

ZONING COMMITTEE – STAFF UPDATE

FILE # 18-117-556

1. **APPLICANT:** Rehder and Associates on behalf of Twin Cities German Immersion School
 2. **TYPE OF APPLICATION:** Site Plan Review **HEARING DATE:** 12/20/2018; laid over to 1/17/2019
 3. **LOCATION:** 1031 Como Ave (between Argyle and Churchill)
 4. **PLANNING DISTRICT:** 10 – Como Park Planning Council **PRESENT ZONING:** R4
 5. **TESTIMONY:** Support: 23 people spoke, 104 letters. Opposition: 16 people spoke, 22 letters.
 6. **ZONING CODE REFERENCE:** §61.402(c) *Site plan review and approval.*
 7. **STAFF MEMO DATE:** 01/17/2019 **BY:** Tia Anderson
 8. **DATE RECEIVED:** 10/23/2018 **DEADLINE FOR ACTION:** 3/06/2019 (applicant extended)
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PURPOSE: Site Plan for a 3-story, 23,500 square foot building addition to an existing school, play area and stormwater management. The proposed site plan includes removal of a portion of the existing building and east surface parking lot on the site.

PLUBIC HEARING DISCUSSION TOPIC UPDATES:

Type of Use:

- The proposed use as a K – 8 school is permitted in a R4 one-family residential Zoning District.
- Zoning Code does not differentiate by type of school, e.g., public, private, immersion, neighborhood.
- Minnesota charter schools are public schools and part of Minnesota’s public education system. 164 charter schools in MN of which 35 are in St Paul.

Screening:

- Staff originally recommended replacement of the fence from Como Ave to the end of the alley turn-around with an obscuring wood fence at least 80% opaque and 6’ in height (based on Zoning definition of Opaque Fence and typical height for a Visual Screen) as a sound and sight buffer with neighboring properties.
- The Site Plan has been updated to include the minimum recommended fence the length of the entire east property line (Como Ave to Van Slyke Ave) as further sound and sight buffer for the existing playground.

Required Off-Street Parking:

- Staff recommends striking the previously proposed condition that there be “no net loss of off-street parking within the property.”
- As noted in the updated Traffic Impact Study, removal of an existing parking lot and curb cut on the east side of the building reduces potential pedestrian and vehicle conflicts and increases the vehicle queuing area.

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- The Site Plan updated 1/16/19, includes three (3) additional off-street parking spaces in the existing west parking lot, reducing the off-street parking deficiency to 34 spaces. The site plan includes: 1) 28 off-street parking spaces in the west lot, 2) removal of 7 off-street spaces in the east lot, 3) reduction of 9 off-street parking spaces based on excess bicycle parking allowance, and 4) 15 off-street parking spaces through a shared-parking agreement.
- TCGIS has a Shared Building Use and Parking Agreement for 15 off-street parking spaces with the church at 1040 Como Ave. Parties to a shared parking agreement shall submit an annual statement to the zoning administrator which verifies the non-concurrent peak parking hours of the buildings involved with the shared parking agreement and a list of uses within each building to verify no changes have occurred that would require additional parking.

Traffic and Pedestrian Safety:

- The school's traffic operations are an existing concern. Regardless of whether the building expansion happens or not, underlying issues with traffic and pedestrian safety remain; the school and City will need to work together to optimize safety on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, there is no one answer, but rather a continuous improvement process with multiple incremental changes to be made, assessed and modified as needed to improve operations in and around the site.
- The Traffic Impact Study (TIS) prepared by Spack Consulting with updates through 1/15/2019 was reviewed by Public Works Transportation and Safety and Traffic Engineering. Public Works Transportation Planning and Safety Division is in general agreement with the results of the Traffic Impact Study dated 1/15/2019.
- Over the past few weeks, the Traffic Impact Study has been reviewed and discussed between City Staff, Spack Consulting, and TCGIS project team. Some changes have been made or are in progress:
 - The TIS modeling was updated to reflect signal timing changes that occurred in late November at the Lexington/Como/Wynn intersection during school start and end times.
 - TCGIS has started to implement TIS recommendations that are within their control: staff as crossing guards at Como and Oxford intersection; staff and parents directed not to park on Como Ave; and arrival/dismissal reminder sent to TCGIS families with designated pedestrian crossings highlighted.
 - TCGIS is exploring TDMP strategies such as discounted Metro Transit passes, updated site plan with designated carpool parking spaces for staff, use of the ZipShare carpooling app, and evaluating options for increasing school bus use for the 2019 – 2020 school year.
- TIS recommendations that require changes to the public realm, including a marked pedestrian crossing on Como Ave at Oxford St and time-of-day parking restrictions, shall be implemented as part of the site plan. Public Works Traffic Engineering staff have an existing and ongoing role working with schools to assess and implement changes to improve safety.

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ALTERNATIVE STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings, the staff recommends approval of the site plan to allow a 3-story building addition to an existing school, play area and stormwater management at 1031 Como Ave. with the following conditions:

1. Approval of variances for building height and lot coverage, or submittal of an updated site plan that meets Zoning Code density and dimensional standards.
2. Approval of a variance for ~~minimum~~ 34 off-street parking spaces, or submittal of a plan that meets Zoning Code off-street parking requirements.
3. ~~No net loss of off-street parking within the property. A parking area to the replace the seven (7) off-street parking spaces proposed for removal shall be subject to Zoning Code standards and design and receive Zoning Administrator review and approval.~~
4. Provide an obscuring wood fence at least 80% opaque and 6' in height along the length of the east property line to buffer the abutting properties.
5. Acceptance of the Traffic Impact Study by the Public Works Transportation Planning and Safety Division. Traffic Impact Study solution recommendations requiring changes to the public realm, including a marked pedestrian crossing on Como Ave at Oxford St and time-of-day parking restrictions, shall be implemented as part of the site plan. Public Works Traffic Engineering and the applicant shall assess additional operational and engineering solutions to improve safety; the school shall implement prescribed solutions as directed by Public Works.