

Staff Report

Saint Paul Planning Commission
Zoning Committee

Zoning Application: Sandbox School CUP

Location	0 Empire Dr, at the end of the Empire Drive cul-de-sac
Application Type	Conditional Use Permit
Applicant	Saint Paul Public Schools
Request	Conditional use permit (\$61.501) for an outdoor trade school in an I2 (\$66.500) zoning district
Staff Recommendation Summary	Approval
District Council Recommendation	Frogtown Neighborhood Association has not submitted a recommendation as of this writing.
Public Hearing Date	September 25, 2025
Deadline for Action	November 22, 2025
Staff	Chris Hong, 651-266-6572, chris.hong@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Parcel Information

PIN	31-29-22-22-0123
Legal Description	Lot 1, Block 3, Empire Builder Industrial Park No. 2
Parcel Size	1.38 acres
Existing Land Use	Vacant land
Zoning	I2 general industrial
Surrounding Land Use	North: Railroad tracks (I2), auto parts store (I2) East: Office building (I2), light manufacturing (I2) South: Office building (I1), credit union (I1) West: Vacant industrial land (I1, I2), light manufacturing (I1, I2)
2040 Future Land Use Designation	Industrial
History	The site was zoned to I2 general industrial in 1975.

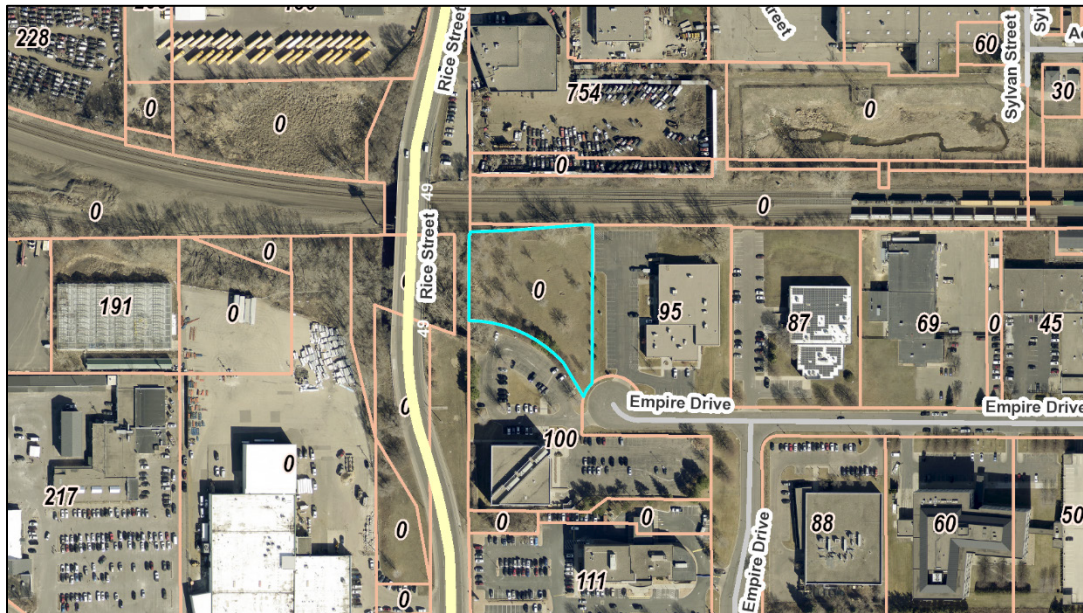


Figure 1. Aerial Map of Subject Parcel

Applicant Request

The zoning application requests a conditional use permit for an outdoor trade school in an I2 general industrial district. Section 66.520 indicates that trade schools are a conditional use requiring a conditional use permit in the I2 zoning district.

Saint Paul Public Schools is leasing the subject parcel from the Port Authority of the City of Saint Paul to construct the proposed “heavy machinery sandbox” training facility and provide heavy equipment training offered in partnership with the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49. Classes will be offered on-site 2 – 3 days per week.

Zoning Analysis

Conditional Use Permit Standards:

Zoning Code § 61.501 lists five standards that all conditional uses must meet.

- (a) *The extent, location and intensity of the use will be in substantial compliance with the [Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan](#) and any applicable subarea plans which were approved by the City Council.*

The condition is met. The subject parcel is identified as Industrial in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. This land use designation typically supports uses that create employment opportunities. However, the proposed use would provide direct training for industrial jobs, thus preserving the intent of industrial land. Policy LU-46 states that industrial land should be protected from conversions to residential or institutional uses. A recommendation for the proposed conditional use permit to only apply to trade schools would prevent the CUP from being used by a more typical classroom school and uphold this policy.

(b) The use will provide adequate ingress and egress to minimize traffic congestion in the public streets.

This condition is met. Students will be picked up and dropped off together on a school bus. Street parking is available for instructors along Empire Drive. No one else is expected to access the site.

(c) The use will not be detrimental to the existing character of the development in the immediate neighborhood or endanger the public health, safety and general welfare.

This condition is met. The heavy equipment to be used at the school is in keeping with the industrial nature of the area. The subject parcel is lined with mature trees on three sides, creating a visual screen and buffering the surrounding area from potential noise and dust. The side of the parcel that is more open shares a lot line with Local 49, SPPS' partner in the proposed project.

(d) The use will not impede the normal and orderly development and improvement of the surrounding property for uses permitted in the district.

This condition is met. The proposed use will not prevent future development that is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and existing zoning. No building – institutional or otherwise – is being constructed for the use and the use itself is compatible with future industrial uses.

(e) The use shall, in all other respects, conform to the applicable regulations of the district in which it is located.

This condition is met. The Applicant is not requesting any variances for the site.

Action

Recommended Motion

Move to adopt the staff recommendation to approve a conditional use permit for an outdoor trade school in an I2 zoning district at 0 Empire Drive.

Additional Options

- Deny the conditional use permit
- Add conditions
- Lay over

Any motion should be supported by the findings. This may require changes in the staff-recommended findings.



CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT APPLICATION

Department of Planning and Economic Development
Zoning Section
1400 City Hall Annex, 25 West Fourth Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102-1634
(651) 266-6583

Zoning Office Use Only

File # _____
Fee Paid \$ _____
Received By / Date _____
Tentative Hearing Date _____

APPLICANT

Name Independent School District 625, Saint Paul Public Schools
(must have ownership or leasehold interest in the property, contingent included)
Address 360 Colborne Street City Saint Paul State MN Zip 55102
Email [REDACTED] Phone 651-744-1800
Name of Owner (if different) Saint Paul Port Authority Email [REDACTED]
Contact Person (if different) Darryl Pratte Email [REDACTED]
Address 1930 Como Avenue City Saint Paul State MN Zip 55108

PROPERTY INFO

Address/Location 0 Empire Drive, Saint Paul, MN
PIN(s) & Legal Description 312922220123
(attach additional sheet if necessary)
Empire Builder Industrial Park No. 2, Ramsey County Lot Area 1 Current Zoning Block 3

TYPE OF PERMIT: Application is hereby made for a Conditional Use Permit under provisions of Zoning Code


Section(s) 65.811(b), 65.812, 66.513 and Table 66.521 for the following use or purpose:

to construct a heavy machinery sandbox training facility which includes a sand area for heavy equipment training, to be used in conjunction with an educational training program for high school students offered in partnership with The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49 for students to learn skilled trades.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION: Explain how the use will meet all of the applicable standards and conditions for the use. If you are requesting modification of any standards or conditions for a conditional use, explain why the modification is needed and how it meets the requirements for modification of special conditions in Zoning Code § 61.502. Attach additional sheets if necessary.

The I2 general Industrial District is intended primarily for manufacturing, assembling and fabrication activities, including large scale or specialized industrial operations whose external effects will be felt in surrounding districts. The I2 district permits the manufacturing, processing and compounding of semi-finished products from raw material and prepared material. The processing of raw material in bulk form to be used in an industrial operation is a permitted use in the I2 district.

Per Table 66.521. Industrial District Uses: a School or Trade school is a Conditional use in District I2 with no additional standards or conditions. To the extent the activity on site - moving sand around - is considered General Outdoor Processing per Sec. 65.812, then it is a Conditional use with standards and conditions. Those standards and conditions are met as follows:

- (a) It is at least three hundred (300) feet from a residential or traditional neighborhood district boundary.
- (b) It will be conducted, operated and maintained in accordance with any necessary permits of the state pollution control agency, the county and the city.
- (c) The required site plan and narrative describing the measures applicant will take to contain on the property any dust, odor, noise or other potentially adverse effects are attached. 

☒ Required site plan is attached

☐ If you are a religious institution you may have certain rights under RLUIPA. Please check this box if you identify as a religious institution.

Applicant's Signature Jonathan Pettigrew

Digitally signed by Jonathan Pettigrew
DN: cn=US, email=jpettigrew@epd.org, o=Saint Paul Public Schools, ou=Facility Planning
Date: 2025.07.24 18:18:05-0500

Date July 25, 2025



Saint Paul Public Schools / Operating Engineers Pathway Sandbox Project Narrative

August 21, 2025

Introduction

Saint Paul Public Schools, with support from the Local 49 and Minnesota Virtual Academy, is launching the Operating Engineers Pathway for 12th grade students in Fall 2025.

Students will take a series of 4 classes for high school elective credit, articulated college credit, and earn hours toward an apprenticeship in heavy machines operating. Hands-on learning is an integral part of this career pathway and the sandbox will provide invaluable opportunities for the students since no other learning sandbox exists in the Twin Cities.

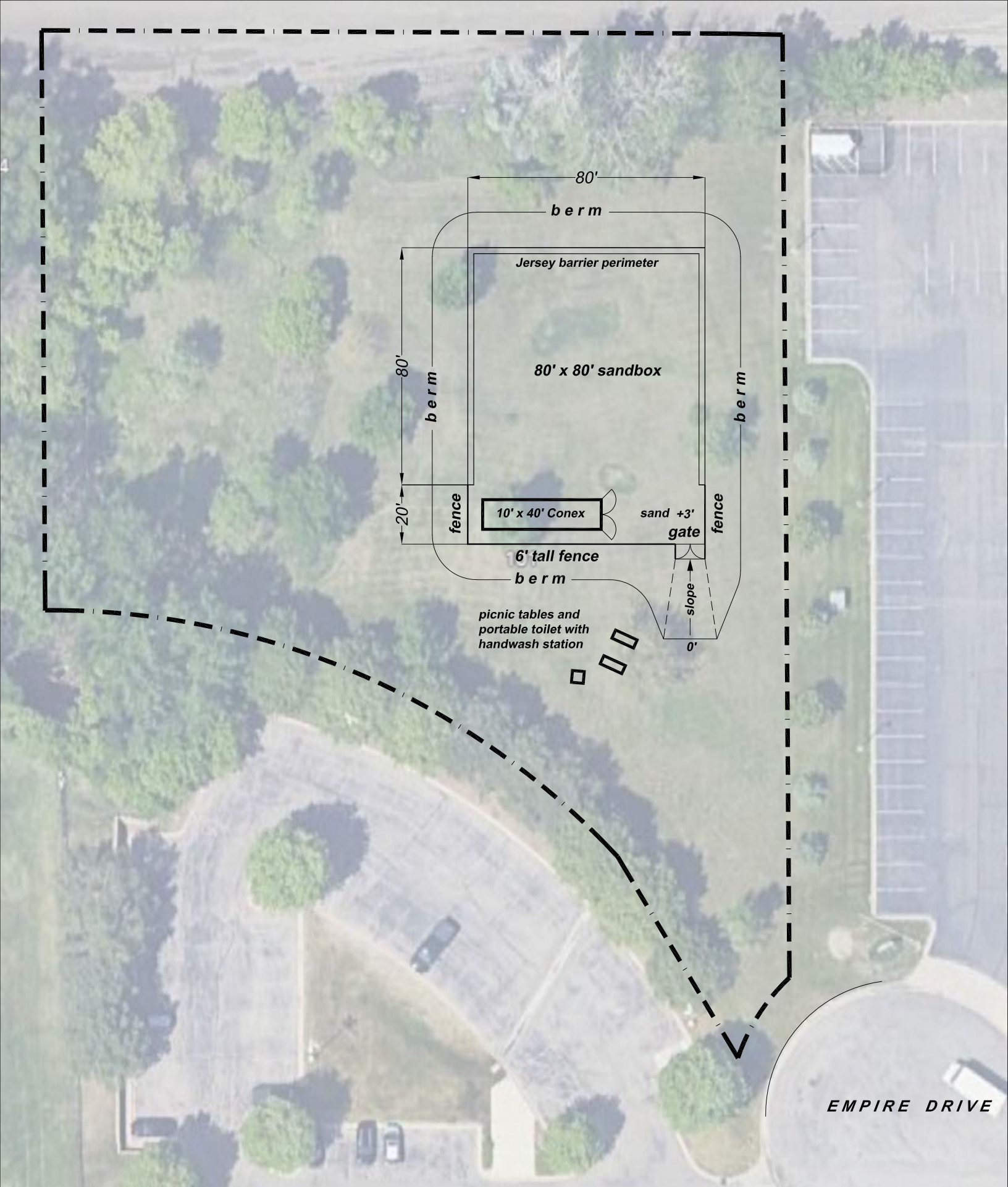
Community impact of this new pathway includes: supporting workforce needs in the St. Paul area and opportunities for collaboration and support from local industry partners who have already expressed enthusiasm and financial support for this project.

Description of Operations

All equipment will be stored and locked in Conex boxes when not in use. Equipment will include 2 skid steers and 1 compact excavator. Because the equipment is relatively "small" and will be used during limited hours, no noise issues are anticipated. Trees on the perimeter of the site should minimize both noise and visual disturbance to adjacent neighbors. Additional site elements include some picnic tables and a portable toilet with a handwashing station.

Students will access the site during their class period. Students will use the Sandbox classroom 2-3 days per week approximately mid to late September through late November, and then again from early March through the end of the school year (weather permitting).

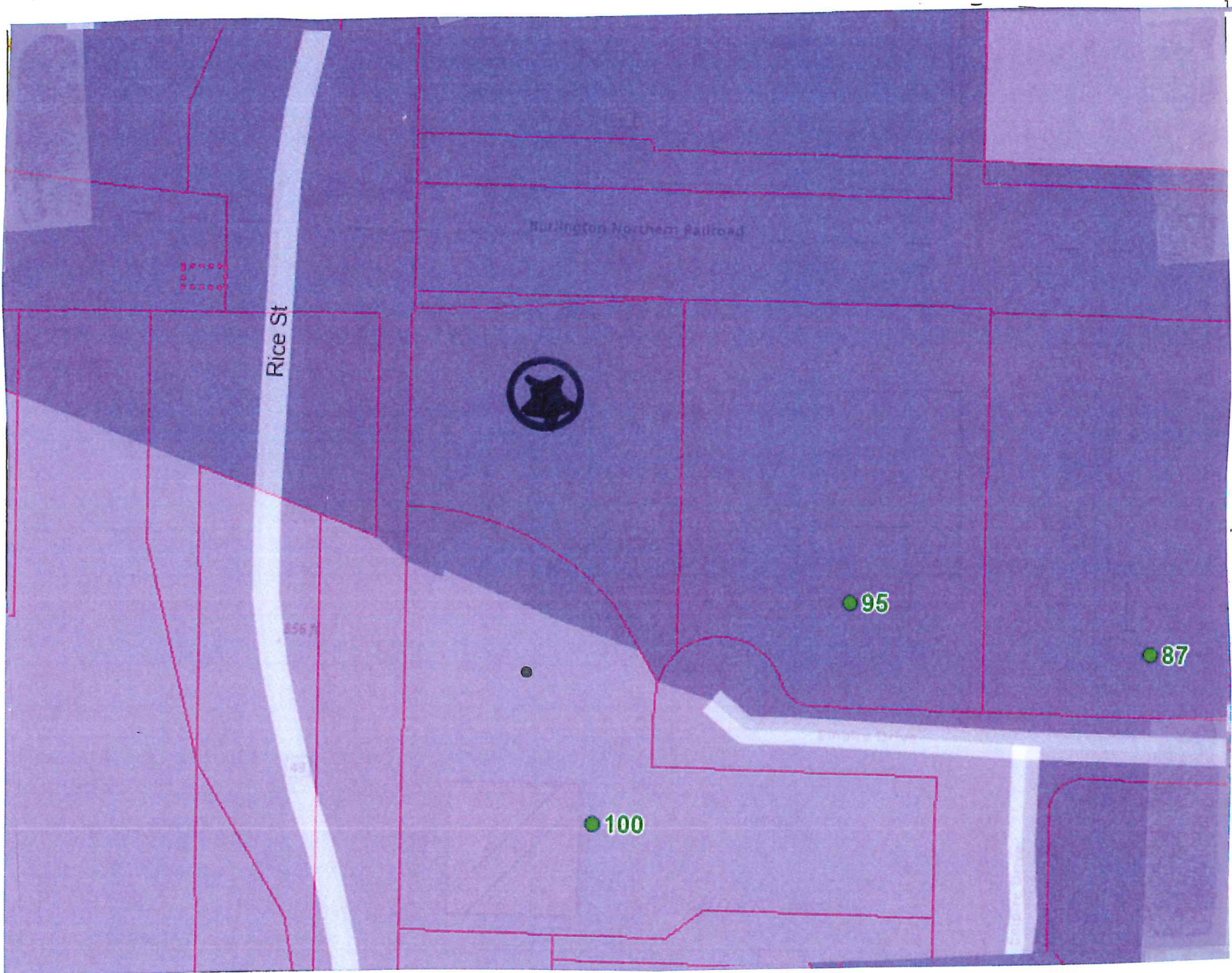
Bus access, for drop-off and pick-up, will be in the cul-de-sac area on Empire Drive. A total of up to 10 cars will make use of the street parking along Empire Drive.



Application of
Independent School District 625, Saint Paul Public Schools
Aerial map



Application of
Independent School District 625, Saint Paul Public Schools
Zoning map



Subject parcel(s) are outlined in blue

Other parcels are outlined in pink

RL One-Family Large Lot
H1 Residential
H2 Residential
RM1 Multiple-Family
RM2 Multiple-Family
RM3 Multiple-Family

T1 Traditional Neighborhood
T2 Traditional Neighborhood
T3 Traditional Neighborhood
T3M T3 with Master Plan
T4 Traditional Neighborhood
T4M T4 with Master Plan
OS Office-Service
B1 Local Business
BC Community Business (converted)
B2 Community Business

B3 General Business
B4 Central Business
B5 Central Business Service
IT Transitional Industrial
ITM IT with Master Plan
I1 Light Industrial
I2 General Industrial
I3 Restricted Industrial

F1 River Residential
F2 Residential Low
F3 Residential Mid
F4 Residential High
F5 Business
F6 Gateway
VP Vehicular Parking
PD Planned Development
CA Capitol Area Jurisdiction



SAINT PAUL
PLANNING & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

0 70 140 280 420 560
Feet