

# Agenda Report

November 13, 2017

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning & Community Development Department  
**SUBJECT: POLYTECHNIC SCHOOL MASTER PLAN – 1030 EAST CALIFORNIA BOULEVARD**

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Find that the proposed Polytechnic Master Plan is categorically exempt from environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code §21080(b)(1); Administrative Code, Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 15314. - Minor Additions to Schools and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances; and
2. Adopt the Findings of Consistency and Conditions of Approval (Attachments A and B, respectively, to the staff report) for the approval of the Polytechnic School Master Plan, acknowledging that the Master Plan, as conditioned, is consistent with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance; and
3. Adopt a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Pasadena Approving a 15-Year Master Plan for Polytechnic School Located at 1030 East California Boulevard.

## **PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

On September 27, 2017, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of the Master Plan to the City Council. At the meeting, the Planning Commission discussed a variety of topics, including potential intersection improvements at Cornell Road and Mentor Avenue and conditions of approval related to maximum number of vehicle trips and the athletic program events. Overall, the Planning Commission expressed that the proposed Master Plan as conditioned provides the means for the school to modernize its facilities while being sensitive to the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

### **DESIGN COMMISSION ADVISORY REVIEW:**

On May 10, 2016, the Design Commission conducted an Advisory Review of the proposed Master Plan. The Design Commission's review focused on urban design issues related to architecture, landscaping, and site planning of the new gym. Among the four preliminary design options for the new gym that were presented, the Design Commission favored Option B based on the low profile that engages pedestrians more, which gives a better sense of way-finding. Overall, the Design Commission appreciated the pedestrian-friendly approach to the new gym entrance, and that the school has been in on-going discussions with neighbors. In addition, the Design Commission encouraged the school to consider an open green space or corridor in the middle of the new gym.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The proposed project is a 15-year Master Plan for Polytechnic School. The purpose of the Master Plan is to moderately increase the student capacity to meet the community demand and modernize the existing gym facility. Through the Master Plan, the school proposes to increase the student enrollment capacity by 80 students (861 to 941 students) and the number of faculty and staff by 15 members (207 to 222 employees). The proposed Master Plan also includes demolition of the existing gym and construction of a new replacement gym in the same general location of the existing gym. A number of Conditions of Approval related to traffic, parking, and construction were developed through on-going discussions with the surrounding neighborhood, which are being recommended as part of the Master Plan in order to ensure that any potential impacts to the surrounding neighborhood are minimized.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Polytechnic School is a private school serving students from kindergarten through high school that was founded at the present site (north of Cornell Road) in 1907. The school's operation was limited to kindergarten through eighth grade until the 1950s, at which time the program was expanded to include high school. Polytechnic School is nationally recognized for its strong and rigorous academic program, along with athletics, outdoor education, community outreach, and the visual and performing arts.

Since its inception, Polytechnic School obtained several Conditional Use Permits from the City to complete various improvements to its campus until 1992, when the first of two previous Master Plans for Polytechnic School was approved. The 1992 Master Plan allowed for the expansion of school facilities by 33,890 square feet with an increase of enrollment to 861 students. While the enrollment of the school almost reached this maximum by the end of 2003 with 856 students, only 9,135 gross square feet of net new construction was completed; therefore, 24,754 square feet of planned new construction was not realized.

In 2005, a second Master Plan was approved, which allowed for 20,000 square feet of new construction in the North Campus (north of Cornell Road), an underground parking structure, 10,000 square feet of new construction in athletic fields and gym areas, a new

swimming pool, and 20,000 square feet of new construction in the South Campus (south of Cornell Road). The 2005 Master Development Plan did not modify the previously approved maximum enrollment of 861 students established in the 1992 Master Plan, and the school has been operating near that maximum allowed enrollment.

## Location

The school's campus is located adjacent to, and west of, the California Institute of Technology (Caltech). It is bounded by E. California Boulevard to the north, S. Wilson Avenue to the east, Arden Road to the south, and S. Catalina Avenue to the west. Residential properties are located along Catalina Avenue, Cornell Road and Arden Road. Cornell Road bisects the school into North and South Campus areas. Generally, K-8 school facilities are located within the North Campus area while all high school facilities are located within South Campus area. Polytechnic School owns nine additional residentially-zoned properties in the neighborhood; however, these parcels are not included in the Polytechnic Master Plan and would remain for residential use by school faculty or market rate rental; they cannot be used for academic purposes. The zoning designation for the parcels within the Polytechnic School Master Plan is PS (Public and Semi-Public), which is intended for large public or semi-public land uses that may not be appropriate in other zoning districts.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The proposed project is a 15-year Master Plan for Polytechnic School. The purposes of the Master Plan is to moderately increase the enrollment to better meet community demand and to replace the existing gym with a new facility as follows:

- Incremental increase in student enrollment capacity by 80 additional students (861 students to 941 students) over five years:

	Proposed Student Enrollment Increase	Proposed Maximum Student Enrollment
Existing	-	861
Year 1	10	871
Year 2	15	886
Year 3	15	901
Year 4	20	921
Year 5	20	941
Total Increase	80	

- Increase in faculty and staff by 15 members (207 to 222 employees), which will also be phased, proportional to the proposed student enrollment phasing.
- Replacement of a 35-foot tall gym with a new 40-foot tall gym with a basement level, in the same general location of the existing gym, resulting in a net increase of 38,214 square feet. The new basement level space will include support spaces for

athletics (e.g. lockers, weight room, trainers' room, team meeting rooms, etc.) and other multi-purpose rooms. The overall footprint would also increase up to 4,600 square feet (an approximately three percent increase) if determined necessary to accommodate the programmatic needs.

The Master Plan Narrative and the Project Plans are Attachments C and D, respectively, to this report.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS:**

Prior to submittal of the Master Plan application, Polytechnic School hosted two community meetings on November 10, 2014 and March 5, 2015 to discuss the school's plans. The school also held meetings with representatives of Catalina and Mentor Avenues, Cornell Road, and Dale Street on May 6, June 29, and August 20, 2015 to further discuss the proposed master plan. Subsequent to these meetings, the school worked with the neighborhood representatives to form a Neighbor Relations Council in order to continue the dialogue with the neighborhood. This group consists of representatives from Catalina and Mentor Avenues, Cornell Road, Dale Street, and California Boulevard. The school and the Neighbor Relations Council met on October 15, 2015, January 7, March 10, and May 12, 2016.

In addition to the above-mentioned meetings held by Polytechnic School, two at-large, City-hosted neighborhood meetings to receive comments on the proposed Master Plan on January 19, 2016 and July 11, 2017. There also have been a number of meetings involving the neighborhood representatives, Polytechnic School, and the City staff (both from the Department of Transportation and the Planning & Community Development Department) to discuss neighborhood concerns regarding the proposed master plan throughout the review process.

### **ANALYSIS:**

#### **Key Issues**

As with many of Pasadena's educational institutions, Polytechnic School is located amidst an established residential neighborhood. Consideration of the proposed Master Plan affords an opportunity to review the existing conditions as well as consideration of any potential impacts of the proposed changes. As mentioned before, there have been numerous neighborhood meetings in various forms. Through these meetings, concerns related to traffic, bus circulation, overflow parking, potential intensification of the school's athletic program, and construction impacts were identified as the main concerns for the neighborhood.

#### **Traffic**

One of the main concerns expressed by the neighbors is the traffic associated with student drop-off/pick-up activities, and the potential increase in school-related traffic within the neighborhood due to the proposed increase in the student enrollment and

faculty and staff. In response, the school has already implemented a number of measures to improve the existing conditions, which includes implementation of a Commuter Bus Program, prohibition of pick-up/drop off on the north side of Cornell Road, modification in the schedules of the three schools to stagger pick-up/drop-off traffic, and use of a third pick-up lane for North Campus.

Most significantly, the school has designated the parking lot located at the southwest corner of Wilson Avenue and Cornell Road ("Garland Parking Lot") as the preferred student drop-off/pick-up location for its high school students. Since utilization of this parking lot as the preferred student drop-off/pick-up plays a vital role in reducing queuing of cars in the neighborhood streets, the continued use of this parking lot as student drop-off/pick-up is included as a condition of approval.

In addition to these measures, the school has agreed to maintain the number of vehicle trips associated with student drop-off/pick-up and faculty/staff commuting at the current level to further ensure that there are no new impacts to the neighborhood related to school-related traffic. As such, a vehicle count survey was conducted by a third-party consultant on two different occasions to determine the current base-line, which would become the not-to-exceed maximum number of vehicle trips. These surveys were conducted during morning drop-off time periods on two different occasions in an effort to accurately capture the volume of vehicle trips associated with school, as vehicle trips associated with drop-off activity are more concentrated into designated time period while the vehicle trips associated with pick-up activities tend to be more staggered and spread out due to various after-school programs and activities.

Based on the survey, the vehicle trips associated with school's student pick-up or drop-off activity, along with employee commuting cannot exceed 743; however, a one percent deviation is proposed to be permitted to account for the fluctuation associated with typical school traffic. Compliance with this requirement will be monitored through future vehicle count surveys that will be conducted per an established schedule similar to that of the survey, and is included as part of the conditions of approval for the project (see #34 and 35 of Attachment B).

#### *Other Neighborhood Traffic Concerns*

Neighbors have also raised concerns related to the neighborhood traffic and pedestrian safety issues that are not directly related to Polytechnic School. These issues include increased traffic volumes associated with 'cut-through' commuter traffic, existing conditions at certain intersections, and vehicles traveling at high speeds. Through ongoing discussions with the neighbor representatives, the Department of Transportation (DOT) staff has reviewed potential implementation of various measures that may address these concerns, which includes: 1) peak-hour left-turn prohibition from westbound California Boulevard onto southbound Catalina and Mentor Avenues and from northbound Catalina Avenue onto California Boulevard; and 2) pedestrian safety improvements to Cornell Road and Mentor Avenue intersection (i.e. crosswalks, ADA ramps, oversized stop signs). A neighborhood meeting was also held on Tuesday, September 26, 2017 to discuss these measures with the neighboring residents. At this

meeting, the attendees were in support of the measures listed, with an exception to the peak-hour left turn prohibition from westbound California Boulevard onto southbound Mentor Avenue.

Currently, the DOT staff is working with the Council office to implement the peak-hour left turn prohibitions from westbound California Boulevard onto southbound Catalina Avenue and from northbound Catalina Avenue onto California Boulevard. In addition, over-sized stop signs have been installed at the Cornell Road and Mentor Avenue intersection, and DOT staff is evaluating the funding and timing of painting of crosswalks and installation of the ADA ramps at this intersection.

### Bus Circulation

Polytechnic School currently hosts various athletic games and events for its students at its campus, which generates bus traffic from visiting teams. Neighbors expressed concerns about such bus traffic, as some of the buses take a route to-and-from the school through residential streets (e.g. Catalina Avenue). As a response to this concern, reconfiguring the Garland Parking Lot to create a bus turn-around area was considered; however, it was deemed infeasible due to the conflicts with the existing student drop-off/pick-up activity, loss of both on-site and street parking spaces, and site constraints that prevent larger-sized buses from safely accessing the parking lot. A number of other options were also considered (e.g. utilization of various off-site locations), but none were identified as feasible options. Also, not all bus traffic in the neighborhood is related to Polytechnic School; some bus traffic is associated with Caltech.

However, in recognition of this neighborhood concern, the school has taken a number of steps in an effort to direct the bus traffic to Wilson Avenue, away from residential streets, which includes: 1) creation of a dedicated bus parking zone on Wilson Avenue (curbside); 2) change of address of the school's athletic program to Wilson Avenue; 3) installation of signage on California Boulevard and Wilson Avenue to direct arriving buses to Wilson Avenue; 4) provision of approach and exit instructions to visiting buses; 5) faculty and staff guides at the bus zones, and 6) creation of a bus log to monitor violations and necessary follow-ups. Lastly, a condition has been added by the Department of Transportation that requires the school to submit a Bus Circulation Plan that uses Wilson Avenue as the primary access road to and from the campus.

### Overflow Parking

Typical of most academic institutions, the Polytechnic School holds various events on its campus, including some third party events. Occasionally, some of these special events draw a number of participants that exceed the existing parking capacity of the school (e.g. Grandparents Day, winter performances, graduations, etc.). One of the neighborhood concerns includes parking impacts to the neighborhood related to event participants parking on the residential streets.

In response, a condition of approval related to event parking management is being recommended for all events that are anticipated to have a parking demand that will

exceed the existing 355 on-site parking spaces; such events are determined to be events with more than 450 attendees accounting for the fact that most event attendees carpool. This condition would require implementation of other parking measures to accommodate visiting vehicles (e.g. procurement of off-site parking), a parking monitor, and pre-event notification to attendees. Such conditions will also apply to events with less than 450 attendees if the school determines that the estimated parking demand for such events would exceed the school's existing parking supply. In addition, the school is required to make available an annual calendar of events to the public through the school's website to help inform the neighborhood of upcoming school events.

### Athletic Program

Neighbors have also expressed concerns about the potential to increase the number of the school's athletic events with the proposed increase in student enrollment and the new gym. Since the school is not expecting an increase in the number of athletic events due to the proposed student increase, it is proposed, with the school's concurrence, that the number of on-site athletic games and events be maintained at a level that is similar to 2015-2016 academic school year. In addition, outdoor night-time lights at the sports field is proposed to be prohibited.

### Construction Impacts

Concerns were raised about construction-related activities for the new gym, including construction schedule, staging, and haul routes, as these can impact surrounding neighborhoods. In response, several conditions of approval related to construction activities have been included. These conditions include, but are not limited to, the following: 1) submittal of the Construction Staging and Traffic Mitigation Plan to the Department of Public Works for review and approval; 2) prohibition of construction related parking on residential streets; 3) prohibition of construction staging, material storage, or trailer on public streets; 4) prohibition of construction traffic on residential streets (subject to final approval by the Public Works Department); and 5) neighborhood notification to the adjacent property owners within 300 feet of the school campus prior to beginning any construction activity related to the new gym.

### **General Plan Consistency**

The project site has a General Plan designation of Institutional. This category is used to characterize facilities operated public and/or private institutions such as schools, libraries, and hospitals. The Pasadena General Plan, adopted in August 2015, reaffirms the City's commitment to provide services to the residents of Pasadena, including "Goal 17. Educational System - A strong and diverse educational system that is responsive to the life-long needs of the community and related to maintaining a high quality of life and a strong economy". Furthermore, General Plan Policy #17.4, Long-Range Planning for Private Schools, requires private schools to collaborate with the City on site selection, site design, traffic control, circulation and site acquisition to ensure compatibility with the neighborhoods or districts in which they are located.

The proposed Master Plan outlines Polytechnic School's proposed development and uses for the next 15 years; additionally, the school has been established in its current location since 1907, therefore, the continued use of the project site as a private high school is consistent with the General Plan, as further discussed in detail in attached Findings (Attachment A).

### **Zoning Code Consistency**

The zoning designation for the project site is PS (Public and Semi-Public). The PS zoning district is intended for large public or semi-public land uses that may not be appropriate in other zoning districts. The PS zone is applied to sites with a contiguous area of two acres or more, including alleys, streets, or other rights-of-way. The project site is approximately 14 acres. All existing and proposed uses within the project site are conditionally permitted in the PS zone. The proposed Master Plan would allow Polytechnic School to continue to operate a school; therefore, the proposed use is consistent with the intent of the PS zoning district.

### **Development Standards**

For properties in the PS zoning district, the Master Plan process allows for flexibility in establishing some development standards in the PS zoning district. The following summarizes the development standards for the proposed Master Plan:

#### Gross Floor Area and Lot Coverage

The proposed Master Plan includes demolition of the existing gym and construction of a new replacement gym with a basement level in the same general location. With the new gym, the gross floor area of the campus will be 213,225 square feet, which is 38,214 square feet greater than the current facility. This increase is almost entirely due to the addition of the basement level to the gym. The new lot coverage will be 164,522 square feet, which is 4,600 greater than the current level. This slight increase in footprint is proposed as a contingency to final design plans.

#### Setbacks and Height Limits

The existing 35-foot gym is set back 10 feet from the Wilson Avenue property line. The proposed Master Plan maintains the existing 10-foot setback from Wilson Avenue for the new gym; the maximum height of the new gym will be 40 feet.

#### Parking

Currently, there are 355 parking spaces located on-site, which consists of 282 spaces in the subterranean parking garage, 69 spaces in the Garland Parking Lot, and four spaces in the surface lot located adjacent to the Language Arts building. If needed, overflow event parking is provided in a variety of ways, which includes, but is not limited to, temporary parking at the existing athletic field (approximately 100 spaces), valet parking, and procurement of off-site parking.



Pursuant to Zoning Code Section 17.46.040, 1.5 parking spaces are required per classroom for grammar schools (K-8) and one parking space is required for every five students for high schools. In addition, one additional parking space is required for every two employees. Based on the existing number of grammar school classrooms and the proposed increase in high school student and faculty/staff, the school is required to provide a minimum of 255 on-site parking spaces, up to maximum of 50 percent over the minimum requirement, or 383 spaces. Since there are 355 existing parking spaces located onsite, the school is in compliance with the required on-site parking.

### **Traffic and Circulation**

Based on a review by the Transportation Department (DOT), a Category One Traffic Study was required for the proposed Master Plan due to the proposed increase in student and faculty/staff. The purpose of the study was determine and identify any potential impacts to vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle, and transit circulation that may result from the proposed Master Plan, and to recommend improvements to alleviate any identified impacts.

Based on the analysis conducted, the study found that the proposed Master Plan may have impact on California Boulevard and Catalina Avenue intersection. As such, DOT is requiring pedestrian circulation improvements be installed at the existing crosswalk at this intersection to improve operations. In addition, the school is required to install new crosswalk at the intersection of Lake Avenue at Cornell Road/Lakewood Place to improve pedestrian safety, which will be reinforced by the previously mentioned additional pedestrian-safety improvements at the Mentor Avenue and Cornell Road intersection (i.e. over-sized stop signs, crosswalks, and ADA ramps), which are either already installed or are being planned to be installed. Lastly, the school is required to install new convex traffic mirrors at the parking garage exit off of Wilson Avenue to improve existing vehicle sight distance.

### **COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:**

The Pasadena General Plan Land Use Element reaffirms the City's commitment to provide a diverse educational system responsive to the needs of the community, including *GOAL 17. Educational System - A strong and diverse educational system that is responsive to the life-long needs of the community and related to maintaining a high quality of life and a strong economy.* Furthermore, General Plan Policy #17.4, *Long-Range Planning for Private Schools*, requires private schools to collaborate with the City on site selection, site design, traffic control, circulation and site acquisition to ensure compatibility with the neighborhoods or districts in which they are located.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

The proposed master plan for Polytechnic School has been determined to be categorically exempt from environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code §21080(b)(1); Administrative Code, Title 14, Chapter 3, Chapter 3, Section 15314: Minor Addition to

Schools, as the proposed improvements to the school campus (i.e. replacement of the existing gym with a new facility) will not result in any increase in the number of classrooms, and the proposed increase in the student enrollment (80 students, approximately nine percent increase) is less than 25 percent of the existing student capacity. In addition, there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances.


**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The cost of the project reviews and permits would be borne by the school. There would be no direct fiscal impact to the City.


Respectfully submitted,

  
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DAVID M. REYES  
Director of Planning & Community  
Development Department

Prepared by:

  
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Joanne Hwang  
Planner

Reviewed by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Arthi Varma, AICP  
Principal Planner

Approved by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
STEVE MERMELL  
City Manager

Attachments (4)

- Attachment A Findings of Consistency
- Attachment B Conditions of Approval
- Attachment C Master Plan
- Attachment D Project Plans