## STAFF REPORT

# CITY OF COLUMBUS PLAN COMMISSION (March 13, 2024 Meeting) 

Docket No. / Project Title:<br>Staff:<br>Applicant:<br>Property Size:<br>Current Zoning:<br>Location:<br>CDP-2024-001 (Lillian Schmitt Elementary) Andres M. Nieto<br>Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation<br>+/- 9.05 acres<br>P (Public/Semi-Public Facilities)<br>2675 California Street, in the City of Columbus.

## Request Summary:

The applicant is requesting approval of a site development plan major modification consistent with Zoning Ordinance Chapter 12.8. The applicant has indicated that the proposed site development plan major modification is for the purpose of constructing a 4,040 square foot building addition, completing visitor parking/bus circulation changes, and adding new exterior lighting along the west and south side of the property.

The applicant is proposing the following waiver(s) from the zoning ordinance development standards that would typically apply to this development:

1. A waiver from Zoning Ordinance Section 7.3 (C)(3)(c)(ii) regarding the 200 -foot minimum driveway separation distance from the nearest existing driveway/intersection along $27^{\text {th }}$ Street, which is a Collector Street. The applicant is requesting to be allowed 95 feet of separation for a new driveway.
2. A waiver from Zoning Ordinance Section 7.3 (C)(3)(c)(ii) regarding the 200 -foot minimum driveway separation distance from the nearest existing driveway/intersection along Home Avenue, which is a Collector Street. The applicant is requesting to be allowed 54 feet of separation for a new driveway.

## Key Issue Summary:

The following key issue(s) should be resolved through the consideration of this application: None.

## Plan Commission Decision Criteria:

The Columbus Zoning Ordinance requires that the Plan Commission consider (1) compliance with the applicable development standards established by the Zoning Ordinance and (2) the general standards listed below in the review of site development plans (Section 12.8(E)).

1. The proposed development will be consistent with the comprehensive plan.
2. The proposed development will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, convenience, or general welfare.
3. The proposed development will not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of the surrounding property.
4. The proposed development will not impede the efficient, orderly, and normal development of the surrounding property.
5. The proposed development provides adequate access, utilities, landscaping, buffering, and other improvements.
6. The proposed development provides pedestrian and vehicle ingress, egress, and circulation in a manner that maintains adequate public safety and efficient movement.

The Plan Commission may waive development requirements of the Zoning Ordinance based on findings by the Commission that the altered requirements will better serve (a) the intent of that development requirement, (b) the intent of the zoning district, and/or (c) the general standards listed above.

## Plan Commission Process, Options, \& Preliminary Staff Recommendation:



## Development Standards Waivers:

 The initial step in the approval process is for the Plan Commission to determine if any requested development standards waivers can be supported based on the decision criteria provided by the Zoning Ordinance. The waiver may be approved if one or more of the criteria have been met. A separate motion with specific findings is recommended for each requested waiver.Requested Waiver \#1 (Driveway Separation on $27^{\text {th }}$ Street): The applicant proposes a new drive access on $27^{\text {th }}$ Street that will be less than the minimum 200-foot separation distance from a driveway on the opposite side of the street. Section 7.3(C)(3)(c)(ii) of the Zoning Ordinance indicates that a minimum of 200 feet of access separation is required from the nearest adjacent access point or intersection along Collector Streets/Roads.

## Preliminary Staff Recommendation: Approval, all criteria are met.

Criteria \#1: The requested waiver or modification will better serve the intent of that development requirement. The Zoning Ordinance indicates the intent of the circulation standards as follows: This Chapter provides standards to promote safe and efficient travel within the community, minimize disruptive and potentially hazardous traffic conflicts, separate traffic conflict areas by reducing number of driveways, provide efficient spacing standards between driveways, protect the substantial public investment in the street system, and ensure reasonable access to properties.
Preliminary Staff Findings: The existing parking lot entrances are legal non-conforming - meaning each of them were constructed before the 200 -foot separation requirement and do not meet this standard. The applicant's proposal to shift the school bus entrance along $27^{\text {th }}$ Street further west, away from the intersection of $27^{\text {th }}$ Street \& Home Avenue would decrease this non-conformity and better serve the intent of the zoning ordinance to limit vehicle conflict points near intersections. This criterion has been met.
Criteria \#2: The requested waiver or modification will better serve the intent of the zoning district in which the property is located. The Zoning Ordinance indicates the intent of the P (Public/Semi-Public Facilities) zoning district as follows: The $P$ (Public/Semi-Public Facilities) zoning district is intended to provide locations for large-scale public facilities, worship facilities, and concentrations of other public institutions. This district should be applied in those locations where a single facility or combination of facilities forms an institutional center. This district is further intended to provide a set of setbacks and other requirements that respond to the unique scale and other considerations common to these types of uses. This district should be applied to reduce land use conflicts and ensure that public and semipublic facilities are appropriately integrated into the community.
Preliminary Staff Findings: The requested modification intends to minimize an existing legal nonconformity on the subject property by adjusting the parking lot access on $27^{\text {th }}$ Street farther away from the intersection of $27^{\text {th }}$ Street and Home Avenue. This is intended to reduce traffic conflict points around the school and provide better traffic flow at the $27^{\text {th }}$ Street / Home Avenue intersection, which would benefit the other surrounding public institutions/schools. This criterion has been met.

Criteria \#3: The requested waiver or modification will better serve the general standards listed by Zoning Ordinance Section 12.8(E)(2) and above.
Preliminary Staff Findings: This school (and surrounding schools/institutions) is the center of significant vehicular and pedestrian traffic at various times of day. The proposed drive access would provide a safer condition for pedestrians and vehicle traffic, compared with the current driveway location, around the $27^{\text {th }}$ Street \& Home Avenue intersection. This criterion has been met.

Requested Waiver \#2 (Driveway Separation on Home Avenue): The applicant proposes a new drive access on Home Avenue that will be less than the minimum 200-foot separation distance from a driveway on the opposite side of the street. Section 7.3(C)(3)(c)(ii) of the Zoning Ordinance indicates that a minimum of 200 feet of access separation is required from the nearest adjacent access point or intersection along Collector Streets/Roads.

Preliminary Staff Recommendation: Approval, all criteria are met.
Criteria \#1: The requested waiver or modification will better serve the intent of that development requirement. The Zoning Ordinance indicates the intent of the circulation standards as follows: This Chapter provides standards to promote safe and efficient travel within the community, minimize disruptive and potentially hazardous traffic conflicts, separate traffic conflict areas by reducing number of driveways, provide efficient spacing standards between driveways, protect the substantial public investment in the street system, and ensure reasonable access to properties.
Preliminary Staff Findings: The proposed new bus exit point on Home Avenue will allow exiting buses to avoid the intersection of $27^{\text {th }}$ Street and Home Avenue, where significant congestion from the various schools in the area is present. While the new drive would not meet the minimum driveway separation requirement from either this intersection or the adjacent access to the Columbus North High School parking lot, the exit only design of the new drive and its bypassing of the street intersection will serve to promote more efficient travel and minimize traffic counts. This criterion has been met.

Criteria \#2: The requested waiver or modification will better serve the intent of the zoning district in which the property is located. The Zoning Ordinance indicates the intent of the P (Public/Semi-Public Facilities) zoning district as follows: The $P$ (Public/Semi-Public Facilities) zoning district is intended to provide locations for large-scale public facilities, worship facilities, and concentrations of other public institutions. This district should be applied in those locations where a single facility or combination of facilities forms an institutional center. This district is further intended to provide a set of setbacks and other requirements that respond to the unique scale and other considerations common to these types of uses. This district should be applied to reduce land use conflicts and ensure that public and semipublic facilities are appropriately integrated into the community.
Preliminary Staff Findings: The requested modification intends to reduce traffic conflict points around the school and other surrounding public institutions/schools by allowing school buses to exit onto Home Avenue south-bound instead of forcing them onto $27^{\text {th }}$ Street with all other vehicle traffic. This is consistent with the zoning district's intent to integrate public facilities into the surrounding community. This criterion has been met.

Criteria \#3: The requested waiver or modification will better serve the general standards listed by Zoning Ordinance Section 12.8(E)(2) and above.
Preliminary Staff Findings: This school (and surrounding schools/institutions) is the center of significant vehicular and pedestrian traffic at various times of day. The proposed drive access would provide a safer condition for pedestrians and vehicle traffic, compared with the current driveway location, around the $27^{\text {th }}$ Street \& Home Avenue intersection. This criterion has been met.

## Conditions:

Step 2
The Plan Commission should determine through discussion if any conditions of approval are appropriate for this request. Conditions are situations that need to be resolved through the action of the applicant prior to, or as part of, the proposed development. Any conditions should be clearly based on the Plan Commission Decision Criteria listed above.
Preliminary Staff Recommendation: The staff is preliminarily recommending the following conditions of approval:

1. All drawing sheets shall be revised to show complete Thoroughfare Plan street classifications. For example, Home Avenue is a (Collector, Residential, Urban) street. (Zoning Ordinance Section 12.9(D)(2)(d)).
2. All four handicap-accessible parking spaces shall be located so as to be the nearest parking spaces to the building's accessible entrance (Zoning Ordinance Section 7.1(Part 1)((C)).
3. All driveway separation dimensions on all drawing sheets shall be shown as between driveway and street intersection centerlines (Zoning Ordinance Section 7.3(Part 1)(C)(3)).
4. An additional 2 trees and 5 shrubs, meeting the specifications of the Zoning Ordinance, (for a total of 9 trees and 54 shrubs) shall be included in the parking lot interior landscaped area (Zoning Ordinance Section 8.1(C)(2)).
5. Two additional trees, meeting the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance, shall be provided along the $27^{\text {th }}$ Street parking lot street frontage, maintaining the legal-nonconforming total of 17 trees in that area (Zoning Ordinance Sections 8.1(C)(1) and 11.4(B)(1)).
6. Either replace the 5 trees to be removed in the Home Avenue Parking Lot Street Frontage landscaping area, or provide an additional 10 shrubs in this landscape area, meeting the specifications of the Zoning Ordinance (Section 8.1(C)(1) and 11.4(B)(1)).
7. Two parking spaces in the visitor parking lot, as specified by the Fire Inspector, shall be designated for "compact cars only" in order to preserve the ability for a fire apparatus to make the turn radius in that area in the event of an emergency.
8. Proposed new light poles in parking lot islands shall be relocated outside of required landscape areas where they conflict with required landscaping.


## Commitments:

The Plan Commission should determine through discussion if any commitments of the applicant are appropriate and/or needed for this request. Commitments are long-term agreements that, together with the Zoning Ordinance, govern the use of the property. Any commitments should be clearly based on the Plan Commission Decision Criteria listed above.
Preliminary Staff Recommendation: The staff is preliminarily recommending the following commitments: None.


## Request Approval, Denial or Continuance:

In reviewing a request for site development plan approval the Plan Commission may (1) approve the application, (2) deny the application, or (3) continue the review to a future Plan Commission meeting. The Plan Commission should make, second, and vote on a motion for the approval, denial, or continuance of the request. Any motion should include reasons supporting that motion that directly reference the Plan Commission Decision Criteria listed above. Any motion for approval should note (1) any approved waivers and (2) any conditions and/or commitments being made as part of the approval.

1. Preliminary Staff Recommendation: Approval, including the approved driveway separation waivers and subject to the conditions listed above.

| Current Property Information: |  |
| :--- | :--- |
| Land Use: | School (Schmitt Elementary), BCSC Information Services Center |
| Site Features: | School, playground, office building, parking lot. |
| Flood Hazards: | N/A |
| Special Circumstances: <br> (Airport Hazard Area, Wellfield <br> Protection Area, etc.) | N/A |
| Vehicle Access: | California Street (Local, Residential, Urban) <br> $27^{\text {th }}$ Street (Collector, Residential, Urban) <br> Home Avenue (Collector, Residential, Urban) |


| Surrounding Zoning and Land Use: |  |  |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
|  | Zoning: | Land Use: |
| North: | RS2 (Residential: Single-family 2) | Single-family residential |
| South: | P (Public/Semi-Public Facility) | St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Single-family <br> residential |
| East: | P (Public/Semi-Public Facility) | Columbus North High School |
| West: | RS2 (Residential: Single-family 2) | Single-family residential |


| Interdepartmental Review: |  |
| :--- | :--- |
| City Engineering: | No response. |
| City Utilities: | No response. |
| Fire Department: | I noticed the reduction of the east island in the office parking lot to accommodate <br> fire apparatus. Can we possibly mark the two parking spaces nearest the island <br> for compact cars only or something along that lines? I am afraid if a full sized <br> vehicle chooses to park there the turning radius for fire apparatus may be too <br> tight. |
| Technical Code <br> Enforcement: | No response. |

## Comprehensive Plan Consideration(s):

The Future Land Use Map indicates the future use of this property as Residential.
The following Comprehensive Plan goal(s) and/or policy(ies) apply to this application:

1. POLICY A-2-11: Encourage all new development to be in scale (height, area, mass, setback, etc.) with its surroundings, determined on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. New development should be designed in a manner that is sensitive to the surroundings.
2. GOAL F-1: Provide a safe and efficient network of arterial and collector streets and a network of local and neighborhood streets which offer suitable access to property and safety for vehicular and pedestrian traffic.
3. POLICY F-1-1: Reduce points of traffic conflict on public streets through driveway and intersection separation requirements. Traffic flows more smoothly and safely when there are fewer points of conflict and fewer places where there are fewer points of conflict and fewer places where turning movements take place. Proper spacing of driveways and intersections reduces these conflict points.
4. GOAL F-5: Provide adequate, attractive, and safe parking facilities.
5. POLICY F-5-1: Require new developments to construct sufficient but not excessive parking for their demand. When businesses, apartments, and other uses do not have sufficient parking, the customer and tenant base is affected. In addition, the surrounding neighborhoods may be disrupted by onstreet parking by customers of businesses with inadequate parking. At the same time, parking lots use large amounts of land, the pavement surface causes increased storm water runoff and "heat islands", and expanses of asphalt are generally unattractive. Sizing parking lots to meet peak demand can waste land. Other approaches, such as using grassed areas for overflow parking, should be considered.
6. POLICY F-5-2: Encourage flexibility in meeting parking demand (shared parking, grassed overflow areas for peak demand and similar practices). The city should explore ways to reduce the amount of land consumed by parking lots. These might include smaller parking spaces for compact cars, shared parking between uses with different hours (such as using church parking lots for businesses during the week), and temporary overflow parking areas.
7. POLICY F-5-5: Require internal landscaping in all large parking lots. Uninterrupted expanses of asphalt are unattractive, and they increase storm water runoff and create "heat islands". Landscaping can mitigate all of these effects.
8. GOAL I-1: Provide high-quality public facilities in locations which are convenient and accessible to local residents.

This property is located in the Columbus Central Neighborhoods character area. The following Planning Principle(s) apply to this application: None.

The Bicycle \& Pedestrian Plan element of the Comprehensive Plan designates the $27^{\text {th }}$ Street frontage of this property as a corridor "needing focused pedestrian improvements". The Bicycle Facility Map of this plan element recommends a Cycle Track to be developed along both the $27^{\text {th }}$ Street \& Home Avenue frontages of this subject property.

## Planning Consideration(s):

The following general site considerations, community planning concepts, and other facts should be considered in the review of this application:

1. The applicant is proposing to construct a $+/-4,040$ square foot building addition (classroom expansion) as well as visitor parking/bus circulation changes.
2. The building addition is located on the west side (California Street frontage) of the school building. This building addition is proposed to be setback further from California Street than the existing school building. The existing building's wall on California Street is +/- 44 feet to the center line of California Street (with an extended entrance canopy being at the right-of-way line). The new building addition would be setback $+/-62$ feet from the centerline of California Street. The Zoning Ordinance requires a 35 -foot front setback from the center line of California Street.
3. The existing parking lot on the north side of the school (along the $27^{\text {th }}$ Street frontage) is proposed to be divided into 2 lots (one to the east and the other to the west) separated by a curbed median. The west side of the parking lot will be used for visitor parking, while the east side will be used for bus parking and drop-off/pick-up. The side used for the buses will have a new drive access on $27^{\text {th }}$ Street, as well as a new "exit only" access point onto Home Avenue.
4. The proposed plan shows 73 parking spaces in the visitor parking lot (including 4 handicapped parking spaces). The other parking lot provides space for 10 school buses, and approximately 60 additional standard parking spaces when buses are not in use. The existing parking lot includes +/49 vehicle parking spaces (plus an additional 23 spaces when no school buses are present). There is also an additional $+/-72$ parking spaces in a separate parking lot on the east side of the property (Home Avenue frontage).
5. The proposed new access to $27^{\text {th }}$ Street will be aligned with a residential driveway across the street, but will be separated by only 95 feet from the next residential driveway to the east (measured at the driveway centerlines). The minimum driveway separation required by the zoning ordinance for those along $27^{\text {th }}$ Street is 200 feet. The proposed driveway will be 260 feet from the Home Avenue intersection (again measured from the centerlines). This proposed drive will replace an existing driveway on $27^{\text {th }}$ Street that is 125 feet from the Home Avenue intersection and 43 feet from the nearest residential driveway.
6. A second, existing driveway onto $27^{\text {th }}$ Street, located on the west side of the property, is proposed to remain in its current location.
7. The proposed new access to Home Avenue would be an additional driveway on the property. It is located 142 feet from the $27^{\text {th }}$ Street intersection and 54 feet from a driveway for the Columbus North High School parking lot across Home Avenue. The minimum driveway separation required by the zoning ordinance for those along Home Avenue is also 200 feet. This new driveway is proposed to be exit only.
8. The current parking lot was built before the current zoning ordinance and is considered legal nonconforming. Neither of the existing parking lot entrances/exits meet the current 200-foot minimum separation standard.
9. Lillian Schmitt Elementary, along with the other surrounding schools, contribute to a high level of pedestrian and vehicle congestion in this area at certain times of the day during the school year.
10. This parking lot reconfiguration will require the removal/replacement of several trees currently located on the street frontage and within the parking lot landscaping areas. The submitted site plan shows the removal of 2 street trees along $27^{\text {th }}$ Street where the new drive access will be constructed. The submitted plans do not show the replacement of these tree(s) where the current access point will be removed and replaced to grass.
11. The existing landscaping on the $27^{\text {th }}$ Street frontage is legal non-conforming since it was installed before the current Zoning Ordinance requirements. Removing these 2 trees without replacing them elsewhere would increase this non-conformity, creating a zoning violation. The current Zoning Ordinance would require this parking lot frontage (+/-550 linear feet) to incorporate a minimum of 11 large trees or 14 medium trees, plus 83 shrubs.
12. Other landscaping changes are planned for the California Street and Home Avenue frontages. The California Street parking lot frontage landscaping will not increase in non-conformity. The Home Avenue parking lot frontage landscaping will increase in non-conformity by removing 5 existing trees and replacing them with only two trees and 5 shrubs, creating a zoning violation. The current Zoning Ordinance would require the parking lot frontage (+/- 100 linear feet) to incorporate a minimum of 2 large trees or 3 medium trees, plus 15 shrubs.
13. The submitted plans include new, additional landscaping that would not meet the requirements specified in the Zoning Ordinance for the parking lot interior. The zoning ordinance requires a minimum of 2,702 square feet of parking lot interior landscaped area for the new parking lot, with a total of 9 trees and 54 shrubs also required. The applicants are currently proposing 3,285 square feet of landscaped area with 7 trees and 49 shrubs.
14. New exterior lighting, which is compliant with the requirements of the zoning ordinance, is included in the applicant's parking lot redesign. This includes 3, 25 -foot tall light poles located in parking lot landscape islands, and 11, 15-foot tall light poles around the perimeter of the parking lot. There are an additional 9,15 -foot tall light poles included in the plans to be added along the western frontage (California Street) of the playground and the south side of the property. The Zoning Ordinance
requires exterior, freestanding lighting to be a maximum of 25 feet tall (allowing a base of 36 inches in height, maximum), and for fixtures to be 90-degree cutoffs.
15. The City's Engineering Office is planning for a bicycle/pedestrian improvement project to be made along the north side of $27^{\text {th }}$ Street between Washington Street and Home Avenue. The proposed concrete side path will be 10-12 feet wide with a 5-foot tree lawn. The intersection of $27^{\text {th }}$ Street and California will receive new ADA ramps and will potentially relocate flashing crosswalk beacons.




## PLAN NOTES






