



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE ISSUED: March 30, 2006 REPORT NO. PC-06-104

ATTENTION: Planning Commission  
Agenda of April 6, 2006

SUBJECT: Initiation of an Amendment to the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Uptown Community Plan to Re-Designate a 2.6-acre parcel from Open Space to Institutional (Hospital). Project No. 94413

OWNER/  
APPLICANT: Scripps Mercy Hospital

### SUMMARY

Issues – Should the Planning Commission INITIATE an amendment to the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Uptown Community Plan pursuant to Municipal Code Section 122.0103? An amendment to the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Uptown Community Plan has been requested to redesignate a 2.6-acre parcel from Open Space to Institutional (Hospital).

Staff Recommendation – INITIATE the plan amendment process.

Community Planning Group Recommendation – The Uptown Community Planning Group has placed the request for a Community Plan Amendment Initiation on the agenda for their regular monthly meeting of April 4, 2006. Their recommendation(s) will be presented at the April 6, 2006 Planning Commission hearing.

Environmental Impact – If initiated, the proposed plan amendment and future discretionary actions would be subject to environmental review.

Fiscal Impact – None. Costs associated with processing this application would be reimbursed by the applicant.

Housing Affordability Impact – None.

**This initiation request does not constitute an endorsement of the project proposal. If initiated, a staff recommendation will be developed once the project has been fully analyzed. This action will allow the staff analysis to proceed.**

## BACKGROUND

Scripps Mercy Hospital has requested an initiation of a General/Community Plan Amendment to redesignate a 2.6-acre parcel for Institutional (Hospital) use. The 2.6-acre site is part of a larger 5.9-acre canyon area bisecting the hospital campus and the entire canyon area is designated in the Uptown Community Plan as Open Space. The 2.6-acre site, generally located east of Fourth Avenue and north of Lewis Street, contains areas of moderate slope, and is occupied by numerous hospital related uses, including an existing parking structure, Mercy Manor, Mercy Gardens, a Chapel, and a power generation and cooling tower. The remainder of the designated open space contains areas of moderate to steep slopes and vegetation. Hospital uses abut the project site to the west and south; with residential development and the remaining open space on the north, and the Sixth Avenue extension from State Route 163 on the east (see Attachment 1).

Scripps Mercy Hospital is located on the east side of the intersection of Fourth Avenue and Washington Street within the Medical Complex neighborhood of the Uptown Community Planning area. The existing hospital and ancillary uses occupy approximately 16 acres located on property subject to a Conditional Use Permit (CUP 88-1062). Existing permitted uses include the hospital, behavioral clinic, an intensive care unit and related offices, resident and intern apartments, a five-story 685-stall parking garage, off-street parking, and incidental accessory uses (see Attachment 2). The majority of the hospital property is designated as Institutional (Hospital) by the Uptown Community Plan, with a portion of the property, including the project site, designated as Open Space (see Attachment 3). Expansion of the hospital beyond the existing site is possible, but somewhat limited due to the canyon bisecting the site.

The Medical Complex Neighborhood of the Uptown Community Plan area is bounded by Interstate 8 on the north, Washington Street on the south, State Highway 163 on the east, and the Dove Street Canyon on the west (see Attachment 4). A significant portion of the Medical Complex area consists of steep canyons and hillsides which border the south rim of Mission Valley. Approximately 106 net acres are available in the area for public and private development. Medical uses account for approximately 44 of the 106 net usable acres within the Medical Complex area. Two major hospitals, including Scripps Mercy, occupy a majority of that land.

The requested General/Community Plan amendment would redesignate 2.6-acres from Open Space to Institutional (Hospital), in order to facilitate the construction of a 5.5-story 582-stall parking structure. If initiated, the project would also require an amendment to CUP 88-1062 and vacation of public street right-of-way (see Attachment 5).

There are no other community plan amendments being considered in the immediate vicinity.

## DISCUSSION

Before a community plan amendment can be initiated, Section 122.0104 of the Municipal Code requires that any one of three initial criteria or all four supplemental criteria, specified in the code, must be met. The Planning Department does not believe that any of the following three

initial criteria can be met:

- (1) The amendment is appropriate due to a mapping or textual error or omission made when the original land use plan or local coastal program was adopted or during subsequent amendments;**
- (2) Denial of initiation would jeopardize the public health, safety or general welfare;**
- (3) The amendment is appropriate due to a material change in circumstances since the adoption of a land use plan or local coastal program whereby denial of initiation would result in a hardship to the applicant by denying any reasonable use of the subject real property.**

The Planning Department does, however, believe that all of the following supplemental criteria can be met:

- (1) The proposed land use plan amendment is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Uptown Community Plan.**

The Conservation Element of the Progress Guide and General Plan identifies the specific goal of preserving the unique landforms, and the character they impart to San Diego. Further, canyons should be left undeveloped, or minimally developed consistent with their special qualities and limitations; only sites best suited to development should be used; and canyons should not be filled. Likewise, the Open Space Element of the Progress Guide and General Plan describes the important role of open space to control urban form, and for scenic and visual enjoyment.

The Uptown Community Plan contains an Open Space and Recreation Element. The element describes Regional/Resource-Based Parks, Population-Based Parks, Urban Parks, and Natural Open Space, and recognizes that Uptown's open space, concentrated primarily in canyons and hillsides, is being threatened by increasing development pressure. Density and the design of new development should be carefully controlled in accordance with specified criteria to ensure the preservation of the natural character of the hillsides.

Uptown's natural open space system was analyzed in 1985 based on the existing conditions utilizing biological, geological, and urban form criteria. The result of the analysis was the creation of a priority matrix for open space identification and acquisition that was incorporated into the Uptown Community Plan. The amendment would impact an area of a canyon open space area identified as Montecito TD (see Attachment 6). The Montecito TD area received a low priority ranking, and the community group voted to not designate the area as open space. Therefore, the proposed redesignation of the project site from Open Space to Institutional may not adversely affect the Open Space Element of the community plan.

The Uptown Community Plan identifies a number of objectives related to parking in the Medical Complex area. The plan states that parking impacts generated by medical facilities should be reduced, and any expansion or redevelopment of hospital facilities should incorporate intensified usage of the existing designated hospital site rather than expand into new areas. In addition, the plan states that parking and traffic impacts generated by the hospital, should be addressed through preparation of a parking study prior to any expansion. The hospital should also employ transportation systems management techniques, such as encouraging employees to use car pools by providing reduced parking rates for those who car pool and increase employee use of transit by providing reduced-cost transit passes. Finally, the plan calls for the on-street parking permit area to be expanded if the parking impact spreads beyond its existing boundaries.

The requested amendment would facilitate the construction of a parking structure, and may meet objectives of the Uptown Community Plan related to parking. If initiated, a parking study would be prepared and this issue would be fully evaluated for conformance with the objectives of the plan.

**(2) The proposed land use plan amendment appears to offer a public benefit to the community or City.**

The potential benefit of the proposed land use amendment to the Uptown Community Plan is that it would facilitate expansion of hospital uses potentially including additional parking facilities which may alleviate parking impacts in the Medical Center neighborhood. Also, by allowing the parking structure to be constructed on hospital-owned property, the public might benefit from the hospital not expanding into adjacent neighborhoods and disrupting long-established residential development.

**(3) Public services appear to be available to serve the proposed increase in density or intensity of use.**

Uptown is an urbanized community and all needed public services are available in the community. If the plan amendment is initiated, the adequacy of public services and facilities would be analyzed during review following the project submittal.

**(4) City staff is available to process the proposed land use plan amendment without any work being deferred on General Fund supported programs or ongoing plan updates.**

Staff is available to process this amendment request without delaying General Fund programs or ongoing plan updates, as the Planning Department's work program includes staff time for non-General Fund development projects. However, delays in processing the plan amendment could occur based on staff levels and workload. The costs associated with processing this amendment would be paid for by the applicant.

As outlined above, the proposed plan amendment meets all the supplemental initiation criteria; therefore, the staff recommends that the proposed amendment to the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Uptown Community Plan be initiated.

The following issues have been identified with the initiation request. If initiated, these issues, as well as others that may be identified, will be analyzed and evaluated through the general/community plan amendment review process:

- Traffic Circulation/Parking
  - Conduct a parking study to evaluate the Hospital facility's impact; review Hospital transportation system management techniques including carpool and transit incentive programs; and explore the need and feasibility for expanding the on-street parking permit area
- Analysis of open space resources and the value of the project site as open space
- Site design analyses related to the project site, including scale, harmony and relationship to open space areas
- Site development analyses related to minimizing the filling of canyon lands and restricting development to an area of least impact

Although staff believes that the proposed amendment meets the necessary criteria for initiation, staff has not fully reviewed the applicant's proposal. **Therefore, by initiating this general/community plan amendment, neither staff nor the Planning Commission are committed to recommend in favor or denial of the proposed amendment.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Planning Department

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Maxx Stalheim  
Senior Planner  
Planning Department

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- Attachments:
1. Open Space Designation
  2. Scripps Hospital Aerial
  3. Community Plan Land Use
  4. Image Inventory – Medical Complex
  5. Open Space Re-designation with existing uses
  6. Priority Matrix – Designated Open Space by Canyon/Hillside System
  7. Ownership Disclosure Statement