



Item No: 1
Meeting Date: 2/28/2012

To: Planning Commission

Date: 2/16/2012

Submitted By:

Authorized By:

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Ronald Munekawa
Ronald Munekawa, Chief of Planning
Planning Division

Subject: PA 11-056 Congregational Church of San Mateo Special Use Permit and SPAR
225 Tilton Avenue, (APN: 032-294-100)

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Commission approve the project by making the following motions:

- A. Approve the Categorical Exemption from environmental guidelines, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, Class 1 Section 15301 (e) Existing Facilities, based upon the Findings for Approval in Exhibit A; and
- B. Approve the Special Use Permit for the ongoing operation of a religious institution, the establishment of a 500 niche columbarium within a memorial garden and the use of off-site parking based upon the Findings for Approval in Exhibit A and subject to the Conditions of Approval in Exhibit B.
- C. Approve the Site Plan and Architectural Review planning application for a 230 square foot addition on the south side of an existing church sanctuary building and a 59 square foot enclosure of the current wheelchair access entrance on the north side of the sanctuary based upon the Findings for Approval in Exhibit A and subject to the Conditions of Approval in Exhibit B.

BACKGROUND

The Congregational Church of San Mateo (CCSM) was founded in 1863 and is located on its original site at 225 Tilton Avenue. CCSM, a member of the United Church of Christ denomination, is a leading voice of Progressive Christianity on the Peninsula. With approximately 550 adult members, CCSM has indicated they are a growing church focused on inspirational worship, extensive children's programming and a strong commitment to social justice. The Church holds one Sunday morning worship service with other church-related activities and events during the week and special events during the year.

CCSM's campus, located on the north side of Tilton Avenue between San Mateo Drive and Ellsworth Avenue, includes the church sanctuary, offices, meeting rooms, kitchen and social hall (Kloss Hall) and the Christian Education (CE) Building (see Attachment 1 for a location map). An on-site apartment is occupied by the church's property caretaker. A parking lot, with 47 spaces, is located north of the buildings and accessed from Catalpa Street. Two small, fenced playgrounds adjoin the CE building. Their use is reserved for church member children and the two child development centers located in the building. A full description of the scope of the existing church operations is included as Attachment 2.

Portions of the CE Building (at the corner of Tilton Avenue and Ellsworth Avenue) are shared with Little Wonders (non-profit) and Muslim Garden School. These child development and education centers operate Monday through Friday between the hours of 9:00 am and 5:00 pm. Each is limited to 20-24 on-site students at a time, plus teachers and parent volunteers. School uses do not require a Special Use Permit in the E2 zoning.

The Church and adjacent parking lot are located on three separate parcels that include the church buildings on one lot and the parking located on two adjacent parcels. Attachment 3 provides a plot map that shows "parcel one" which includes the church buildings and "parcel two" and "parcel three" which contain a parking lot with 47 parking spaces. The parking has always been associated with the Church and the parcels were combined into a single Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) for tax purposes only.

The project site is 1.3 acres. The General Plan land use designation is Executive Office. The Zoning Classification is E2 (Executive Office) with a maximum floor area ratio of 1.5. The project site is located with the Northwest Heights Planning Area.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION & DISCUSSION

Church Sanctuary Building Addition: The sanctuary, at the northeast corner of San Mateo Drive and Tilton Avenue, was built in 1931 and was extended closer to San Mateo Drive in 1955. The sanctuary has had relatively few changes since being extended in 1955. The architecture is an example of the Spanish colonial revival style popular in California during the first decades of the 20th century. The proposed project is focused on two main objectives related to the sanctuary area of the campus:

1. ADA-compliant accessibility and visibility improvements to the sanctuary.
2. Creation of a memorial garden, including labyrinth and columbarium, north of sanctuary.

The addition consists of a 230 square foot addition on the south side of an existing church sanctuary building to accommodate the proposed lift and chancel (the area around the altar and chair seating) storage and a 59 square foot enclosure of the current wheelchair access entrance on the north side of the sanctuary. A full description of the addition, including a detailed discussion of the basis for the proposed improvements to improve disabled access, is included as Attachment 4. The project plans are included as Attachment 5.

The addition to the south side of the structure has been designed at a scale that is in keeping with the proportions of the building, reminiscent of a small side chapel. The addition is designed to echo the octagon shape of the chancel walls facing San Mateo Drive and includes cut-out features which complement the design of the existing side windows. The smaller addition on the north side of the sanctuary will not change the existing roofline and footprint of this space. This modified entrance,

which includes a bay window and small vestibule, will connect to a more permanent outdoor covered ramp that will lead from the front of the sanctuary to the restroom/office hallway and proposed Memorial Garden. The existing building Floor Area Ratio is 0.51, which is below the maximum permitted FAR of 1.5 (Attachment 6).

This property is classified as "Potentially Eligible for Inclusion on the National Register." The Historic Resources form prepared in 1989 is attached as Attachment 7. General Plan Policy C/OS 8.1 and Zoning Code Section 27.66.040 require all exterior modifications of individually eligible and contributor buildings (e.g., exterior building additions and alterations) to conform with the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Structures. Specifically, these Standards stipulate that:

"New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment."

The applicant has submitted documentation from the historic architect, Architectural Resources Group, Inc., detailing how the project- including the wall and new garden area- complies with the Secretary of Interior's Standards and does not cause any substantial impacts to the historic resource value of the church complex (Attachment 8). As required by the Guidelines, the design of the southern building addition differentiates itself from the original through detailing such as the use of a belt course, cast stone parapet and stucco bas-relief panels. The addition on the northern side of the sanctuary affects an area that has already been modified numerous times over the years, and the work is not considered to affect historic fabric. Staff is supportive of the project as proposed and agrees with the conclusions of the Architectural Resources Group, Inc.

Memorial Garden and Columbarium: The proposed Memorial Garden will be located immediately north of the sanctuary. This space currently includes two heritage oak trees, a stucco wall and wooden gate facing San Mateo Drive, a metal storage shed, blacktopped area and basketball hoop. The project proposes replacement of the stucco wall and gate approximately 30 feet closer to San Mateo Drive, removal of the storage shed and blacktop, preservation of the heritage oak trees, and the addition of an enclosed, secure and well-lit garden with fountain, seating areas, labyrinth and columbarium. The new wall enclosures and gate facing San Mateo Drive will be similar in design to the existing wall and gate. The impact of the proposed improvements on the two heritage oak trees (which will be retained) was evaluated by Arborwell, who recommended specific construction measures to minimize compaction and root damage in the root zone of the trees (Attachment 9). These recommended measures will be required to be met during construction as a condition of approval.

The Memorial Garden will provide an outdoor space that stimulates reflection, comfort, peace, conversation, and various ways to remember loved ones. Approximately 300 niches (individual and family) are planned for the columbarium and their use will be reserved for members and friends of CCSM. The north wall, east of the proposed fountain, will be constructed to enable an additional 200 niches over time, for a grand total of 500 niches.

The proposed project has been reviewed and approved by the City's Police Department with security concerns addressed. This will not be a public columbarium. While access to the garden is secure, it will be accessible to the community during church office hours and Sundays on a limited schedule. As a condition of approval, the columbarium will be closed, at a minimum, from sunset to 7:00 am. The garden will be completely secured by fencing with two entrances proposed. The gate fronting San Mateo Drive will be open on Sundays and for scheduled events. The gate accessed from the church parking lot (entered from Catalpa) will be open on a limited basis to the public during church office hours. Both gates will be locked during the hours of closure. Low voltage lighting is also proposed for the memorial garden, including motion sensors to keep the area safe and secure. The on-site property caretaker monitors the campus on a nightly basis and will also be checking the safety and security of the memorial garden/columbarium.

No additional staffing is proposed for maintenance and use of the columbarium. A management plan will be developed by Church staff to provide legal standing, policies, processes, records management, and accountability. A columbarium construction firm will be under contract to assist CCSM in the design and construction of the niches. Niche and memorial wall inscriptions will be performed by a selected local tradesperson. The transport and internment of ashes will be performed by CCSM staff and one of a group of trained members. CCSM staff do not anticipate the columbarium having a significant impact on use of the property or resulting in an increase in scheduled events. Some small gatherings and memorial services that currently take place in the sanctuary may move to the garden as an optional venue.

No increase in memorial services is anticipated due to columbarium existence. Currently memorial services occur inside the CCSM buildings, and usually in the sanctuary. In 2011, there were eight memorial services conducted at CCSM. In 2010, there were five memorial services held on campus. When the Columbarium is completed, some of the memorial services will include internment (placement of secured boxes containing ashes of the deceased) into the secured and owned niche through a small private ceremony that would take place fully inside the confines of the memorial garden during operating hours.

Parking: Since the required parking for the church is not on the same parcel as the building and therefore considered "off-site" even though the parking looks and operates like it is part of the church property and is owned by the Church, approval of a Special Use Permit for off-site parking is required per Zoning Code Section 27.64.060 "Control of Off-Street Parking Facilities." No changes are proposed to the parking lot, nor will the small sanctuary addition or new columbarium require any increase in parking needs as a result. The offsite parking is an existing condition that has been in place since the parking was constructed in the 1950s. The Zoning Code requires that all required parking spaces shall be within a walking distance of five hundred feet of the use served. The parking spaces serving the Church are within this distance and share the same Executive Office zoning as the church parcel. The parcels that contain the parking are currently owned by the Church and have been improved and designed to clearly serve as Church parking. An Agreement & Deed Restriction, Restrictive Covenant & Equitable Servitude was prepared that must be recorded against all three affected parcels before issuance of a building permit for the proposed improvements (Attachment 10). This agreement will serve to ensure that there is a binding legal requirement that the two parcels that contain the parking remain under the same possession and ownership as the church building parcel or if not, that the City may utilize all available remedies necessary to bring it into full conformance with the City's parking requirements. The legal agreement has been reviewed by the City Attorney's office and agreed to by all parties.

ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE:

The proposed project is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines section 15301(e), Existing Facilities, since the project involves a small addition to an existing structure.

PUBLIC OUTREACH/COMMENTS:

In accordance with Government Code section 65090, notice of this hearing was published in the Examiner newspaper 10 days before the hearing. In accordance with Government Code section 65091 and the City's Municipal Code noticing requirements, this hearing was noticed to the following parties ten days in advance:

- A total of 1,001 property owners, residential tenants and business tenants within 500 feet of the project site.
- The City's "900 List" which contains nearly 100 Homeowner Associations, Neighborhood Associations, local utilities, media, and other organizations interested in citywide planning projects.

No public comments were submitted on the project. The applicant held a neighborhood meeting on August 30, 2011.

EXHIBITS

- A. Findings for Approval
- B. Conditions of Approval

ATTACHMENTS

1. Location Map
2. Description of Church Use for Special Use Permit
3. Parcel Map
4. Description of Proposed Project
5. Reduced Project Plans
6. Data Form
7. Historic Resources Inventory Form, City of San Mateo, 1989
8. Historical Evaluation, ARG, November 15, 2011
9. Arborist Report, Arborwell, October 25, 2011
10. Agreement & Deed Restriction, Restrictive Covenant & Equitable Servitude (for off-site parking)

CC (AR and attachments)

Applicant
ARG - Architect