



Agenda Report

MEETING DATE: Tuesday, April 5, 2022

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR MERRIAM
PRINCIPAL PLANNER JUSTIN MEEK, AICP

SUBJECT: PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL
TO ALLOW THE PERMANENT ESTABLISHMENT OF A 525-
STUDENT CHARTER SCHOOL ON A 2.1± ACRE SITE LOCATED
AT 215 LOCUST STREET (APN 017-161-51)

STATEMENT OF ISSUES

The applicant proposes to allow the permanent establishment of a 525-student charter school for grades 6-12 at Ceiba College Preparatory Academy in an existing 27,000± square-foot building with an 8,500± square-foot mezzanine, previously used as storage for Nordic Naturals and a shipping facility for DHL International, on a 2.1± acre site located at 215 Locust Street (APN 017-161-51). Project entitlements consist of a General Plan Map Amendment, Zoning Map Amendment, and Special Use Permit with Environmental Review (App #1737).

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission:

- (a) Adopt a Resolution recommending that the City Council approve a General Plan Map Amendment and Zoning Map Amendment (App #1737) to change the land use designation from Industrial to Public/Quasi-Public and corresponding Zoning District from General Industrial (IG) to Institutional (N) for the property with Assessor's Parcel Number 017-161-51.
 - (b) Adopt a Resolution recommending that the City Council approve a Special Use Permit with Environmental Review (App #1737) to allow the permanent establishment of a 525-student charter school for grades 6-12 in an existing 27,000± square-foot building with an 8,500± square-foot mezzanine on a 2.1± acre site located at 215 Locust Street (APN 017-161-51).
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BASIC PROJECT DATA

Application: App #1737

Location: 215 Locust Street (formerly 260 West Riverside Drive) (APN: 017-161-51)

Lot Size: 2.1± acre

General Plan: Industrial
Zoning: General Industrial (IG)
Surrounding: Industrial in the IG Zoning District (east & south), Residential Low Density in the Single-Family Residential Low Density (R-1) Zoning District (north & west)

Existing Use: Charter school for grades 6-12
Proposed: Charter school for grades 6-12
Surrounding: Industrial, residential (single-family dwellings)

Flood Zone: The project site is within the 100-year floodplain with a base flood elevation of 28 feet (FEMA Flood Map Panel 0394E, Map No. 06087C0394E, revised May 16, 2012)

CEQA Review: The project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), in that the project would not result the change, intensification or expansion of an existing use and the allowance of an existing school use on a permanent basis would not result in a significant effect on the environment (CEQA Guidelines §§ 15301(Class 1) & 15061(b)(3); PRC § 21080).

Applicant: Elizabeth Sanborn Falcon with Benchmark Realty Advisors for Ceiba College Preparatory Academy, 215 Locust Drive, Watsonville, CA 95076
Owner: Spinnaker Ventures LLC c/o Skip Ely, 1729 Seabright Avenue, Suite A, Santa Cruz, CA 95062

BACKGROUND

Founded in 2008, Ceiba College Preparatory Academy is a public charter school serving more than 500 students.¹ For its first five years Ceiba operated out of two locations in downtown Watsonville. In 2013, Tom Brown on behalf of Ceiba proposed to relocate the school to its current location under one roof. Ceiba planned on leasing the building on a temporary basis while they looked for a permanent location for purchase.

On June 4, 2013, the Planning Commission of the City of Watsonville adopted Resolution No. 08-13, approving Special Use Permit with Environmental Review (PP2012-251), to allow establishment of a 525-student charter school in a vacant 27,000± square-foot industrial building at 260 West Riverside Drive (APN 017-161-51). This action allowed Ceiba to use the premises for a period of up to 10 years while a permanent school site is identified for purchase.

Upon careful review of the Planning Commission's approval of the project in 2013, it has been determined that key information provided in the staff report were erroneous, such as the procedural discussion allowing the issuance of a Special Use Permit for a school use in the IG Zoning District. In addition, evidence provided in support of making required findings lacked appropriate policy and impact analyses. Attachment 3 memorandum describes the procedural

¹ Ceiba website, <https://www.ceibafoundation.org/story> (visited on February 15, 2022).

errors in listing a school use as allowed conditionally in the IG Zoning District with issuance of a Special Use Permit.

In October 2013, Ceiba was issued a Building Permit (BP2013-185) for converting the existing industrial building into a school, including adding an 8,500± square-foot mezzanine, toilet rooms, bearing and non-bearing walls, HVAC system, and electrical power and lighting upgrades. Subsequent tenant improvements to the building include new gas service (EP2014-38), fire sprinkler upgrades (FP2014-36), classroom alternations (BP2018-45), new and relocated fire pendants based on new ceiling and classroom partitions (FP2018-62), new smoke and fire alarms (FP2018-76), new carport with solar panels (BP2019-185), and replacement paving and wall studs due to water damage (RP2020-7).

On May 27, 2021, Elizabeth Sanborn Falcon with Benchmark Realty Advisors on behalf of Ceiba College Preparatory Academy, applicant, and Spinnaker Ventures LLC, property owner, submitted an application for a General Plan Map Amendment (to change the site's land use designation from Industrial to Public/Quasi-Public), Zoning Map Amendment (to change the site's zoning designation from IG to N for Institutional), and Special Use Permit (App. No. 1737) to allow the existing school use to remain permanently.

PROCESS

Overview

The applications to amend the General Plan Land Use Diagram and Zoning Map require review and recommendation by the Planning Commission to the City Council, pursuant to Part 7 (Amendment to General Plan) and Part 8 (Amendment to the Zoning Code and Map) of WMC Chapter 14-12 (Zoning Permits) of the Watsonville Municipal Code (WMC). The establishment of a school use in the N Zoning District is allowed with approval of a Special Use Permit with Environmental Review. These applications are combined as one for review and recommendation by the Planning Commission to the City Council.

Amendment to the General Plan Land Use Diagram

The provisions of the General Plan text and the General Plan Land Use Diagram may be amended by the Council by resolution and according to procedures established in WMC Chapter 14-12 whenever the public necessity, the general community welfare, and good zoning practices permit such amendment. [WMC § 14-12.700](#).

Any proposed amendment to the General Plan Land Use Diagram shall be reviewed by the Planning Commission, at a public hearing noticed in accordance with Part 9 of WMC Chapter 14-10 and conducted in accordance with Part 10 of WMC Chapter 14-10, for recommendation to the City Council. At the conclusion of the public hearing, the Commission shall adopt a resolution, recommending approval or denial of the proposed amendment, by the affirmative vote of the majority of the Commission members, subject to findings required by [WMC Section 14-12.708](#).

Upon forwarding the Commission recommendation, such recommendation shall be accompanied by a complete report of the Commission's action prepared by the Community Development Department, including a summary of the hearing, its findings, and a copy of the Commission resolution, minutes, along with any other pertinent material or information which

will assist the Council in making its final determination in the matter. [WMC § 14-12.706](#). Upon receipt of the Commission's recommendation, and before adopting any amendment, the Council shall review the matter at a public hearing noticed in accordance with Part 9 of WMC Chapter 14-10 and conducted in accordance with Part 10 of WMC Chapter 14-10.

At the conclusion of the public hearing, the Council shall adopt a resolution approving or denying the proposed amendment, subject to findings set forth in WMC Section 14-12.708.

Amendment to the Zoning Map

The provisions of Title 14 and the Zoning Map may be amended by the Council by ordinance and according to procedures established in WMC Chapter 14-12 whenever the public necessity, the general community welfare, and good zoning practices permit such amendment. Pursuant to [WMC Sections 14-12.802](#) through [14-12.807](#), the map of the adopted Zoning Code may be amended in the same manner as the General Plan Land Use Diagram.

Special Use Permit

Pursuant to [WMC Section 14-16.802\(a\)\(6\)](#), a public or private educational facility, such as a public charter school for grades 6-12, is allowed conditionally in the N Zoning District with issuance of a Special Use Permit. The Planning Commission is typically the decision-making body for considering a Special Use Permit application. The Planning Commission is authorized to approve Special Use Permits in accordance with the procedures set forth in WMC Sections 14-12.509 through 14-12.512. However, as the application involves changes to the City's General Plan Land Use Diagram and Zoning Map, which are required in order to approve the Special Use Permit, the City Council will make the determination on the Special Use Permit and the Planning Commission will make a recommendation to the City Council for approval or denial of the Special Use Permit concerning the proposal to allow Ceiba to remain permanently at its current location.

The purpose of the Special Use Permit is to ensure the proper integration of uses which, because of their special nature, may be suitable only in certain locations or zoning districts or only if such uses are arranged or designed in a particular manner. [WMC § 14-12.500](#). This special review shall be for the purpose of determining that the proposed use is, and will continue to be, compatible with surrounding, existing, or planned uses; and for the further purpose of establishing such special conditions as may be necessary to ensure the harmonious integration and compatibility of uses in the neighborhood and with the surrounding area. [WMC § 14-12.501](#).

The Planning Commission in recommending, and the City Council in making a final decision, shall render its decision based on making findings in [WMC Section 14-12.513](#) and conditions necessary to make the use compatible with surrounding uses. If the appropriateness of the use cannot be assured at the proposed location, the application for a Special Use Permit shall be denied as being incompatible with existing uses or uses permitted by right in the district. [WMC § 14-12.510](#).

Two of the basic criteria guiding the Planning Commission in discharging its function are the "compatibility between the proposed development and adjacent development and neighborhoods" and "protection of the health, safety and general welfare of the citizens of the City." [WMC § 14-10.800](#).

The concept of public welfare is broad and inclusive. Were the Planning Commission to determine, based on substantial evidence, that it could not make the finding that the project is compatible with adjacent development or protects public health, safety and welfare, then it could not recommend to the City Council approval of the project. The failure to find this or any one of the required findings would cause denial of the requested Special Use Permit.

Environmental Review

The California Environmental Quality Act requires local and state governments to consider the potential environmental effects of a project before making a decision on it. CEQA's purpose is to disclose the potential impacts of a project and suggest methods to minimize those impacts. Certain classes of projects, however, have been identified that do not have a significant effect on the environment, and are considered categorically exempt from the requirement for the preparation of environmental documents. [State CEQA Guidelines § 15300](#). In addition, a project is exempt from CEQA if the activity is covered by the commons sense exemption (i.e., CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment). Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA. [State CEQA Guidelines § 15061\(b\)\(3\)](#).

STANDARD OF REVIEW & APPEAL PROCESS

Whether a particular decision is adjudicative or legislative determines the requirements to support the decision. Legislative decisions involve the adoption of broad policies applicable to many situations (for example, general plan and zoning amendments). Legislative decisions generally require few, if any, findings.

Adjudicative (or “quasi-judicial”) decisions, on the other hand, are not policy decisions. Adjudicative/quasi-judicial decisions apply already adopted policies or standards to individual cases, such as a variance or conditional use permit application. Adjudicative/quasi-judicial decisions are based on evidence and must always be supported by findings.²

The proposed General Plan Map Amendment and Zoning Map Amendment are legislative decisions as they involve amending the General Plan Land Use Diagram and Zoning Map for the site. These legislative decisions require certain findings, as set forth in [WMC Section 14-12.708](#).

The remaining decisions before the Planning Commission—a Special Use Permit—is an adjudicative/quasi-judicial decision and requires findings, either for denial, or as recommended, for approval and be supported by substantial evidence. *Toigo v Town of Ross* (1998) 70 Cal App 4th 309

If the Planning Commission's decision is appealed, the City Council will consider whether the action taken by the Planning Commission was erroneously taken and may sustain, modify or overrule Planning Commission's action. In order for the Planning Commission's decision to be overturned on appeal, the City Council must find that the action taken by the Planning

² Quasi-judicial decisions require the decision-making body to take evidence and use its judgment to make factual as well as legal determinations about whether a particular property or project meets the standards established by the land use ordinance.

Commission was erroneous and inconsistent with the intent of the Zoning District regulations that regulate the proposed action. [WMC § 14-10.1106](#).

DISCUSSION

Existing Site

The project site is a single 2.1± acre parcel located at 215 Locust Street (formerly 260 West Riverside Drive). Built in 1999, the existing 27,000± square-foot building was once used as storage for Nordic Naturals and a shipping facility for DHL International, and since 2014 has been used by Ceiba as a 525-student charter school for grades 6-12. Driveways provide vehicle access from Locust Street and Riverside Drive (SR 129). The site includes small outside eating and play areas, 53 parking stalls, lighting, fencing, a trash enclosure, and stormwater drainage facilities (Attachment 2).

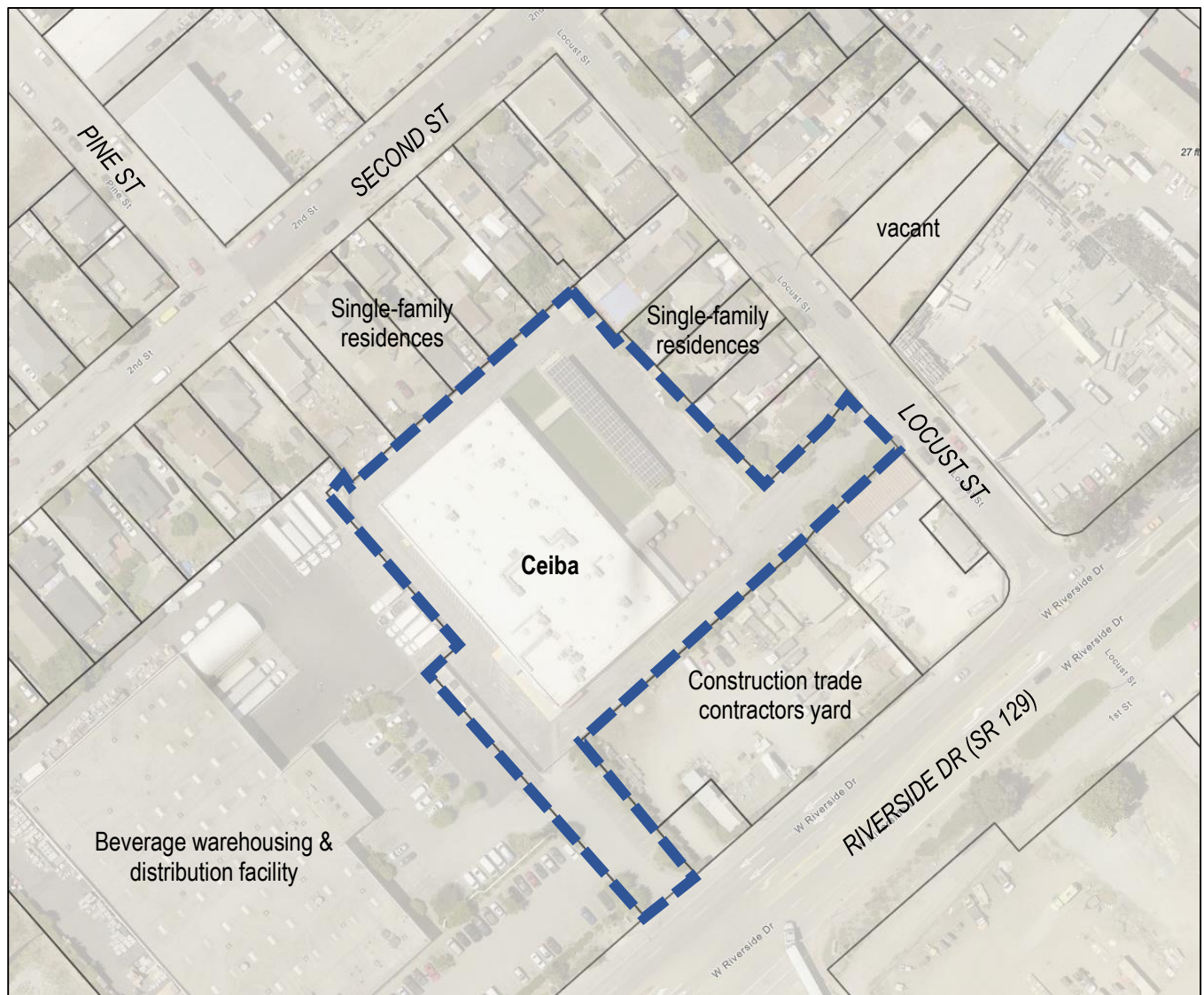


FIGURE 1 Aerial view of the project site and surrounding area

Source: Watsonville GIS Viewer, 2022

The surrounding area is a mix of industrial and residential development. Adjacent and to the west and south of the site are existing industrial businesses on land designated for industrial use, including the Elyxir distribution beverage business at 270 West Riverside Drive, Superior Hydroseeding, Inc. at 250 West Riverside Drive, and Oliveira Plastering at 209 Locust Street. To the north and east of the project site are existing single-family residences fronting Locust and 2nd Streets.

The site and much of the surrounding area is within the 100-year floodplain. It is a FEMA designated Special Flood Hazard Area with a base flood elevation (BFE) of 28 feet. The ground surface is nearly flat and ranges from approximately 24 to 28 feet. The school building's first floor and the lowest elevation of equipment servicing the building is 28.2 feet (Attachment 4).

Proposed Project

The applicant proposes to obtain approval for Ceiba to remain at 215 Locust permanently. The project does not involve, at this time, any additional development or improvements on- or off-site. However, Ceiba representatives have indicated an interest in converting nearby vacant land at 228-234 Locust Street (APNs 017-162-15 and -16) into additional outside play areas.³

The existing school has a student body of 525 students (in grades 6 through 12) and 63 staff members, 15 percent of which are part time. Current operations are 7:30 AM to 5:00 PM five days a week with occasional weekend and evening events.

According to the applicant, students of driving age are not allowed to park onsite and approximately 20 percent of staff carpool.

General Plan / Zoning Amendment

The project site is designated Industrial on the General Plan Land Use Diagram and is within the General Industrial (IG) Zoning District. The intent of this land use designation is to serve the industrial needs of the community and the purpose of the IG Zoning District is to provide and protect an environment which will encourage sound industrial development. The IG Zoning District regulations are intended to facilitate industrial operations to the highest degree while protecting the district and adjacent land uses, persons, and property from excessive noise, odor, dust, dirt, smoke, vibration, heat, glare, heavy traffic, and other objectionable influences and from fire, explosion, fumes, radiation, and other hazards. [WMC § 14-16.600](#). General categories of allowed uses include both nonmanufacturing and manufacturing industrial uses, such as wholesale sales, manufacturing research and development, heavy commercial, construction and trade contractors, food processing, lumber and wood products, and general manufacturing.

Public and quasi-public uses, such as elementary, junior and high schools, are not intended to be located in areas of the City designated for industrial uses. In addition, elementary, junior high and high schools are not an allowed use in the IG Zoning District. These types of educational facilities, however, are allowed in areas designated as Public/Quasi-Public on the General Plan Land Use Diagram and zoned Institutional (N). Since Ceiba was permitted to establish at the site on a temporary basis, has made substantial improvements to the existing building, and has not found another site for purchase, the proposed amendments to the General Plan Land Use Diagram and Zoning Map would enable the formal recognition of the existing school use on the

³ According to nearby residents, this unimproved land is used informally for recreational activities.

premises. Therefore, the project includes changing the site's land use designation and zoning as follows:

- Genera Plan: Industrial → Public/Quasi-Public
- Zoning: IG (General Industrial) → N (Institutional)

The purpose of the Public/Quasi-Public designation is to allow government or quasi-public buildings or facilities, including schools. Educational facilities for school-age children are allowed in N Zoning District with issuance of a Special Use Permit and may be operated by a public or private entity. [WMC § 14-16.802\(a\)\(6\)](#).

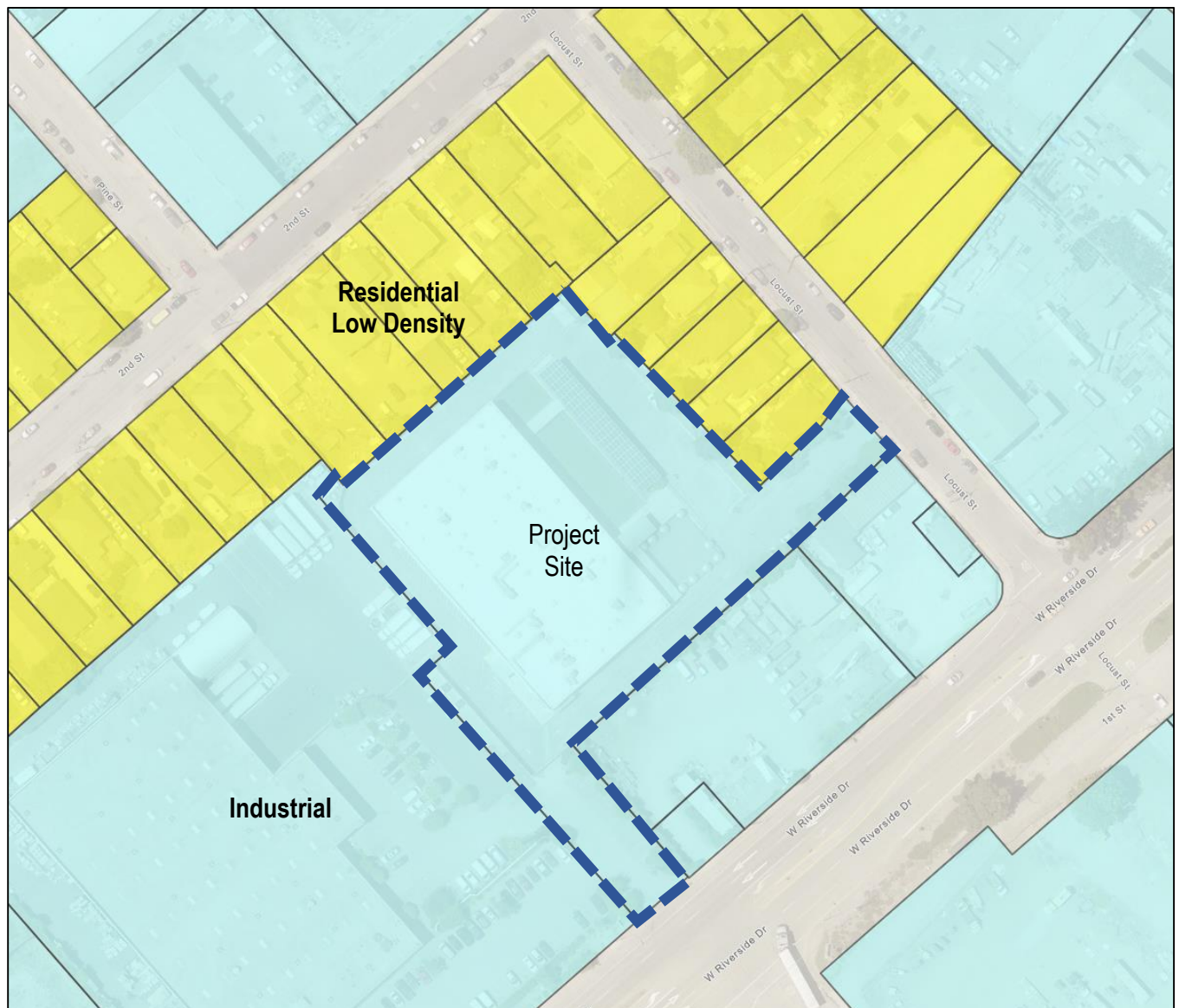


FIGURE 2 General Plan land use designations for the project site and surrounding area

Source: Watsonville GIS View, 2022

Land Use Compatibility

The proposed permanent establishment of a school use is compatible with existing residences nearby with implementation of conditions of approval intended to address past complaints and safety concerns. The City has received nuisance complaints from residents on Locust Street regarding traffic congestion during morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up times, odors from the trash enclosure, and using the vacant property at 228-234 Locust Street for recreational activities. The draft Resolution includes Conditions of Approval Nos. 27, 28, 29, 30, 41, and 47 to address these issues.

The school is also not incompatible with nearby industrial uses, including to a beverage distribution facility and two construction trade contractor's yard. While schools are not often located in industrial areas, the types of businesses nearby do not represent heavy industrial uses and, therefore, do not generate excessive noise, odor, dust, dirt, smoke, vibration, heat, glare, heavy traffic, and other objectionable influences and from fire, explosion, fumes, radiation, and other hazards. To date, the City has not received any complaints from or about the adjoining industrial uses.

General Plan Consistency

The proposed project requires approval from the City Council for a General Plan Map Amendment from Industrial to Public/Quasi-Public to allow the school use on a permanent basis. As the project does not involve a new or expanded use, the project would not cause a significant environmental impact due to conflict with any applicable land use policies for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect. As conditioned, the proposed project is also consistent with the following General Plan goals and policies concerning children and youth, safe and efficient vehicle and pedestrian travel, flood hazard reduction, and industrial land preservation.

- **Children and Youth Element Goal 7.1 Children and Youth** – Ensure a secure, healthy, and safe environment for the children and youth of the City of Watsonville and provide opportunities for them to develop to their fullest potential.
- **Children and Youth Element Policy 7.A Planning for Children, Youth, and Families** – The City of Watsonville is committed to providing and promoting a safe, secure, protective, healthy, and stimulating community environment for its children, youth, and families. With regard to both existing and future conditions, the City of Watsonville shall bear this commitment in mind as it considers the direct and indirect impact of its actions on children, youth, and families as it makes decisions and during the planning processes in all areas of land use, development, zoning, transportation, human services, social services, health services, and mental health services.
- **Children and Youth Element Policy 7.E Educational and Training Systems** – The City of Watsonville shall collaborate with the Pajaro Valley [Unified] School District, area community college districts, private schools, and the University of California in order to maximize educational, developmental, and learning opportunities for all children, youth, and parents. Through joint use of facilities, cooperative agreements for staffing, sharing of expertise, and provision of programs and services, the City of Watsonville shall participate in the development of innovative methods by which developmentally

appropriate activities, educational opportunities, and training can be provided. The City of Watsonville is committed to working with educational, health care, social service, and recreational organizations to provide training opportunities for those professionals who work with children, youth, and families.

- **Transportation & Circulation Element Goal 10.1 Street and Highway Facilities** – Plan and provide for a safe, efficient, and environmentally sensitive network of streets and highways for movement of people and goods.
- **Transportation & Circulation Element Policy 10.A Street & Highway Improvements** – The City shall pursue a program of regularly scheduled maintenance and street improvements, accompanied by the planned extension of roadways to serve new development.
- **Transportation & Circulation Element Goal 10.5 Pedestrian Circulation** – Recognize the importance of pedestrian travel, alone, or in combination with other travel modes, and to encourage walking.
- **Transportation & Circulation Element Policy 10.M Pedestrian Travel** – The City shall plan for, and implement a comprehensive network of safe pedestrian facilities in order to promote pedestrian travel.
- **Transportation & Circulation Element Policy 10.O Walkway Aesthetics & Safety** – Pedestrian walkways should be designed to promote walking by providing a safe and aesthetically pleasing path of travel.
- **Transportation & Circulation Element Policy 10.P Pedestrian Access** – Access for pedestrian travel shall be maintained where it already exists and provided where it does not, in order to prevent or eliminate barriers to pedestrian travel.
- **Public Safety Element Goal 12.3 Flood Hazard Reduction** – Reduce the potential for loss of life and property damage in areas known to be flood prone.
- **Public Safety Element Policy 12.D Flood Hazard Reduction** – The City shall pursue the protection of new and existing development from the impacts of flooding up to the 100-year event.
- **Land Use Element Goal 4.4 Industrial Land Use** – Achieve economic diversification, living wage employment, the preservation of the agricultural economic base of the Pajaro Valley, and maintain a balance among jobs, housing, and other urban land uses.
- **Land Use Element Policy 4.D Industrial Land Use** – The City shall promote modernization of existing industrial plants and the location of new industrial facilities on lands planned for industry in *Watsonville 2005*.
- **Land Use Element Implementation Measure 4.D.4 Industrial Reserve** – The City shall maintain a reserve of industrial land sufficient to meet the long-term job creation goals

and to enable the City to maximize economic opportunities consistent with the City's Comprehensive Economic Development Action Plan.

The existing public charter school currently provides education services to approximately 500 children. Approval of this project would allow Ceiba to continue to prepare students for college at its current location on a permanent basis, and thereby provide opportunities for academic development.

As further discussed below under "Site Access/Circulation" and "Safe Routes to School" headings, the project is required to install street improvements for identified nearby intersections and enhance the walkway from the sidewalk into the site to be in compliance with the State's accessibility standards, the adopted Complete Streets to School Plan (2020), and the City's General Plan Implementation Measures 10.N.1 (Construction/Improvement), 10.N.2 (Design of Walkways), 10.O.3 (Accessible Pedestrian Areas) and 10.P.3 (School-Related Walkways).

As further discussed below under the "Flood Proofing" heading, the project is required to flood proof the existing building, in conformance with the provisions for flood hazard reduction in the City's Floodplain Management Ordinance, the guidelines of FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program, and General Plan Implementation Measure 12.D.1.

The conversion of this small site does not compromise the reserve of industrial land in the city. The 2.1-acre project site represents approximately 0.4 percent of the 558.1 acres of land designated as Industrial in the General Plan. In addition, the existing site is not currently used for industrial activities. Therefore, changing the designation would reflect the existing school use and represent a small, marginal adjustment to the overall Land Use Plan with minimal changes to the City's industrial base and the ability to maintain a robust number of jobs in the City.

In summary, the proposed project, with implementation of conditions of approval, would be generally consistent with certain policies in the General Plan. Because general plans often contain numerous policies emphasizing differing legislative goals, a project may be consistent with a general plan, taken as a whole, even if the project appears to be inconsistent with some of its policies. While not in harmony with all aspects of the General Plan, the proposed project may be found consistent with provisions pertaining to safe and efficient vehicle and pedestrian travel, flood hazard reduction, and industrial land preservation. It is within the Planning Commission's purview to decide if the proposed project is consistent or inconsistent with any applicable City goals or policies.

Zoning Consistency

The Zoning Ordinance implements the General Plan, regulates the future growth of the City, and promotes orderly community development.⁴ It includes the Zoning Map, which sets forth the designations, locations and boundaries of zoning districts.

⁴ A general plan is a set of long-term goals and policies that a community uses to guide development decisions. Although the General Plan establishes standards for the location and density of land uses, it does not directly regulate land use. Zoning, on the other hand, is regulatory. Under the zoning ordinance, development must comply with specific, enforceable standards such as minimum parking requirements, minimum lot size, maximum building height, minimum building setback, and a list of allowable uses.

The project site is within the IG Zoning District. As mentioned previously, the purpose of the IG Zoning District is to provide a separate and exclusive district for a variety of nonmanufacturing and manufacturing industrial activities.

The project is consistent with the list of allowable uses for and general purpose of the proposed N Zoning District, in that a school for grades 6-12 is a permitted conditionally with issuance of a Special Use Permit. In addition, the location of the existing building conforms with the following minimum development standards set forth in WMC Section 14-16.801:

- Minimum front yard setback – 10 feet
- Minimum rear yard setback – 10 feet
- Minimum side yard setback – 5 feet

Parking

Pursuant to WMC Section 14-16.803(6)(ii), the City's parking requirements for school facilities are as follows:

- Elementary or junior high school – 1 space per employee + 1 space for every 20 students of school design capacity.
- High school – 1 space per employee + 1 space for every 7 students of school design capacity.

The existing school site does not provide parking spaces that meet these standards. There is also no room onsite to provide additional parking spaces to meet either standard for junior high or high school facilities. In addition, as the existing school was allowed on a temporary basis, the opportunity to have require additional parking onsite was missed. Therefore, the scope of this analysis focuses on the inadequate parking supply and how to reduce the demand for parking and avoid spillover effects on nearby streets.

Some measures have already been established. Students of driving age are not allowed to park onsite. In addition, according to the applicant, many staff carpool. Although these measures are in place, a Parking Study prepared for Ceiba confirms that available parking onsite is insufficient and street parking is utilized to satisfy the school's parking demand (Attachment 5).

The school has 63 staff members and 53 onsite parking spaces. The applicant has noted that approximately 20 percent of staff carpool, which comes to 13 of the 63 staff members carpooling and resulting in a need for 50 parking spaces. The parking counts conducted by Hexagon Transportation Consultants demonstrate that while 44 to 50 vehicles are parked onsite, an additional 10 vehicles are parked on the street, for a total parking demand of up to 60 spaces (Attachment 5, Table 1).

The draft Resolution includes Conditions of Approval Nos. 43-46 to reduce the school's parking demand and spillover onto nearby streets, as follows:

- **Mandatory Travel Behavior Change Program.** Involves developing a travel behavior change program that targets individuals' attitudes, goals, and travel behaviors, educating participants on the impacts of their travel choices and the opportunities to alter their

habits. Also involves providing a web site that allows employees to research other modes of transportation for commuting.

- **Promotions and Marketing.** Involves the use of marketing and promotional tools to educate and inform travelers about site- specific transportation options and the effects of their travel choices with passive educational and promotional materials. Marketing and public information campaign to promote awareness of TDM program with an on-site coordinator to monitor program.
- **Preferential Carpool / Vanpool Parking Spaces.** Reserved carpool / vanpool spaces closer to the building entrance.
- **Transit Subsidies.** Involves the subsidization of transit fare for employees of the project site (i.e., pays for employees to use local transit). This could either be a discounted ticket or a full-reimbursed transit ticket. (Note that bus service runs along W. Beach Street and Rodriguez Street and that the Watsonville Transit Center is within ½ mile walking distance of the school.)

Site Access/Circulation

The site has two driveway approaches, one off Riverside Drive (SR 129) and the other off Locust Street. As shown on the Site Plan (Attachment 2), parents dropping off or picking up their children from school are to use the driveway off Locust Street and drive around the building in a counter clockwise circulation pattern. The driveway approach off Riverside Drive (SR 129) and associated parking area is intended for staff's use only. Fencing and a gate restrict access to this driveway. Condition of Approval No. 27 and 29 require that the driveway off Locust Street shall continue to be the main access point for student drop-offs and pick-ups and that school staff shall be responsible for traffic flow to and from the site.

Accessible Path of Travel

The site does not have a path of travel for pedestrians separate from the vehicular way into the site. Pursuant to CBC Chapter 11A, Section 1116A.5, when a walk crosses or adjoins a vehicular way, the walking surface shall be separated from the vehicular area by curbs, railings or other elements. Alternatively, the boundary between the pedestrian areas and the vehicular areas may be defined by a continuous detectable warning 36 inches wide. As shown in the photographs included as Attachment 6, the pedestrian area is simply delineated by striping. Condition of Approval No. 33 requires the applicant to modify the pedestrian path of travel in accordance with CBC Chapter 11A, Section 1116A.

Safe Routes to School

In 2020, the City of Watsonville adopted the Complete Streets to Schools Plan (Resolution No. 24-20). This Plan was prepared in partnership between the City of Watsonville, Santa Cruz County Public Health, PVUSD, and Ecology Action and has two main goals:

- Improving the safety and comfort of students and families walking and biking to school; and
- Reducing school congestion by improving the efficiency of drop-off & pick-up at all schools citywide.

Attachment 7 provides excerpts from the Plan concerning Ceiba, including a detailed summary of existing conditions from a motorist, bicyclist and pedestrian perspective along with recommended improvements. These recommendations consist of a range of infrastructure projects that would improve safety for families that are walking and biking to school and encourage more active transportation trips.

Attachment 8 shows the locations of needed enhanced pedestrian crossings near Ceiba.

The draft Resolution includes Conditions of Approval Nos. 31 and 32 requiring the applicant to install high-visibility crosswalks, curb extensions and accessible ramps, as necessary, at or across the following intersections:

- Locust Street and Second Street;
- Pine Street and Second Street;
- Pine Street and West Beach Street.

In addition, Condition of Approval No. 35 requires the applicant to submit an application with Caltrans to establish a School Zone on Riverside Drive, upgrade existing crosswalks at Riverside Drive and Walker Street, and upgrade existing ramps at Riverside Drive and Locust Street to meet current ADA standards.

Odor Impacts

The existing trash enclosure is located in the northeast corner of the site within close proximity to adjoining residences. As shown in Attachment 6, the enclosure does not meet the City's current standards and, at times, is poorly maintained resulting in odor complaints.

A condition of approval requires that a new metal roof be added to enclosure for the purpose of helping to prevent stormwater flowing through this area, in accordance with City standards. Another condition of approval requires school staff to routinely clean the trash enclosure and secure it at night to prevent nuisance conditions and complaints concerning odors emanating from garbage and rotting food scraps in the trash enclosure area.

Drainage

A site inspection by Engineering staff found that the site's existing stormwater features need to be better maintained. In accordance with the Maintenance Agreement between the City and Ceiba, the following corrective actions were identified and included as Condition of Approval No. 36:

- Remove wood, basketball hoops, and other blockages/debris from the bioswale;
- Replace missing beehive grates at drainage inlets;
- Provide planting in accordance with the City Standard Drawing Nos. LID-004A, B; and
- Provide gravel energy dissipation at all bioswale curb cut inlets per City Standard Drawing No. LID-002.

Flood Proofing

The project site lies within the 100-year floodplain. This means that the site has a one percent chance of being flooded in any given year with floodwaters reaching a certain “base flood elevation” of BFE. In this case, the BFE is 28 feet. For the school to not be considered vulnerable during a 100-year storm event, the school’s bottom floor along with the lowest elevation of the equipment servicing it would need to be at least one foot above the BFE. An elevation certificate confirms that that school building’s bottom floor and the lowest elevation of equipment servicing the building is not greater than one foot above the BFE (Attachment 4).

To promote public safety and to minimize public and private losses due to flooding, the City requires buildings vulnerable to floods be protected against flood damage. The draft Resolution includes Condition of Approval No. 48 requiring that the building to be flood-proofed in accordance with the standards for reducing flood hazards set forth in WMC Section 9-2.500. According to subsection (c)(2) of WMC Section 9-2.500, flood-proofing would involve making the building watertight and being capable of resisting hydrostatic / hydrodynamic loads and the effects of buoyancy.

Environmental Review

The project involves approval of General Plan Map Amendment (from Industrial to Public/Quasi-Public), Zoning Map Amendment (from IG to N), and Special Use Permit to allow conditionally the existing school use on a permanent basis. The project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), in that the project would not result the change, intensification or expansion of an existing use and the allowance of an existing school use on a permanent basis would not result in a significant effect on the environment (CEQA Guidelines §§ 15301 & 15061(b)(3); PRC § 21080).

CONCLUSION

The proposed General Plan Amendment, Zone Change, and Special Use Permit with Environmental Review (App #1737) would allow the permanent establishment of a 525-student charter school for grades 6-12 in an existing 27,000± square-foot building with an 8,500± square-foot mezzanine on a 2.1± acre site located at 215 Locust Street (APN 017-161-51). The project would recognize the existing school use on the premise while also setting forth conditions intended to address concerns related to safe routes to school, flood-proofing, parking spillover, and odor complaints. As conditioned, staff recommends that the Planning Commission (a) adopt a Resolution recommending that the City Council approve requested General Plan Map Amendment and Zoning Map Amendment and (b) adopt a Resolution recommending that the City Council approve the requested Special Use Permit, subject to findings and conditions

STRATEGIC PLAN

The purpose of the City of Watsonville’s 2021-2023 Strategic Plan is to help the City prioritize its efforts, allocating both fiscal and human resources to achieve a shared vision and goals. The 2021-23 Strategic Plan identifies seven goals, concerning housing, fiscal health, infrastructure and environment, economic development, community engagement and well-being, public safety, and efficient and well-performing government.

This action is consistent with the City Council’s public safety goal to continue to strive to create a healthy, safe and thriving Watsonville, in that the project applicant would be required to

implement enhanced crosswalks and other measures to improve the safety of children and families walking and biking to school.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The project would have no clear direct fiscal impacts on the City. Indirect costs associated with staff time responding to nuisance complaints may be reduced with implementation of conditions of approval concerning traffic congestion and odors. In addition, the costs associated with the implementation of the conditions concerning Safe Routes to Schools would be borne by the applicant.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION

The Planning Commission may recommend denial of the requested General Plan Map Amendment, Zoning Map Amendment, and Special Use Permit if, based on evidence in the record, the Commission cannot make the required findings set forth in WMC Sections 14-12.708 and 14-12.513.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Site and Vicinity Map
2. Existing Conditions and Site Plan
3. Memorandum re: Special Use Permit with Environmental Review (PP2012-251) & Application #1737
4. Elevation Certificate
5. Parking Study (Hexagon, November 4, 2021)
6. Photographs of Existing Conditions
7. Safe Routes to School Plan for Ceiba
8. Map Showing Location of Pedestrian Crossings to be Upgraded