

# CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

SPR FILE # 18-117-556

APPEAL FILES # 19-012-615, 19-012-718

1. **APPLICANT:** Rehder and Associates on behalf of Twin Cities German Immersion School
  2. **TYPE OF APPLICATION:** Site Plan Review **CC HEARING DATE:** 06/05/2019
  3. **LOCATION:** 1031 Como Ave (between Argyle and Churchill)
  4. **PARCEL SIZE:** 77,471 sf, plus 6,020 sf for half the alley (approx. 1.92 acres)
  5. **PLANNING DISTRICT:** 10 – Como Park Planning Council **PRESENT ZONING:** R4
  6. **ZONING CODE REFERENCE:** §61.402(c) *Site plan review and approval.*
  7. **STAFF REPORT DATE:** 06/05/2019 **BY:** Tia Anderson
  8. **DATE RECEIVED:** 10/23/2018 **DEADLINE FOR ACTION:** 6/08/2019 (MN 15.99 Deadline)
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A. **PURPOSE:** Site Plan for a 3-story, 23,500 square foot building addition to an existing school, play area and stormwater management. The proposed site plan includes removal of a portion of the existing building and east surface parking lot on the site.

B. **EXISTING AND SURROUNDING LAND USE:**

K – 8 school with 587 students and 80.5 FTE staff

North: R4 single-family and duplex

East: R4 single-family and multi-family

South: R4 single-family and institutional

West: R4 single-family

C. **HISTORY/DISCUSSION:**

A complete Site Plan application was submitted on October 23, 2018. A Site Plan Review (SPR) Committee meeting was held for the proposed project on November 13, 2018, and subsequent staff feedback provided on December 13, 2018, January 30, 2019, and May 29, 2019 (see file for Committee Reports and Status Update Memos). SPR Committee staff have signed-off on the Site Plan with revisions dated May 21, 2019, pending Approval of the Site Plan with Conditions.

On June 4, 2019, the Department of Safety and Inspections received a complete application from TCGIS for a Shared Building Use and Parking Agreement for 15 off-street parking spaces with the church at 1040 Como Ave. Parties to a shared parking agreement shall submit an annual statement to the Zoning Administrator to verify no changes have occurred that would require additional parking.

Site Plan Review is a function delegated by the Saint Paul Planning Commission to City staff, however, a Site Plan may be referred to the Planning Commission for public hearing and decision. Appeals of the Planning Commission procedure and decision on the Site Plan were received by Kevin Anderson (on behalf of Friends of Warrendale – Save Historic Saint Andrews LLC) and District 10 Como Community Council.

The property is currently developed with a K – 8 school. The applicant is proposing a new 3-story, 23,500 sf building addition for classrooms, gymnasium and cafeteria, as well as an expanded play area and underground infrastructure to manage stormwater run-off from the building addition. The proposed site plan is predicated on removal of the existing Aula (former church) building and east surface parking lot.

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D. **FINDINGS:** §61.402(c) of the Zoning Code says that in “order to approve the site plan, the planning commission shall consider and find that the site plan is consistent with” the findings listed below:

1. *The city's adopted comprehensive plan and development or project plans for sub-areas of the city.* The site plan meets this finding. The *Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan* provides mixed guidance with policies supporting preservation of historic resources, collaboration with schools, and redevelopment.

The HPC has found that the former St. Andrew’s Church meets the legislative criteria (Sec. 73.05) for designation, indicating the value of the church as an historic resource. The Historic Preservation Chapter includes the following specific provision:

- 4.3. Protect undesignated historic resources.

The proposed site plan is consistent with the Land Use Chapter of the *Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan*. The area is a mix of residential and institutional uses and a K – 8 school is a permitted use within the R4 Zoning District. Zoning Code does not differentiate by type of school, e.g., public, private, immersion, neighborhood. Minnesota charter schools are public schools and part of Minnesota’s public education system.

The Land Use Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan acknowledges the importance of education institutions in providing “opportunities for Saint Paul and its residents as well as for those who work in the city.” It also acknowledges that “education facilities often provide an identity for specific areas of the city.” The Land Use Chapter includes the following specific provision:

- LU 1.55: Collaborate with public and private elementary and secondary schools in conjunction with construction or major remodeling.

The proposed development is consistent with the *Como Park Community Plan* Goals:

- The stable, residential quality of the neighborhood will be maintained with limited, sensitive development and re-development that enhances the residential quality of the neighborhood.
- The neighborhood will be home to a variety of small and medium sized businesses and institutions offering desirable products and services close to home.
- The introduction to the Housing and Land Use chapter identifies that based on the lack of vacant land, “opportunities for development and re-development will by necessity involve the re-use or replacement of current structures.”

2. *Applicable ordinances of the City of Saint Paul.*

The site plan as proposed requires variances to meet this finding. The following standards in the R4 zoning district for density, setbacks, height, parking, and design apply:

- §66.216 – Intent, R4 one-family residential district.
- §66.230 – Residential District Density and dimensional standards.
- §66.232 – Maximum lot coverage.
- §63.207 – Parking requirements by use.
- §63.110 – Building design standards.

*Type of Use:* Schools are a permitted use. The R1—R4 one-family residential districts provide for an environment of predominantly low-density, one-family dwellings along with civic and institutional uses, public services and utilities that serve the residents in the districts.

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*Setbacks:* The site plan meets the minimum setbacks. In R4 the minimum front and rear setback is 25'. The minimum side setback requirement is 9' for non-residential uses.

*Height:* The site plan does not meet the maximum building height of 3 stories and 30' in a R4 district. Building height is measured from the established grade to the top of the roof deck. The project is proposing a variance for a building height up to 33' 1".

*Lot Coverage:* The site plan does not meet the maximum 35% lot coverage in a residential district. The project is proposing a variance to allow 36% lot coverage (30,290 sf building area / 83,491 sf lot area including half the alley).

*Parking:* The site plan does not meet the minimum off-street parking requirement based on one space per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employee. The project is proposing a 34 space parking variance based on expected 86.5 staff FTEs (fractional spaces including .5 are disregarded). The site plan includes: 1) 25 existing surface off-street vehicle parking spaces, 2) addition of 3 off-street parking spaces in the existing west parking lot; 3) removal of 7 off-street parking spaces in the east parking lot, 4) one required bicycle parking space plus excess bicycle parking of 36 spaces, which allows for a 10% parking reduction, and 5) proposed shared parking for 15 off-street parking spaces with an adjacent church at 1040 Como Ave.

*Design standards:* Staff has reviewed the site plan in relation to the building design standards and found that all relevant standards are met.

3. *Preservation of unique geologic, geographic or historically significant characteristics of the city and environmentally sensitive areas.*

The site plan meets this finding. The proposed use is permitted in a R4 one-family residential Zoning District, which provides for uses that serve the residents in the districts. The existing Aula (former church) structure is proposed for removal as part of the site plan. At this time the property is not currently designated as historical.

At an HPC public hearing on November 5, 2018, the Commission voted that the former St. Andrew's church is eligible for local designation as a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site. The application is in progress with a final decision to be determined by the Saint Paul City Council.

4. *Protection of adjacent and neighboring properties through reasonable provision for such matters as surface water drainage, sound and sight buffers, preservation of views, light and air, and those aspects of design which may have substantial effects on neighboring land uses.*

The site plan meets this finding. The effect of this specific proposed building on neighboring properties is reasonable. Specific to the findings:

- The stormwater system meets City standards for run-off rate control. The system will consist of pipes buried below grade located on the east side of the building in the proposed play area. In addition, roof drainage shall meet plumbing code requirements.
- The building addition is oriented to the south side of the property towards the street frontage. The building's proposed setbacks meet or exceed the zoning requirement, providing a reasonable distance from the abutting homes.
- The proposed site plan adheres to §63.110 – Building design standards, including delineation of a primary entrance, direct pedestrian connection to the street, building materials, minimum window and door openings, and reducing visual impact of rooftop equipment.
- The setback area to the east is proposed to replace parking with a play area and coniferous

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trees along the street frontage. Existing boulevard trees will be protected where possible and new boulevard trees will be planted as required.

- The east property line is currently screened with a wood fence along the alley and chain link fence along the play area. The proposed development offers an opportunity to provide a more durable, opaque fence of sufficient height and density to visually separate the screened activity from adjacent property and to help improve the existing sound and sight buffer. Any fence will need to meet minimum Zoning Code requirements for a visual screen and site triangle requirements for vehicles using the alley.
- Off-street parking is proposed to increase from existing based on a Shared Parking Agreement with the adjacent church at 1040 Como Ave and additional bicycle parking. Refuse and recycling will continue in its existing location with alley pick-up.

5. *The arrangement of buildings, uses and facilities of the proposed development in order to assure abutting property and/or its occupants will not be unreasonably affected.*

The site plan meets this finding. The existing use is a K – 8 school with 585 current student enrollment. The building addition will allow for classroom space for up to three sections per grade level (648 students). The total staff FTE is expected to increase from 80.5 to 86.5.

As a buffer to abutting residential properties, the building addition is centered in the middle of the parcel with a 25' front setback and side yard setbacks of approximately 75' to the east and 80'+ to the west. Fencing along the east and landscaping along the southeast property lines will visually separate the building and play area from the abutting property.

6. *Creation of energy-conserving design through landscaping and location, orientation and elevation of structures.*

The site plan meets this finding. A new building addition shall meet current building and energy codes. The building is oriented to the south corner of the site and exceeds the minimum amount of glazing on all sides, allowing the building to gain solar heat.

The proposed development is located within two blocks minor arterial streets (Lexington Pkwy and Como Ave) with good public transit and off-street bicycle paths, and adjoining Van Slyke Ave is an enhanced bicycle route, making the area conducive to walking, biking, and using public transit rather than driving.

7. *Safety and convenience of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic both within the site and in relation to access streets, including traffic circulation features, the locations and design of entrances and exits and parking areas within the site.*

The site plan meets this finding. A Traffic Impact Study (TIS) was prepared by Spack Consulting; Public Works Transportation Planning and Safety Division is in general agreement with the results of the TIS dated 1/15/2019. Implementation of the TIS recommendations are in progress between City Staff and TCGIS.

The school's traffic operations are an existing concern. Regardless of whether the building expansion happens or not, underlying issues with traffic and pedestrian safety remain; the school, District 10 Como Community Council, and City will need to work together to optimize safety on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, there is no one answer, but rather a continuous improvement process with multiple incremental changes to be made, assessed and modified as needed to improve operations in and around the site.

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TIS recommendations that require changes to the public realm, including a marked pedestrian crossing on Como Ave at Oxford St and time-of-day parking restrictions, shall be implemented as part of the site plan. Public Works Traffic Engineering staff have an existing and ongoing role working with schools to assess and implement changes to improve safety.

The site plan includes an existing surface parking lot with 25 spaces, proposed bike racks for at least 37 bicycles, and accessible sidewalks along Como Avenue. The proposed removal of an existing parking lot and curb cut on the east side of the building reduces potential pedestrian and vehicle conflicts on site. On-street parking is permitted on adjoining and nearby streets.

The proposed development is located within two blocks minor arterial streets (Lexington Pkwy and Como Ave) with good public transit and off-street bicycle paths, and adjoining Van Slyke Ave is an enhanced bicycle route, making the area conducive to walking, biking, and using public transit rather than driving.

8. *The satisfactory availability and capacity of storm and sanitary sewers, including solutions to any drainage problems in the area of the development.*

The site plan meets this finding. The utility connections are shown on Sheet C2. Water, Sanitary and Storm sewer services are available in Como Avenue.

Stormwater from the building addition will be piped to a new underground detention system. There's an existing stormwater system under the west parking lot for run-off of the existing site. Stormwater shall go out to the public storm sewer in Como Ave at a controlled rate that meets City standards. Drainage maps and HydroCAD modeling to meet the City's stormwater run-off rate control standards were reviewed and approved.

9. *Sufficient landscaping, fences, walls and parking necessary to meet the above objectives.*

The site plan as proposed requires an off-street parking variance to meet this finding. The site plan does not meet the minimum off-street parking requirement based on one space per Full Time Equivalent employee (86 spaces required, 34 space deficiency). However, off-street parking is proposed to increase from existing based on a Shared Parking Agreement with the adjacent church at 1040 Como Ave and additional bicycle parking.

The setback areas to the southeast shall be landscaped and the east will be used for a play area and stormwater management. A new obscuring fence is proposed along the east property line to visually separate the play areas from the abutting property. Existing boulevard trees will be protected where possible and new boulevard trees planted as required.

10. *Site accessibility in accordance with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including parking spaces, passenger loading zones and accessible routes.*

The site plan meets this finding. The plan proposes accessible parking that meets ADA standards. Required accessible entrances and routes shall be provided per accessibility code. The public sidewalks have accessible crossings.

11. *Provision for erosion and sediment control as specified in the ``Ramsey Erosion Sediment and Control Handbook.''*

The site plan meets this finding. The site plan includes an erosion and sediment control plan that meets this standard.

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## E. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings above, the staff recommends approval of the site plan to allow a 3-story building addition to an existing school, play area and stormwater management at 1031 Como Ave. with the following conditions:

1. Approval of requested variances for building height and lot coverage.
2. Approval of the requested variance for 34 off-street parking spaces, or submittal of a plan that meets Zoning Code off-street parking requirements.
3. Install an obscuring fence at least 80% opaque and 6' in height along the length of the east property line to buffer the abutting properties.
4. Traffic Impact Study solution recommendations requiring changes to the public realm, including a marked pedestrian crossing on Como Ave at Oxford St and time-of-day parking restrictions, shall be implemented as part of the site plan. Public Works Traffic Engineering and the applicant shall assess additional operational and engineering solutions to improve safety; the school shall implement prescribed solutions as directed by Public Works.