

DATE ISSUED: October 7, 2004 REPORT NO. PC-04-157

ATTENTION: Planning Commission
Agenda of October 14, 2004

SUBJECT: San Diego Model School Development Project Workshop – Discussion of proposed land use amendments to the Mid-City Communities Plan and Progress Guide and General Plan

REFERENCE: City Council hearing of June 28, 2004; Resolution No. R-299396 (Attachment 1)

APPLICANT/
OWNER: San Diego Model School Development Agency

SUMMARY:

THIS IS A WORKSHOP REGARDING GENERAL/COMMUNITY PLAN AMENDMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SAN DIEGO MODEL SCHOOL PROJECT WITHIN THE CITY HEIGHTS AREA OF THE MID-CITY COMMUNITY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION AT THIS TIME.

BACKGROUND

In 1998, City of San Diego voters passed Proposition MM, which approved the San Diego Unified School District's (SDUSD) \$1.5 billion bond measure to modernize the district's existing schools and construct new schools in areas of need. The bond measure provides for 13 new elementary schools, one high school and repairs for existing elementary schools. With overcrowded school facilities in the community, City Heights was selected for the construction of four new elementary schools. Given the highly developed and relatively dense urban nature of City Heights, the development of four new schools will result in the removal of approximately 637 housing units with a portion of those units consisting of public housing owned and operated by the San Diego Housing Commission, housing owned and operated by other non-profit entities, and Section 8 housing.

In order to address displacement issues resulting from the development of the new elementary schools, the Model School Project began as a pilot study in January 2001. The study was primarily focused on creating a new model for school development that would take into account reincorporating housing into the overall design of a potential site in order to address displacement issues related to existing residents. The pilot study focused on the proposed school

site located in the vicinity of 43rd Street and Myrtle Avenue. The pilot study brought together a variety of organizations, agencies, community representatives and residents to participate in the study. Organizations and agencies included in the pilot study were: Price Charities; the City of San Diego; the San Diego Housing Commission; the City Heights Project Area Committee; as well as the San Diego State University National Center for the 21st Century Schoolhouse, which served as the clearinghouse of ideas on school design. At the time, Price Charities provided the seed money to jump-start the project and fund preliminary design plans based on community input.

In 2002, the San Diego Model School Development Agency, consisting of the SDUSD, the City of San Diego, the City of San Diego Redevelopment Agency, and the San Diego Housing Authority was created as a Joint Powers Authority to facilitate the development of the Model School Project. The San Diego Model School Development Agency is operated by a seven-member Board of Directors that represents each of the four agencies and the City Heights community. A community representative is also on the Board of Directors. In August of 2003, the firm of Sedona Pacific/Lankford Associates was hired by the Board of Directors to be the program manager to represent the Agency, supervise the planning and design, evaluate the feasibility and recommend a site for the Model School Project. Three other new school sites were identified and evaluated as part of the process. However, the original site, as identified in the pilot study, was selected for the Model School since it allowed for the most opportunities to incorporate the overall model school design and facility concepts envisioned by the Model School Project.

On November 12, 2002, the SDUSD voted to approve the preferred site within the Model School Project area and commence site acquisition and construction of the Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School. As such, demolition of buildings within the school site has begun and the Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School is anticipated to open in Fall 2006 with an initial capacity of 700 students and a master plan capacity of 900 students.

On June 28, 2004, in response to concerns that the proposed Model School Project keep pace with the development of the new Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School project, the City Council initiated a General/Community Plan Amendment to analyze changes to the General Plan and Mid-City Communities Plan to reflect land use and transportation modifications which would be needed to allow the potential development of the Model School Project in City Heights. Specifically, the actions approved by the City Council were to initiate an amendment to the Mid-City Communities Plan to reflect the Model School Project around Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School; amend the existing zoning in order to implement the proposed land uses contemplated for the Model School Project; amend the City Heights Redevelopment Project Area Plan to accommodate the Model School Project; and make other appropriate updates and changes needed to make the Mid-City Communities Plan compatible with the relevant community and redevelopment goals of the Model School Project (Attachment 1). To date, the Model School Project has not been submitted to the Development Services Department for formal review.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed 37.05-acre Model School Project site is comprised of an irregularly-shaped area roughly bounded by Myrtle Avenue on the north, 42nd Street on the west, 44th Street and Highland Avenue to the east and Redwood Street and Quince Street to the south (Attachment 2). This site is located within the Castle, Azalea Park, and Swan Canyon neighborhoods of City Heights.

As part of the development proposal, the Model School Project proposes to construct a mixture of residential, commercial and institutional uses that are centered around the development of the Florence Griffith Joyner Elementary School, which will remove a total of 123 residential units. The overall project would remove a total of 311 residential units but would provide 509 units of replacement housing. These housing units would be developed as a mixture of market rate and affordable for-sale and rental units. The project also proposes the development of community-related services including before and after school childcare, tutoring, daycare and preschool services, job counseling, immigration advice, healthcare, and other social services. Additional project features would include opportunities for commercial-retail uses along Fairmount Avenue as well as the preservation and enhancement of open space within and adjacent to Manzanita Canyon and Swan Canyon (Attachment 3).

The Model School Project focuses on utilizing the planning for the Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School as the neighborhood focal point and gathering place for area residents. The concept of providing extended community services at the school was conceived as part of the pilot study and incorporated as a means of providing community amenities that would foster livability within the neighborhood. In addition, the Model School Project utilizes Smart Growth principles that emphasize concentrating growth in conjunction with creating infrastructure to serve the needs of the surrounding community.

The applicant has requested amendments to the Progress Guide and General Plan and Mid-City Communities Plan to redesignate 17.69 acres of the 37.05-acre site. These amendments primarily include increasing existing residential densities from Low Density Residential (6-10 dus/acre) south of Thorn Street on the west side of Fairmount Avenue to Medium Density Residential (11-15 dus/acre). Requested amendments on the east side of Fairmount Avenue would redesignate the area from Medium Density Residential (16-20 dus/acre) to Medium High Density Residential (26-30 dus/acre) in the area south of Thorn Street and east of the commercial corridor as well as redesignate the mixed-use areas from Low Density Residential (9 dus/acre) to Mixed-Use with Medium Density Residential (29 dus/acre). The area where the Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School is sited would be redesignated from Low Density Residential (6-10 dus/acre) and Mixed-Use (29 dus/acre) to Institutional- Elementary School. (Attachments 4, 5 and 6).

MID-CITY COMMUNITIES PLAN EXISTING AND PLANNED LAND USES

Existing Uses

The neighborhoods of Castle, Azalea Park and Swan Canyon are primarily comprised of older single-family homes interspersed with a number of low density multi-family complexes. The Fairmount Avenue commercial corridor contains mostly older neighborhood-serving retail,

multi-family residential and light industrial uses. Located in close proximity to the project site are two additional schools, Monroe-Clark Middle School and the Alexander Hamilton Elementary School. Demolition has commenced for the construction of the new 6.3-acre Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School which is sited in the project site and is located between Myrtle Avenue and Thorn Street and the alley east of 42nd Street and 43rd Street.

Planned Land Uses

The Mid-City Communities Plan identifies a mixture of land use designations for the project area. These include Low to Medium Density Residential, Mixed Use and Open Space. As envisioned by the Mid-City Communities Plan, existing residential areas should be stable and be characterized by a diverse array of well-designed neighborhoods with affordable housing that caters to a full range of family and living styles. Further, the commercial areas are envisioned to provide vibrant shopping and business opportunities to the community. New commercial and mixed-use development should be focused within nodes and along existing commercial corridors to create strong centers of complementary activity. Both Manzanita Canyon and Swan Canyon are located in the south and southeastern portion of the project site and are designated as Open Space by the Mid-City Communities Plan. These canyons are envisioned to be part of an interconnected system of improved parks, canyons and natural hillsides (Attachment 2).

With the addition of Rosa Parks Elementary School and Monroe-Clark Middle School, public school facilities in Mid-City now include 16 elementary schools, three middle schools and two high schools. However, according to the Public Facilities Element of the Mid-City Communities Plan, on-going enrollment growth in combination with older schools in Mid-City on extremely small sites continues to aggravate overcrowding in most schools. Until the four new facilities are built, SDUSD has attempted to alleviate overcrowding on an interim basis with portable classrooms, busing, modified attendance boundaries and restructured grade levels.

Rather than consider schools as islands in the middle of an urban environment, the Mid-City Communities Plan has envisioned that new school facilities serve as a focal point for the neighborhood by providing a quality physical environment as well as a high standard of elementary and secondary education that caters to the surrounding neighborhoods. Further, the plan calls for coordination between the SDUSD and the community to ensure that adequate public facilities and infrastructure are in place and comply with maximum school enrollment capacities are considered. Consideration of linkages between new schools, other neighborhood facilities and natural amenities are also cited in the plan to ensure that future schools are appropriately integrated in the surrounding neighborhoods.

The plan also recommends that the City and SDUSD enter into joint-use recreational agreements for elementary school and middle-school sites. According to the Mid-City Communities Plan, Mid-City is deficient in mini-neighborhood and community park acreage by 87 acres. Further, the Plan states that the most pressing needs are in the older neighborhoods, generally west of 54th Street. These same areas suffer from undersized, overcrowded school sites, limiting their use for recreational space. There are currently seven neighborhood parks and three community parks within Mid-City. As part of the City Heights Urban Village Project, the City Heights Community Park was expanded and improved to assist in alleviating park deficiencies. In 2003, the City also acquired a six-acre site along Home Avenue in anticipation of creating a passive use park and enhancing the Chollas Creek. Joint-use agreements for the use of school grounds

for park purposes, including the turfing of school play fields, has also assisted in alleviating some of the deficiencies.

There are currently two other General/Community Plan amendments in progress within the Mid-City Communities planning area. The Vista Colina Project proposes to redesignate 3.6 acres located at 4079 54th Street from Low to Medium Density Residential (11 to 15 dus/acre) to Medium to High Density Residential (31 to 43 dus/acre) in order to accommodate 142 for-sale housing units. This amendment was initiated by the Planning Commission on October 16, 2003. At this time, City staff is reviewing the applicant's detailed project submittal. The Planning Commission initiated the Auburn Park Project on July 22, 2004 to redesignate a 2.3-acre site located at the southwest corner of University Avenue and 52nd Street from Industrial to Medium Density Residential (21 to 25 dus/acre) in order to accommodate a proposal for 73 affordable housing units. City staff is also currently reviewing the applicant's detailed project submittal.

DISCUSSION

Issues being studied as part of the amendment process include the proposed intensity of residential development adjacent to existing single-family neighborhoods, open space areas, and along the Fairmount Avenue mixed-use corridor; traffic issues related to the proposed increase in density; impacts to open space; the adequacy of proposed park space; impacts to housing availability and affordability; and potential impacts to existing and new schools. The following is a summary of each of the issues that staff has identified:

Land Use Issues

Potential compatibility issues could arise between proposed new residential development and single-family areas surrounding the project site. The proposal currently designates the area that is adjacent to Manzanita Canyon as Medium Density Residential (11-15 dus/acre). Under the Mid-City Communities Plan, the existing areas are designated for Low Density Residential (6-10 dus/acre) and Open Space. As described in the San Diego Model School Development Project report, the for-sale housing for this area would be comprised of two building types. The units would include paired-three-story town homes with individual garages that would line the canyon edge while two and three bedroom townhouses would stack on one and two bedroom condominium units sitting over parking decks.

The applicant has indicated that residential densities along Fairmount Avenue between Myrtle and Thorn Streets have not been included as part of the General/Community Plan Amendment and would conform to the existing land use designations. However, land use amendments are currently being analyzed along Fairmount Avenue from Thorn Street to the area south of Redwood Street. This area is designated for Mixed-Use with differing residential densities. The Low Density Residential (9 dus/acre) designation that is applied to the areas south of Thorn Street and the Medium Density Residential (29 dus/acre) that is applied north of Thorn Street would be redesignated to accommodate Medium High Density Residential up to 29 dus/acre as part of the mixed use designation. This proposed redesignation of the mixed-use areas may be supportable due in fact that the sites are adjacent to Fairmount Avenue which has access to mass transit and would be in close proximity to neighborhood-serving commercial establishments. However, staff will request that a comprehensive density analysis and a comprehensive shade and shadow study to be conducted as part of the overall project, as well as request that enhanced

architectural design and streetscape treatments be incorporated into the project design. Staff is also anticipating conducting an assessment of how the project implements the General Plan's Strategic Framework Element.

Traffic Issues

Traffic issues, due to the proposed increase in residential dwelling units, could have a potential impact on the surrounding neighborhoods. The Mid-City Communities Plan recommends that 43rd Street be maintained as a two-lane, one-way collector street southbound on 43rd Street. As part of the project, the applicant is proposing to connect Myrtle Street from Van Dyke Avenue to Fairmount Avenue in order to improve traffic flow. Furthermore, the project proposes to reconfigure the intersection at 43rd Street and Fairmount Avenue. Therefore, staff has identified potential traffic-related impacts as a primary issue to be addressed as part of the analysis when the project is submitted for formal review.

Open Space Issues

Approximately 9.55 acres of open space is contained within the project boundaries. Potential issues include the project's relationship to surrounding open space and canyon areas within and adjacent to the project site. A portion of the area within Manzanita Canyon falls within the Multiple Habitat Preservation Area (MHPA). Further, a United States Geological Survey Blueline Stream has been identified at the bottom of Manzanita Canyon. Slopes within both Manzanita Canyon and Swan Canyon are generally 25 percent and greater. Therefore, a detailed environmental analysis and study will be conducted when the project is formally submitted to determine potential impacts to the canyons systems and if any wildlife corridors are impacted by the proposal. Conceptually, the Model School Project has proposed to enhance and restore the disturbed canyon areas that are part of the project site. Further discussion with Multiple Species Conservation Program and Environmental staff will be necessary to determine the extent of the impacts and restoration that will be necessary.

Park Issues

According to the Mid-City Communities Plan, the Mid-City is deficient in mini-, neighborhood and community park acreage by 87 acres. Further, the Plan indicates that the most pressing needs are in the older neighborhoods, generally west of 54th Street. As shown on Attachment 7, the project development plan includes area P1, a joint-use area consisting of 1.5 acres. The project also proposes a 1.32-acre park adjacent to Manzanita Canyon (P2), a .35-acre park at the corner of Thorn Street and Fairmount Avenue (P3) as well as a .75-acre park along Fairmount Avenue in the Swan Canyon neighborhood (P4) along the southern portion of the project site. Total proposed park acreage within the project site would be 3.92-acres.

According to the Mid-City Communities Plan, new and expanded park facilities should meet the General Plan standards. These standards specify that one neighborhood park, of no less than ten acres, should be provided for every 5,000 residents and one community park, no less than 20 acres in size for every 25,000 residents. The Hollywood Neighborhood Park, which is within a quarter mile of the project site, constitutes 13 acres of usable park space. The Azalea Neighborhood Park, which is located approximately one-half mile from the project site, comprises nine-acres of usable park space. The City Heights Community Park, located in the

City Heights Urban Village which is located approximately one-half mile north of the project site, constitutes approximately 13 acres. The addition of a joint-use area as part of the Florence-Griffith Joyner School along with three additional mini/pocket parks would assist in relieving the overall park deficiency within this portion of City Heights.

Housing Availability and Affordability Issues

Given the existing Mid-City Communities Plan land-use designations, approximately 336 to 476 units could be developed within the project area, including the school site. The proposed General/Community Plan Amendments would contribute to the creation of 509 housing units consisting of for-sale and affordable housing units within the boundaries of the project site. The project proposal would result in the loss of 188 units in addition to the 123 units already demolished as part of the on-going development of the new Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School. As a result of the project's objective for providing replacement housing, a net gain of 198 dwelling units would be achieved. Based on the existing development proposal, approximately 291 rental units would be designated on site for affordable housing, which would meet the requirements of the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance. The remaining 218 units would be offered as for-sale units. However, at this time the applicant has not indicated whether or not these units would qualify as affordable for-sale units since the total project financing has not been determined.

According to Census 2000, the Average Median Income (AMI) in City Heights was \$23,682 as compared to the Citywide AMI of \$45,826. Based on affordable housing projects registered with the San Diego Housing Commission, City Heights has approximately 1,315 dwelling units restricted to either very-low (0-50 percent AMI) and low (51-80 percent AMI) incomes. The citywide, restricted affordable dwelling units comprise 17,097 of dwelling units. The portion of restricted affordable units located in City Heights is approximately 8 percent of the citywide total. Issues to be addressed as part of the amendment analysis will include a review of the proposed mixture of affordable and market rate housing to determine how the units will implement the City's policies on balanced communities as well as the General Plan's Housing Element.

School Issues

According to SDUSD, the development of four new elementary schools in City Heights will provide relief to the existing elementary schools currently suffering from over enrollment. With the addition of the new schools, enrollment at the ten existing elementary schools is anticipated to be reduced from an enrollment of 7,037 students to 5,530 with an average of 553 students per elementary school. According to the Mid-City Communities Plan, elementary enrollment standards are 100 students per acre, or the design capacity of permanent structures on existing school sites (500 students per school are preferred). During previous public meetings on the Model School Project, community concerns were raised concerning the student enrollment impact to the new Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School, since the proposed General/Community Plan Amendments would increase allowable residential densities within the school attendance boundaries. Based on enrollment forecasting provided by the SDUSD, approximately 780 students would be enrolled at Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School. With the addition of the Model School Project housing component, it is estimated that

approximately 104 additional students could be enrolled at the new elementary school, thus increasing the total enrolled to 884 potential students.

Outreach

The San Diego Model School Development Agency has conducted various public meetings and outreach efforts with several community organizations and community residents (Attachment 8). Due to the concern that the Model School Project was not keeping pace with the development of the new Florence Griffith-Joyner Elementary School, the City Heights Area Planning Committee did not have an opportunity to formally provide a recommendation to the City Council regarding the consideration of the General/Community Plan Amendment initiation on June 28, 2004. However, in a special meeting conducted by the community planning group on September 20, 2004, CHAPC voted 8-1-1 with 1 recusal request that the General/Community Plan Amendment Initiation be rescinded by the City Council; that the initiation be reconsidered by the Planning Commission; and that adequate notice be provided to residents and property owners in the vicinity and within the subject site (Attachment 9). Concerns expressed by planning group members and the community at large related to the potential displacement of residents and existing businesses, general opposition to increasing residential densities, additional overcrowding of the new elementary school, development impacts to adjacent residences, and the over concentration of affordable housing in City Heights.

According to Section 122.0103 (a) of Land Development Code, the City Council has the authority to initiate an amendment to the General Plan and applicable land use plan. Therefore, the City Council acted within their purview when action to initiate the proposed plan amendments came before them on June 28, 2004.

CONCLUSION

As currently envisioned, the San Diego Model School Development Agency would create an “urban village” to serve community needs and provide replacement housing that otherwise would have not been replaced. Further, the San Diego Model School Development Project is envisioned to revitalize a portion of City Heights by developing a new neighborhood center with a new elementary school as the focus of the neighborhood. In addition to acting as a means of replacement housing, the proposed development proposal would include other neighborhood-enhancing amenities such as additional park space and the preservation and enhancement of open space adjacent to and within Manzanita Canyon and Swan Canyon.

Planning Commission input is requested on the issues identified above and other issues related to the Model School Project. This input will be utilized when review of the General/Community Plan Amendments commences. Following this workshop, the consultant for the San Diego Model School Development Agency (Sedona Pacific) will coordinate with City staff to begin the General/Community Plan Amendment process; including formal submittal of the General/Community Plan Amendment to the City, identify and implement strategies for achieving effective public outreach (including multiple community-based workshops), environmental analysis, per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and further coordination with the various stakeholders in the City Heights community.

Once community consensus is established relative to the design and land uses proposed for the Model School Project, the necessary CEQA analysis has been completed, and recommended changes to the Community Plan text have been identified; the project will return to the Planning Commission for a public hearing to consider a formal recommendation(s) to the City Council.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary P. Wright
Program Manager
Planning Department

Marlon I. Pangilinan
Associate Planner
Planning Department

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Attachments:

1. City Council Resolution R-299396
2. Project Location Map
3. San Diego Model School Site Plan
4. Mid-City Communities Plan Land Use Plan Map
5. Existing Land Use Designations
6. Proposed Land Use Designations
7. Project Development Areas
8. Community Outreach List
9. City Heights Area Planning Committee (CHAPC) draft minutes of the September 20, 2004 Special Meeting
10. Ownership Disclosure Information