

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF WATSONVILLE



TELECONFERENCE/REMOTE

October 6, 2020

6:02 PM

In accordance with City policy, all Planning Commission meetings are recorded on audio and video in their entirety and are available for review in the Community Development Department (CDD). These minutes are a brief summary of action taken.

1. ROLL CALL

Chair Matthew Jones, Vice-Chair Anna Kammer, and Commissioners Ed Acosta, Gina Cole, Veronica-Dorantes Pulido, Jenny T. Sarmiento, and Jenni Veitch-Olson were present.

Staff members present were City Attorney Alan Smith, Assistant Police Chief Thomas Sims, Community Development Director Suzi Merriam, Principal Planner Justin Meek, Associate Planner Ivan Carmona, Assistant Director of Public Works Maria Esther Rodriguez, Recording Secretary Deborah Muniz, Administrative Assistant II Elena Ortiz and City Interpreter Sofia Vazquez-Flores.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Matthew Jones led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. PRESENTATIONS & ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Principal Planner Justin Meek shared that the month of October is National Community Planning Month and encouraged everyone to visit the City's website for more information.

Commissioner Veitch-Olson reminded everyone to vote on Election Day and provided information on where to drop off ballots and vote in-person.

A. PRESENTATION TO PLANNING COMMISSION ON FINDINGS

Presentation was given by Community Development Director Suzi Merriam.

In answering Commissioner Sarmiento, Director Merriam stated that they plan to share tonight's presentation with the general public to provide an understanding of the planning process.

4. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. AN APPLICATION FOR A SPECIAL USE PERMIT WITH ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (PP2019-452) TO ALLOW CONVERSION OF A PORTION OF AN EXISTING TWO-STORY 75,398± SQUARE-FOOT VACANT COMMERCIAL BUILDING INTO A TWO-STORY 41,419 SQUARE-FOOT PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL FOR WATSONVILLE PREP SCHOOL LOCATED AT 407 MAIN STREET (APN 017-641-12), FILED BY KEVIN SVED WITH NAVIGATOR SCHOOLS, APPLICANT, ON BEHALF OF HANSEN FAMILY TRUST, PROPERTY OWNER

1) Staff Report

The staff report was given by Associate Planner Ivan Carmona.

2) Planning Commission Clarifying & Technical Questions

Associate Planner Ivan Carmona and Assistant Director of Public Works Maria Esther Rodriguez, answered questions from Vice-Chair Kammer regarding the traffic impact analysis, and the use of bicycles on City sidewalks.

Assistant Director Rodriguez and Assistant Police Chief Sims answered questions from Commissioner Acosta clarifying the age of children allowed to ride bicycles on City sidewalks.

Director Merriam answered questions from Commissioner Cole pertaining to the revised alcohol ordinance, restrictions in the downtown core area, and the type of housing available at the Resetar Residential Hotel.

Commissioner Cole asked if Santa Cruz METRO was given notification of the project.

Associate Planner Carmona stated that they were not.

3) Applicant Presentation

Kevin Sved, Navigator Schools Chief Executive Officer, and property owner, William Hansen, both gave an overview of the project.

4) Planning Commission Clarifying & Technical Questions

Mr. Sved, Mr. Hansen, and Assistant Director Rodriguez, all answered questions from Commissioner Kammer in regards to notification about the project to Santa Cruz METRO, the school indoor play area and plan to meet the California Department of Education (CDE) Physical Education requirement, the Traffic Management Plan, and the Watsonville Prep Transportation Impact Analysis conducted by Kittelson & Associates, Inc.

Mr. Sved, Assistant Director Rodriguez, and Assistant Police Chief Sims answered questions from Commissioner Veitch-Olson regarding the number of reported incidents on the Transportation Impact Analysis, school campus security plan, and measures they plan to implement to not exceed the school's maximum capacity of 565 students.

Commissioner Cole inquired about the timeline of the project.

Mr. Sved stated that they anticipate construction commencing in early December 2020, with a plan to open by August 2021.

Commissioner Cole asked if the students are currently attending school in person or doing distance learning.

Mr. Sved stated that they are currently doing distance learning, but just started hosting on-site for a few students at E.A. Hall Middle School.

In addressing Commissioner Cole's inquiry, Martin Hochroth, Artik Art & Architecture Principal, went over the school campus layout.

Mr. Sved, Assistant Director Rodriguez, and Mr. Hansen answered questions from Commissioner Cole regarding the early drop-off and pick-up time schedule, measures they plan to implement to limit the amount of traffic during pick-up times, the site's parking lot traffic pattern, and the percentage of students that get dropped off on campus by vehicle.

In answering Commissioner Acosta's inquiry about a future increase to the school's student capacity, Mr. Sved reiterated that they plan to cap the maximum at 565 students.

Mr. Hansen suggested to the Planning Commission that they include as part of the conditions of approval for the Special Use Permit, a maximum capacity of 600 students.

In answering Commissioner Acosta, Assistant Police Chief Sims clarified his earlier comments in regards to the policy on riding bicycles on sidewalks, as he misspoke by stating that children K through 8th grade could ride bicycles on City sidewalks.

Commissioner Veitch-Olson asked what Mr. Hansen's plans are for the building's first floor, and if those will be affected by having a school on the second floor.

Mr. Hansen went over those plans.

In answering Commissioner Dorantes-Pulido, Mr. Sved mentioned that he hopes to work with Radcliff Elementary School to help mitigate the traffic congestion that may arise in the area due to school drop-off and pick-up times.

In response to Commissioner Cole's suggestion to notify Santa Cruz METRO about the project, Director Merriam confirmed that Santa Cruz METRO was indeed given notification about the proposed project because they are within 300 feet from the project.

5) Public Hearing

Chair Jones opened the public hearing.

Sharon Waller, Navigator Schools founder, spoke in support of the project and her reasons for doing so.

Brando Sencion, Slice Project owner, expressed concern about the amount of traffic generated in downtown, especially on Fridays.

Crystal Toriumi, Watsonville resident, spoke in support of the project and asked the Planning Commission to do the same.

William Hansen, property owner, spoke in support of the project and listed the various ways the City and community would benefit from having the school downtown.

Hearing no further comment, Chair Jones closed the public hearing.

6) Appropriate Motion(s)

In answering Commissioner Sarmiento's question regarding the alcohol ordinance, Director Merriam reiterated that the City Council recently approved the revised ordinance, which eliminates separation requirements for downtown business, including the school, and allows more alcohol related uses in downtown.

Commissioner Acosta expressed concern about the safety of the school children in the downtown area.

FIRST MOTION (Failed): It was moved by Commissioner Acosta, seconded by Commissioner Dorantes-Pulido, to deny the following resolution:

RESOLUTION NO. 17-20 (PC):

RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF WATSONVILLE, CALIFORNIA, APPROVING A SPECIAL USE PERMIT WITH ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (PP2019-452) TO ALLOW CONVERSION OF A PORTION OF AN EXISTING TWO STORY 75,348± SQUARE FOOT COMMERCIAL BUILDING INTO A TWO-STORY 41,419± SQUARE FOOT PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL FOR WATSONVILLE PREP SCHOOL ON A 4.83± ACRE SITE LOCATED AT 407 MAIN STREET (APN 017-641-12)

7) Deliberation

Director Merriam requested that if the Planning Commission is leaning towards denying the project, they allow City staff time to continue the item and make findings for denial.

In answering Commissioner Kammer's questions, City Attorney Smith went over the voting procedure.

Commissioner Cole spoke in support of staff's recommendation, as she sees that all conditions of approval are met and the findings have enough supporting evidence to move forward with the project. She urged the rest of the Commission to analyze those findings before casting a vote.

Commissioners Acosta and Dorantes-Pulido both shared their reasons for making a motion to deny staff recommendation, but would be willing to reconsider if given more time to review the findings.

Commissioner Kammer expressed opposition to denying the project, and instead, listed some of the conditions she would like staff to go over and have the applicant reconsider.

8) Chair Calls for a Vote on Motion(s)

FIRST MOTION (Failed): The above motion failed by the following vote:

AYES:	COMMISSIONERS: Acosta, Dorantes-Pulido, Sarmiento
NOES:	COMMISSIONERS: Cole, Kammer, Veitch-Olson, Jones
ABSENT:	COMMISSIONERS: None

SECOND MOTION (Approved): It was moved by Commissioner Cole, seconded by Chair Jones, to approve staff recommendation by the following vote:

AYES:	COMMISSIONERS: Cole, Kammer, Veitch-Olson, Jones
NOES:	COMMISSIONERS: Acosta, Dorantes-Pulido, Sarmiento
ABSENT:	COMMISSIONERS: None

FIRST AMENDMENT TO SECOND MOTION (Failed): It was moved by Vice-Chair Kammer, seconded by Chair Jones, to approve staff recommendation and include a condition to the Special Use Permit to remove the seventh and eighth grade levels and reduce the school count by 120 students, and incorporate an outdoor component to the physical education curriculum of twice a month.

AYES:	COMMISSIONERS: Dorantes-Pulido, Kammer
NOES:	COMMISSIONERS: Acosta, Cole, Sarmiento, Veitch-Olson, Jones
ABSENT:	COMMISSIONERS: None

Commissioner Kammer explained the reasoning for her vote and encouraged the applicant to consider offering an outdoor physical component for the benefit of the students.

Commissioner Veitch-Olson strongly encouraged the applicant provide education about traffic safety for students, parents or others that will be on site, particularly during peak hours.

Commissioner Dorantes-Pulido agreed with Commissioner Kammer's addition of an outdoor component, and encouraged the applicant to offset the start and end school time to help minimize the traffic impact that may arise with the neighboring Radcliff Elementary school hours.

Chair Jones shared that he voted in support due to the project's scaled approach, which allows time to assess the traffic impacts and safety concerns.

Mr. Hansen stated that to further ensure the safety of the students, they will commit to having crosswalk guards present during school drop-off and pick-up times, and will work with Navigator Schools to incorporate an outdoor component for the school children.

5. REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

The report was given by Director Merriam.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Jones adjourned the meeting 9:24 PM. The next remote/teleconference Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 17, 2020, at 6:00 PM.

Suzi Merriam, Secretary
Planning Commission

Matthew H. Jones, Chair
Planning Commission