approved the project.

CEQA: An Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (State Clearinghouse Number 2008092066) was circulated in May 2008, attached as Attachment 3, and adopted in December 2008. An addendum was prepared analyzing the effects of the modification, per §15164 of the State CEQA Guidelines. The addendum is attached as Attachment 4. There are no anticipated impacts to the environment that cannot be mitigated to a less than significant level.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS: Based upon the on-site inspection, a review of Planning Division reference sources, and comments from all involved referral agencies, public comments, and conditions of approval, Planning staff finds that the project will not result in a significant impact on the environment if mitigation measures are incorporated and conditions of approval are met. The applicant has submitted evidence in support of making all of the required findings for approval. Staff recommends conditional approval of the project.

The applicant has expressed that they do not want to have an access point on Ledru Avenue due to neighbor concerns. Their site plan reflects this: both ingress and egress are using the existing Murray Road driveway. During the New Heart Community Church approval process, neighbors expressed concern for impacts to their neighborhood from the church, and did not want the church to have access from Ledru Avenue. The design of the church did not have Ledru Ave as an access point, and only used the Murray Road driveway for ingress and egress.

Planning staff recommends approving the site plan with the driveway on Murray Road as opposed to the access off of the residential side streets as recommended by both Cal-Trans and Public Works because the more commercial/institutional traffic on the residential side streets has the potential to be detrimental to the neighborhood's existing welfare. There is no indication that the access on Murray Road would cause any significant adverse impacts to public safety.

ALTERNATIVES: The Planning Commission could elect not to approve the project, or to require the applicant to submit further evidence, or modify the project. Modifications may cause potentially significant impacts, additional CEQA analysis and findings may be required. These alternatives could be implemented if the Commission is unable to make all of the required findings.

Staff prepared an environmental analysis for the original approval which included preparation of an IS/MND pursuant to the CEQA Statute (Public Resources Code 21000–21189) and Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000–15387), and has prepared an addendum to the IS/MND for the current project that did not find any potential impacts that cannot be mitigated to a less than significant level. The Commission could also decide the project may have environmental impacts that would require further environmental review pursuant to CEQA. Staff did not identify any potentially significant unmitigable impacts.