



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: June 5, 2024

TO: Hearing Officer

SUBJECT: Conditional Use Permit #7114

LOCATION: 55 South Grand Avenue

APPLICANT: Western Justice Center (WJC)

ZONING DESIGNATION: PS-1 (Public and Semi-Public)

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION: Medium Density Residential

CASE PLANNER: Joseph Weaver

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the Environmental Determination and the Specific Findings in Attachment A to **approve** Conditional Use Permit #7114 with the conditions in Attachment B.

PROJECT PROPOSAL: Conditional Use Permit: To establish a Clubs, Lodges, Private Meeting Hall land use within an existing building (Maxwell House).

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION: This project has been determined to be exempt from environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code §21080(b)(9); Administrative Code, Title 14, Chapter 3, §15301, Class 1, Existing Facilities) and there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances. Section 15301 exempts the operation, permitting, licensing or minor alteration of existing structures where there is negligible or no expansion of use. The Western Justice Center has occupied the historic Maxwell House since 1989. No expansion or alteration of the building or site is proposed with the project. Therefore, there would be no substantial change in the significance of the Maxwell House. The events proposed would be ancillary to the existing office use and constitute a negligible expansion.

BACKGROUND:

Site characteristics: The project site consists of an irregular shaped lot measuring approximately 35,978 square feet in size. The site has street frontage on South Grand Avenue, although no vehicular access exists. The property is developed with the Maxwell House (55 South Grand Avenue) and three other historic buildings (65, 75, and 85 South Grand Avenue), collectively known as the “Western Justice Center Campus”. The Maxwell House is approximately 11,610 square feet in size with a 2,456 square foot basement. Two outdoor patios exist behind the Maxwell House which are approximately 900 and 595 square feet in size.

Adjacent Uses: North – Multi-Family Residential
South – United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit
East – Multi-Family Residential
West – Multi-Family Residential and United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit

Adjacent Zoning: North – PD-25 (Vista Del Arroyo Bungalows Planned Development)
South – PS-1 (Public and Semi-Public)
East – RM-16-1 (Multi-Family Residential, City of Gardens)
West – PD-25 (Vista Del Arroyo Bungalows Planned Development) and PS-1 (Public and Semi-Public)

Previous zoning cases on this property: Conditional Use Permit #2423: To allow: 1) Conditional Use Permit to establish an Office land use, 2) Conditional Use Permit to utilize a joint parking and loading arrangement, 3) Variance to allow off-street parking through a lease agreement effective less than 10 years, and 4) Variance to allow reduced parking as part of collective parking arrangement. Approved October 16, 1991.

Conditional Use Permit #4270: To allow a 400 square foot, one-story restroom addition to the existing Maxwell House building. Approved February 4, 2004.

Conditional Use Permit #5419: To allow an 896 square foot basement expansion beneath the existing Maxwell House building. Approved May 19, 2010.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The Western Justice Center (WJC), founded in 1987, is a non-profit organization whose main purpose is to advance alternative conflict resolution in education. Their mission is to increase the opportunity for peaceful conflict resolution in order to displace the power of violence in society. They design, implement, evaluate, and promote innovative methods of conflict prevention and resolution for children, communities, and courts.

The Maxwell House, built in 1929, is a part of a series of four buildings located to the north of the former Vista Del Arroyo Hotel which now serves as the United States Court of Appeals for the

Ninth Circuit. The Maxwell House has served a variety of uses over the years, ranging from a residential bungalow in conjunction with the former hotel to an army hospital during World War II. The subject site is owned by the City of Pasadena. The WJC operates out of the Maxwell House and currently uses the building and surrounding campus as administrative offices for their nonprofit work. They also lease office space on the campus to other local nonprofit organizations.

The applicant, WJC, has submitted a Conditional Use Permit application to establish a Clubs, Lodges, Private Meeting Hall land use. The proposal would allow special events, including weddings, celebrations, and other private events to be held at the Maxwell House. These private events are not associated with the WJC's primary business activities. According to the applicant, the revenue generated through events would allow WJC to offer below market rates to other nonprofit organizations and facilitates the restoration, maintenance, and preservation of the historic buildings on the campus, as is required by the lease with the City.

The applicant proposes no more than 28 events per calendar year. Proposed events would occur on Saturdays and Sundays between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. which includes any set up and clean up. Events would be limited to the first-floor interior of the Maxwell House and adjacent outdoor areas at the rear of the building. The proposed events would primarily take place within the foyer, conference room, dining room, and library of the Maxwell House and would include activities such as ceremonies, dining, dancing, and gathering associated with the events. An existing kitchen within the facility would be utilized for events with food service. Amplified music would be limited to inside the Maxwell House only and would cease by 10:00 p.m.

The outdoor areas consist of a garden patio and a small patio next to an oak tree area. Outdoor areas would be limited in use to ceremonies and photography only. Use of the outdoor areas would only occur between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Only acoustic or soft ceremonial music would be allowed within the outdoor areas until 6:00 p.m.

ANALYSIS:

Conditional Use Permit: To establish a Clubs, Lodges, Private Meeting Hall land use.

The subject site is located within the PS-1 (Public and Semi-Public) zoning district. The purpose of the PS-1 zoning district is to provide a specific base zoning district for large public or semi-public land uses that may not be appropriate in other base zoning districts. The establishment of a Clubs, Lodges, and Private Meeting Hall that is accessory of a principal use requires a Conditional Use Permit within the PS-1 zoning district. The Zoning Code defines a Clubs, Lodges, Private Meeting Hall land use as, "A meeting, recreational, or social facility of a private or nonprofit organization primarily for use by members or guests." The WJC, a non-profit organization, proposes to utilize the first-floor interior of the Maxwell House and adjacent outdoor areas at the rear of the building for special events such as weddings, celebrations, and other private events. The facility would not be open to the general public and would solely be used by invited guests of private events in addition to WJC staff, security, and vendors. As such, the proposed use qualifies as a Clubs, Lodges, and Private Meeting Hall land use and would be accessory to the primary administrative office use to remain.

The Hearing Officer may approve a Conditional Use Permit to allow the establishment of a Clubs, Lodges, Private Meeting Hall use only after making six findings identified in the Zoning Code. The general purpose is to evaluate compliance with the Zoning Code and General Plan, whether the use would be detrimental or injurious to the neighborhood, and compatibility of the operation with existing and future uses. The Conditional Use Permit process allows the City to specify

development standards and may result in recommended conditions or requirements associated with the operation of the use.

The proposed Clubs, Lodges, Private Meeting Hall use is classified as a public and semi-public use, which is consistent with the purpose the PS-1 zoning district and in conformance with the goals, policies, and objectives of the General Plan. To ensure the operation of the use would not be detrimental to uses and surrounding properties in the vicinity, staff is recommending a series of conditions of approval, as discussed in the analysis below, to minimize the impact of the proposed use.

Number of Events and Attendees

Throughout the remainder of calendar year 2024, the applicant is proposing 14 events which would occur on the dates specified in the table below.

Schedule for Remainder of 2024

Month	Dates	Number of Weddings
July	20	1
August	10, 24	2
September	14, 21	2
October	5, 12, 19, 26	4
November	2, 3, 16, 17	4
December	7	1
TOTAL	12 Weekends	14 Weddings

In calendar year 2025 and beyond, there would be no more than 28 events per calendar year. The 28 events would occur throughout 14 weekends and events would not occur on consecutive weekends to ensure that events are spaced out and do not occur too frequently. The events would not exceed the number of events per month or weekends per month as identified in in the table below and in Attachment B.

Schedule for 2025 and Beyond

Month	Number of Weekends	Number of Weddings
January	0	0
February	1	2
March	2	4
April	2	4
May	1	2
June	1	2
July	1	2
August	0	0
September	2	4
October	2	4
November	1	2
December	1	2
TOTAL	14 Weekends	28 Weddings

The majority of events would range from 25 to 125 people with a possible maximum of 175 people, excluding WJC staff, security, and vendors. The facility would not be open to the general public and would solely be used by invited guests of private events. The events would predominately be weddings and similar life celebration events. All events with alcohol service or that exceed 125 people would include onsite security personnel to be present during the event to supervise the event and ensure compliance with alcohol restrictions. In addition, a minimum of one WJC representative would be present during each event.

Conditions of approval are included to ensure compliance with the maximum number and frequency of events, and attendees permitted. A condition of approval is also included to require the applicant to maintain a record of number of attendees for each event to ensure that a majority of events per calendar year do not exceed 125 guests. Additionally, a condition of approval is included to require the applicant to maintain a public website, or other form of notification, which shall include the days and hours of proposed events along with a contact person and phone number for any questions or concerns during these events.

Hours of Operation

Proposed events would occur on Saturdays and Sundays between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. which includes any set up and clean up. The applicant states that some events would occur for a shorter period of time and that weddings would typically last a maximum of six hours, not including set up and clean up.

While the proposed use is not subject to limited hours of operations in Zoning Code Section 17.40.070 (Limited Hours of Operation), a condition of approval is included limiting hours of operation for the proposed use to Saturdays and Sundays between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. This condition would ensure that events do not occur beyond the specified hours.

Noise

The proposed events would primarily take place within the Maxwell House and would include activities such as ceremonies and receptions. Any amplified music associated with the proposed events would only occur inside the Maxwell House building. During events, a WJC representative would be present to serve as a door monitor to ensure doors remain closed and limit the amount of sound escaping the building to the outdoor areas. Windows would also remain closed during events. Any indoor music would end at 10:00 p.m.

The two outdoor patios are approximately 900 and 595 square feet in size and are surrounded by walls, fences, and landscaping which screen these areas from adjacent properties to the west. To address the concern of outdoor noise, the outdoor patios would be limited in use. The garden patio would be used only for ceremonies and the small patio and oak tree area would be used only for photography. Use of the outdoor areas for events would be limited to a maximum three-hour period between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. No amplified music would occur within the outdoor patios. Only acoustic music, soft background music, and use of a microphone for the exchange of vows would be permitted within the garden patio. Any speaker used outside shall be directed to the east away from the rear property line. Outdoor music and use of a microphone would end at 6:00 p.m.

The proposed hours of 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. would include any set up and clean up. Clean up of trash and debris may occur after event but no later than 11:00 p.m. However, removal of equipment shall occur the day after an event during business hours, to avoid noise late at night.

Conditions of approval has been included restricting amplified music and limiting the use of the outdoor areas. Additionally, a condition of approval is included which would require that the use comply with the City's Noise Restrictions Ordinance (Pasadena Municipal Code Chapter 9.36).

Parking

Employees and guests of the subject property currently use a parking lot located approximately 200 feet to the south at 116 South Grand Avenue. The parking lot is shared with the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. In 1991, Conditional Use Permit #2423 established an office use at the subject property and authorized use of 30 spaces within the parking lot. In 2010, Conditional Use Permit #5419 approved a basement expansion beneath the Maxwell House and provided seven additional spaces within the parking lot. Therefore, a total of 37 parking spaces are available.

The proposed Clubs, Lodges, Private Meeting Hall use would have access to the nearby parking lot which contains 150 spaces. Though the use would operate accessory to primary office use of the site, the Zoning Code requires that Clubs, Lodges, and Private Meeting Hall uses provide for a minimum of 10 spaces per 1,000 square feet of area used for assembly purposes. A total of 3,096 square feet of area within the Maxwell House would be used for assembly purposes, therefore the use would require 31 parking spaces. The applicant states that the proposed events would occur outside of normal business hours and without any interruption to the WJC campus. Since the proposed use would not occur at the same time as the primary administrative office use, the hours of the two uses would not overlap. As such, the 37 available spaces within the parking lot would satisfy the Zoning Code requirement for the proposed use. Further, the United States Court of Appeals would be closed on the days of the proposed events, therefore more spaces within the parking lot would be available due to differing hours of operation.

The applicant states that guests would be provided parking directions prior to the event to prevent confusion upon arrival. Additionally, a WJC representative would be present in front of the Maxwell House during the times guests are arriving and departing to ensure that guests park in the designated lot.

Conditions of approval are included to require that the hours of the proposed events do not conflict or overlap with the administrative office use to ensure adequate parking is available in the parking lot; that a WJC representative would be present at the front of the building to ensure guests park in the designated lot; and that the applicant be required to notify the Court of Appeals prior to large events with over 125 people.

GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:

The proposed Clubs, Lodges, and Private Meeting Hall land use is consistent with General Plan Policy 8.9 (Maintenance), 11.1 (Business Expansion and Growth), and 14.1 (Tourism and Hospitality). Policy 8.9 promotes maintenance and upkeep of historic resources to avoid the need for major rehabilitation and to reduce the risk of demolition, loss through fire, deterioration by neglect, or impacts from natural disasters. Policy 11.1 promotes the growth and success of businesses that create new job opportunities and productive and satisfying employment for Pasadena residents. Policy 14.1 encourages the growth of cultural assets and entertainment activities that attract visitors and conventioners.

The WJC assumes the responsibility of maintaining, preserving, and restoring the Maxwell House as well as the other historic buildings on the campus. Revenue generated through the proposed events would allow the WJC to continue to maintain the property and offer below market rental rates to other non-profit organizations. The proposed use would offer the historic Maxwell House building as a space for visitors and locals to enjoy. The services of local small businesses and vendors would be utilized for the events, benefiting the local community and contributing toward the success of local businesses. Therefore, the proposed Clubs, Lodges, Private Meeting Hall use is consistent with the General Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

This project has been determined to be exempt from environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code §21080(b)(9); Administrative Code, Title 14, Chapter 3, §15301, Class 1, Existing Facilities), and there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances. Section 15301 exempts the operation, permitting, licensing or minor alteration of existing structures where there is negligible or no expansion of use. The Western Justice Center has occupied the historic Maxwell House since 1989. No expansion or alteration of the building or site is proposed with the project. Therefore, there would be no substantial change in the significance of the Maxwell House. The events proposed would be ancillary to the existing office use and constitute a negligible expansion.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

The proposal was reviewed by the Department of Transportation, Fire Department, Department of Public Works, Building and Safety Division, Design and Historic Preservation Section, Housing Department, Police Department, and the Department of Water and Power. The Fire Department included conditions of approval for the project. No other comments were provided.

CONCLUSION:

It is staff's assessment that the findings necessary for approval of the Conditional Use Permit to establish a Clubs, Lodges, and Private Meeting Hall land use can be made. As conditioned, the proposed use is consistent with all applicable provisions of the Zoning Code and the General Plan. Staff is recommending conditions of approval intended to address potential concerns relating to the use and to ensure that the proposed use would not be detrimental to surrounding uses. As conditioned, the Clubs, Lodges, and Private Meeting Hall land use can operate in harmony with the surrounding uses. Therefore, staff recommends that the Hearing Officer approve the application with the findings in Attachment A and the Conditions of Approval in Attachment B.

Attachments:

Attachment A: Recommended Specific Findings

Attachment B: Recommended Conditions of Approval

Exhibit A: Insurance Requirements – Rental of Facilities