



Congregational Church of San Mateo

Special Use Permit - Church Use with Addition of Columbarium

December 1, 2011

On September 16, 2011, our Planning Application was submitted for accessibility improvements to the church's sanctuary and the creation of a memorial garden with labyrinth and columbarium. The associate planner's comment list, dated October 13, 2011, stated that the City couldn't locate records for a Special Use Permit for the church use, which is currently required in the E2 zoning district. Though the property should be "grandfathered" for the existing "church use", our interest in establishing a columbarium is considered an expansion of the Church operations, requiring this application for a Special Use Permit.

CURRENT CHURCH USE DESCRIPTION:

Church Operations - 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 is a growing church focused on inspirational worship, extensive children's programming and a strong committee to social justice. Locally, CCSM is a supportive partner of Home and Hope Shelter, Homework Central, KYROS Ministry, Little Wonders Parent Cooperative, The Garden School, Peninsula Interfaith Action and San Francisco Night Ministry. Internationally, CCSM supports Habitat for Humanity Mozambique, Mother of Peace Orphanage in Zimbabwe, two sponsored Sudanese Refugees currently studying in Uganda, and a library and orphanage in Nepal.

Facilities - 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. 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.

Staffing - CCSM staffing consists of five full-time employees and ten part-time employees, including choir directors, youth leaders, Music School and administrative staff. Office hours are Monday through Friday (8:00 am to 4:30 pm). The KYROS Ministry also has an office in the church, with one full-time employee.

Services - Sunday Morning Worship is held at 10:30 am. Attendance ranges from 250 to 400 on a typical Sunday morning. This includes 70 to 90 children and teachers who attend the first portion of the service and then go to church school in the CE Building for the remainder of the hour. A social "coffee hour" takes place in Kloss Hall after worship each Sunday (normally from 11:40 am to 12:30 pm) with 60-70% of the worship attendees participating.

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We anticipate moving our worship services to Kloss Hall during construction of the accessibility improvements to the sanctuary. Two Sunday morning services will be conducted during this period given the smaller capacity of Kloss Hall. While this is viewed as a temporary solution, the church has discussed adding a second sanctuary service sometime in the future as worship attendance continues to grow. Sanctuary seating capacity will be reduced after construction, with the removal of four pews in the back of the church to accommodate the expanded narthex and accessibility ramp.

Weekly Events - Weekly choir practice occurs Wednesday evenings (20-30 in attendance). The bell choir rehearses on Thursday evenings (10-15 in attendance). The campus has a number of meeting rooms used by church committees and affinity groups on a monthly or “as needed” basis. Attendance at these gatherings can range from five to 100, based on the group involved. On a typical week, this may result in three or four more daytime or evening events being scheduled on the campus.

Less Frequent Events - In a typical year, CCSM will also conduct small midweek Lenten services, a Sunday afternoon concert series, three to four weddings and five to eight memorial services. Two or three times per year, events are held on the lawn between the sanctuary and Kloss Hall (usually after worship services). Attendance at concerts, weddings and memorial services is usually between 100 and 250 individuals. Receptions may be held afterward in Kloss Hall.

This past summer, CCSM, in partnership with Muslim Garden School, Yaseen Foundation, and Peninsula Temple Beth El, developed and hosted Peace Village San Mateo. The aim of this five-day summer camp was to educate children about other faiths and how to solve problems peacefully instead of resorting to violence. 40 students and 15 counselors participated in the program.

Home and Hope Shelter - CCSM is one of sixteen participating congregations on the Peninsula that host this rotating family homeless shelter. For one week, every couple of months, Kloss Hall is transformed into a welcoming home for less fortunate families in our community. Members of the congregation provide hospitality, meals, children’s activities, support and shelter. Typically there are ten to fifteen hosted guests and three to five volunteer church members on site.

Other Uses of Property - 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, as on file and reported annually to the County of San Mateo, California Secretary of State and the State Board of Equalization. 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.

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SPECIAL PERMIT USE – PROPOSED COLUMBARIUM DESCRIPTION:

Columbarium Plans - The columbarium is a feature of the proposed Memorial Garden planned for the area immediately north of the sanctuary (fronting on San Mateo Drive). The Memorial Garden will provide an outdoor space that stimulates reflection, comfort, peace, conversation, and various ways to remember loved ones.

Currently this space contains a storage shed (which will be removed), blacktop area with basketball hoop and limited landscaping around two heritage oak trees. The oak trees will be prominent features of the memorial garden, which will also include a labyrinth, fountain, memorial remembrance wall and the proposed columbarium.

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. 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.

Per city code, the columbarium will be closed, at a minimum, from sunset to 7:00 am. Two entrances are proposed for the memorial garden. 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 is being developed 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. We do not anticipate the garden 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.

Parking Plans - CCSM's parking plan was submitted and approved by the City as part of our last permit process (Permit No. 21590, approved on 4/1/2004). Please reference current plans and original plans submitted as part of that permit application (A1.1 and engineered drawings C1 and C2). 44 full-size parking spaces and 3 handicapped parking spaces are provided in this plan. No changes are proposed to the parking lot, nor do we envision any increase in parking needs as a result of this application.