



Staff Report

File #: 24-0297

PLANNING AND HOUSING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

DATE: 04/08/2024

TO: Honorable Chair and Commissioners

FROM: Planning & Development Department

APPLICATION REQUEST:

CUP2023-0017 (CONTINUED): Conditional Use Permit application to establish a charter school within an existing 44,800 square foot commercial building located at 2115 Compton Avenue (APN: 278-060-035) in the Commercial (C) District of the El Cerrito Specific Plan. (Applicant: River Springs Charter Schools, 2774 Jefferson Avenue, Temecula, CA 92590)

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the Planning and Housing Commission adopt Resolution No. 2627 GRANTING CUP2023-0017, based on the findings contained in the staff report and conditions of approval, and find the project exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Section 15301.

PROJECT SITE SUMMARY

Area of Property: 2.7 acres

Existing Zoning: Commercial (C) within El Cerrito Specific Plan (SP 91-2)

Existing General Plan: GC (General Commercial)

Existing Land Use: Professional Office Building

Proposed Land Use: Charter School

Surrounding Zoning/Land Uses:

N: Commercial within El Cerrito Specific Plan / Professional Offices

E: Interstate 15

S: Commercial within El Cerrito Specific Plan / Retail

W: Commercial within Corona Vista Specific Plan / Retail

BACKGROUND

CUP2023-0017 is a conditional use permit (CUP) application by River Springs Charter Schools to establish a charter school within an existing 44,800 square foot, three-story office building located at 2115 Compton Avenue. The property is zoned Commercial per the El Cerrito Specific Plan.

Currently, the Commercial District does not permit schools for general education. For the applicant to establish a school at 2115 Compton Avenue, the applicant is requesting concurrent approval of a specific plan amendment which would amend the El Cerrito Specific Plan to permit an *educational school* in the Commercial District by a CUP. The details of the specific plan amendment, SPA2023-0001, are provided under a separate staff report for the Planning and Housing Commission's consideration. SPA023-0001 must be approved in order for CUP2023-0017 to be approved.

River Springs Charter School has been operating the Springs Charter School Corona Student Center at 510 W. Second Street since 2011. The campus on Second Street currently serves 313 students ranging from transitional kindergarten to eighth grade. River Springs Charter School has been searching for a new campus to expand its classrooms and grades for over ten years. The proposed campus at 2115 Compton Avenue will occupy a vacant, three-story office building and accommodate enrollment for grades 1 through 12, offer a hot breakfast and lunch program, and provide extracurricular activities such as music lessons and occupational therapy for students. The new campus will also provide service to 12 students in the transitional kindergarten and kindergarten special education program.

The applicant originally submitted the CUP application to the city on September 13, 2023. The application was reviewed by city staff at the Project and Environmental Review Committee meeting of October 5, 2023. The Committee deemed the application complete in late February 2024, and the CUP application was subsequently scheduled for the March 11, 2024, Planning and Housing Commission meeting.

The applicant conducted community outreach by visiting and sharing the school's operations with businesses within the same commercial development, which are Sherwin-Williams paint store and Amerca's Tire on April 17, 2023. Additionally, the applicant shared the school's operations with the store managers at Sam's Club and Home Depot which are major retailers located to the west of the project site. Exhibit 7 is a notice of outreach submitted by the applicant.

Planning and Housing Commission Meeting March 11, 2024

The project's initial public hearing by the Planning and Housing Commission was on March 11, 2024. The Commission continued the public hearing on the project because information on the outdoor play area was not fully disclosed, and actual student enrollment at the project site was unclear. The applicant has provided additional details on the school's operation along with an updated site plan, floor plans, and circulation diagram. This information is further discussed under Project Description and provided in Exhibits 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

CUP2023-0017 is an application to establish and operate a charter school within an existing office building located at 2115 Compton Avenue. The 2.7-acre project site is located on the east side of Compton Avenue and north of Ontario Avenue. It borders Interstate 15 to the east. The site contains a three-story freestanding office building with parking spaces surrounding the building. The existing building is part of a commercial development that has reciprocal parking and driveway access on Compton Avenue with the adjacent Sherwin-Williams and America's Tires retail buildings to the south, located at 2163 and 2187 Compton Avenue, respectively.

Operation & Student Enrollment

The campus at Compton Avenue will provide enrollment for grades 1 through 12 and provide drop-in service to transitional kindergarten (TK) and kindergarten (K) students in a dedicated resource room. The drop-in service is for students in special programs without assigned classroom time on campus. The new campus on Compton Avenue will not replace the campus on Second Street, which will continue to provide education to TK and K students.

Since the campus on Second Street will remain in operation, the anticipated student enrollment at the campus on Compton Avenue went from the previous projection of 780 to 936 students to 621 students. Table 1 describes the anticipated enrollment by grade level at the campus on Compton Avenue.

Table 1 - Enrollment By Grade Level

Grade Level:	Weekly Schedules:	Expected Enrollment at Compton Avenue:
1 - 3 Classroom Program	3.5 days on campus	145
4 - 8 Classroom Program	3.5 days on campus	319
9 - 12 Independent Study	Campus Drop-In, 3 days (Tuesday - Thursday, 8 AM - 4 PM)	29
1 - 3 Enriched Program	2 days on campus	58
4 - 8 Enriched Program	2 days on campus	58
TK/K Enriched Program/Special Ed.	Campus Drop-In, 2 days 8:10 AM - 12 PM	12
	Total Enrollment:	621

The operating hours are Monday to Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Within this time frame the school has occasional teacher-parent conferences, morning staff arrivals, and staff departure at the end of the after-school program. Summer school is a four-day summer session operating from Tuesday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Staff is expected to be on-site 30 minutes before and after during the summer session.

Classroom Operation

The school provides a hybrid schedule that consists of a classroom program 3.5 days a week and an enriched school program 2 days a week. Drop-in students do not have an assigned schedule. The enriched school program consists of the makers space robotics lab, art lab, and library. Students in grades 9 through 12 are not required to attend class in-person but have an opportunity to attend a Learning Zone study hall classroom on Tuesday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The school normally observes about 50% of this enrollment in an in-person classroom setting. Most students in this age group are working apprenticeships or internships, or attending community college classes.

The school is expected to have 43 instructional staff (teachers and aids) and 15 administrative staff daily.

Table 2 provides the education hours for each grade level.

Table 2 - Education Hours For Each Grade Level

Grades 1-4	Grades 5-12	Grades TK & K Drop In
8:10 a.m. to 3:10 p.m.	8:40 a.m. to 3:40 p.m.	8:10 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

The hours are staggered to control the volume of students arriving and departing on the campus.

Site Plan

River Springs Charter School will occupy the entire 44,800-square-foot, three-story building. The site plan shows the existing building footprint, a new 207 square-foot trash enclosure, a new security fence adjacent to the northwest corner of the building (keynote #33), a new rolling gate near the southeast corner of the building, which will be closed when students are present (keynote #34) and outdoor play areas near the northeast corner of the property (Exhibit 3).

Outdoor Play Area

The outdoor play area includes a play structure, hopscotch, open field, gaga ball court, pickle ball court, and covered tables totaling 11,800 square feet (Exhibit 4). Wrought iron fencing will be provided as safety barriers between the drive aisles and the play area.

The play area located within the existing landscaped area to the east of the building will require grading to provide a level surface. A retaining wall will be constructed in this area. If the retaining wall exceeds a height of four feet, the applicant is required to construct a four-foot-high guard rail on top. The guard rail is intended as a safety rail for landscape maintenance workers within the slope area.

Students have one recess in the a.m. and one recess in the p.m. during lunchtime. Lunchtime in the multipurpose room and play area is staggered among the grade levels to control the number of students within these areas at a given time. One staff member for every 30 students is assigned to the play area with a minimum of two staff members always present. The operation of the play area is described in Exhibit 8.

Floor Plans

The interior of the three-story building will be modified from its office setting to provide 22 classrooms, laboratories, and common areas. The proposed floor plans include a library, maker space robotic lab and art lab. Exhibit 9 depicts the proposed floor plans and Table 3 describes the use on each floor.

Table 3 - Use of Floor Area

	Classrooms:	Common Areas:	Staff Areas:
First Floor:	5 elementary classrooms, and 1 TK/K classroom for 12 students	Lobby, conference room, multi-purpose room, kitchen, restrooms.	Teacher lounge, offices, nurse station, storage rooms.
Second Floor:	8 elementary classrooms	Collaborative space, library, maker space robotic laboratory, restrooms.	Offices, storage rooms.
Third Floor:	7 middle school classrooms, 1 high school classroom, 1 special education resource room	Collaborative spaces, conference room, art laboratory, restrooms.	Offices, break room, storage rooms.

The seating capacity for each classroom is 29 students. The TK/K classroom on the first floor is designed for 12 students since this is a drop-in service. The classrooms for the lower grades and student gathering areas are located on the first and second floors. The third floor provides classrooms for middle school and high school students.

Each floor will provide a common gathering space for students; however, the first floor will provide a multipurpose room for assemblies and a kitchen with refrigerators and warming ovens for students to have breakfast and lunch breaks. Designated collaborative spaces are also provided on the second and third floors for teacher-led group discussions.

Interior access throughout the building is provided by two elevators and a stairwell located at the center of the building. Additional stairwells are located at the north and south sides of the building.

Parking

The school, Sherwin-Williams, and America’s Tires share the onsite parking. The parking data on the applicant’s site plan (Exhibit 3) erroneously shows that all three uses require a combined total of 125 parking spaces. All three uses actually require a combined total of 122 parking spaces based on the parking requirements in Section 17.76.030 of the Corona Municipal Code. The commercial development provides 220 parking spaces. Table 4 summarizes the parking requirement and the number of parking provided.

Table 4 - Parking Summary

Use	Required Parking per CMC 17.76.030	Building Square Footage or No. of Employees and Students	Required Spaces	Provided Spaces
Office	1 per 250 SF	2,260 SF	9 spaces	---

Elementary or Junior High School	1 space per employee	21 classrooms with 2 employees per classroom	42 spaces	---
High School	1 space per employee, plus 1 space per 1 space per 6 students	1 classroom with 2 employees per classroom (Maximum of 29 students per class)	2 employee spaces, plus 5 student spaces	---
Sherwin-Williams paint store	1 per 200 SF	3,600 SF	18 spaces	---
America's Tires	5 spaces minimum, plus 1 space per 200 SF	8,109 SF	46 spaces	---
		Total:	122 spaces	220 spaces

Access And Circulation

Vehicle access to the project site is provided from three existing driveways located along the east side of Compton Avenue. The driveways are shared with the other businesses, Sherwin Williams Paint and America's Tires, within the center by a reciprocal access agreement. It should be noted that the school will utilize the two most northern driveways since these two driveways are located closest to the proposed school building.

Student drop-off will occur between 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. This schedule aligns with the classroom schedule provided in Table 2, which shows Grades 1- 4 arriving first before 8:10 a.m. and Grades 5 - 12 arriving later before 8:40 a.m. The same scenario will occur in the afternoon with the lower grades leaving first at 3:10 p.m. and the upper grades leaving at 3:40 p.m. The after-school program will have some students leaving between 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

As shown on the applicant's On Site Drop-Off & Pick-Up Queue diagram in Exhibit 5, the applicant's traffic engineer, LOS Engineer Inc., anticipates that approximately 78 percent of vehicles will enter the driveway north of the school building, and 22 percent will enter the driveway south of the school building. This south driveway will be utilized by school employees arriving before students drop-off time, parents who will park and walk in their younger children to the front entrance and high school students driving themselves.

Parents entering from the north driveway will be required to loop around the south parking lot before dropping the student(s) in front of the building's main entrance which is located on the west side of the building, facing Compton Avenue. School employees, parents with younger children and high school student drivers entering from the south driveway will be required to park at the designated spaces along the east property line.

The project's on-site circulation was designed by the project's traffic engineer. The onsite circulation

provides approximately 830 feet of onsite queuing to prevent vehicle spillover onto Compton Avenue. Within 830 feet of queuing represented by the green line on the On Site Drop-Off & Pick-Up Queue diagram, it shows the green queuing lane is capable of accommodating approximately 38 vehicles. The diagram also shows two additional queuing lanes, in orange and yellow, which provides queuing for an additional 10 vehicles. LOS Engineering, Inc. provided an additional queuing diagram to demonstrate the school's ability to accommodate additional queuing for 20 vehicles. These additional queuing lanes are identified as Link 4, shown in blue on the On-Site Pick-Up Queue Option 2 diagram (Exhibit 5).

The school administrators will place temporary cones in the parking lot near the south driveway to control the flow of traffic within the parking lot and will monitor and direct the flow of traffic during drop-off and pick-up times. Additionally, school administrators will provide instructional handouts to parents on parking management, and drop-off and pick-up procedures. Parents will be instructed to avoid driving through the surrounding commercial properties to get to the school. Exhibit 10 shows the diagrams on advised travel routes and prohibited travel routes which are intended to prevent or minimize cut-through traffic from occurring within the Home Depot and Sams Club parking lots located to the west of the project site, on the other side of Compton Avenue. Parents are required to sign an acknowledgement letter stating that they have received and read the school's drop-off and pick-up procedural rules. A copy of the letter is provided as part of Exhibit 10.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

LOS Engineering, Inc. prepared a Traffic Impact and Vehicles Miles Traveled Analysis, dated September 18, 2023, which was based on the original projected enrollment for 900 students. Using a revised enrollment for 621 students, there is a 31% reduction in students and project trip generation.

With the projected enrollment of 621 students, the school is expected to generate approximately 1,540 daily trips, with approximately 491 trips in the AM peak hour, 329 trips in the afternoon peak hour, and 106 trips in the PM peak hour. The prior office use on the property generated approximately 486 daily trips, with 68 trips in the AM peak hour and 65 trips in the PM peak hour. Compared to the prior use, the project is expected to generate 1,054 additional daily trips, with 422 more daily trips in the AM peak hour and 41 more daily trips in the PM peak hour. The surrounding streets are capable of handling the *net* amount of traffic to be generated by the project.

LOS Engineering also analyzed the segment of California Avenue between Old Temescal Street and Ontario Avenue for level of service impacts. The project is forecast to increase traffic at this roadway segment by 0.6 percent, which is insignificant. Additionally, nine street intersections were analyzed in the vicinity of the project. No signalization or other roadway improvements are warranted at any of the nine street intersections analyzed. Finally, as previously discussed, the project will provide approximately 830 feet of onsite queuing to prevent vehicle spillover onto Compton Avenue. The project site also provides additional queuing lanes on-site should the need arise. Therefore, the project is not expected to have traffic-related impacts to the surrounding area.

Per Section 15301 of the State Guidelines for Implementing the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Section 3.28 of the City's Local CEQA Guidelines, a Notice of Exemption has been prepared for the project because the project qualifies as a Class 1 (Existing Facilities) categorical

exemption. The project consists of establishing an educational school within an existing commercial building, and no expansion to the existing building is proposed with this project. Approval of this project will only establish the right to operate an educational school within the existing building. The Notice of Exemption is attached as Exhibit 11.

FISCAL IMPACT

The applicant has paid the applicable application processing fees for the project.

PUBLIC NOTICE AND COMMENTS

A 10-day public notice was mailed to all property owners within a 500-foot radius of the project site, as well as advertised in the Sentinel Weekly News and posted at the project site for the original public hearing on March 11, 2024. As of the preparation of this report, the Planning Division staff has not received any comments from the public in response to the public notice.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The proposed school will occupy an existing commercial site that is already developed with a commercial building, onsite parking, access, and landscaping. All the necessary public infrastructure has been constructed and available at the project site. The proposed school will implement interior remodel work to achieve the needed floor plan layouts for the classrooms and common areas for activities. No exterior changes to the building are proposed. The project will construct a new 207-square-foot trash enclosure adjacent to the southeast corner of the building. Outdoor play area will be provided near the northeast property corner. Although the outdoor play area will remove 38 parking spaces, the site requires a total of 122 parking spaces for the proposed school and adjoining businesses. The site provides 220 parking spaces with sufficient access from Compton Avenue. School personnel also will be stationed in the parking lot to direct traffic during drop-off and pick-up to minimize circulation impacts during this time.

As stated in the El Cerrito Specific Plan, the Commercial District is intended for retail and office commercial uses. The Specific Plan further provides that permitted uses shall be conducted within completely enclosed buildings in such a manner that no nuisance is created from outside the building. The applicant's proposed school use aligns with the intent of the Commercial District as the school will operate entirely inside the building and it shares a similar weekday schedule as a typical office use. The school will utilize the outdoor play area for a period of 30 minutes for recess, lunch breaks and after-school programs which range from one to two hours. However, all outdoor activities will be supervised by school staff to ensure students' safety.

Therefore, the Planning Division recommends approval of CUP2023-0017, based on the findings listed below and staff's recommended conditions of approval attached as Exhibit 6.

FINDINGS OF APPROVAL FOR CUP2023-0017

1. A Notice of Exemption has been prepared pursuant to Section 15301 of the State Guidelines for CEQA because the project qualifies as a Class 1 (Existing Facilities) categorical exemption under CEQA. The project consists of the establishment and operation of an educational school serving kindergarten through 12th grade students within an existing 44,800 square-foot commercial building, and no building expansion is proposed with the project. All activities will

be conducted inside the building with limited outdoor play area. Therefore, there is no possibility that the proposal will have any significant effects on the environment.

2. All the conditions necessary for granting a Conditional Use Permit as set forth in Section 17.92.110 of the Corona Municipal Code do exist in reference to CUP2023-0017 for the following reasons:
 - a. *The proposed use will not be detrimental to the public health, safety, convenience and general welfare, and is in harmony with the goals and policies of the City's General Plan because the project will establish a school within an existing building on an already developed property that was designed to meet the applicable development standards of the El Cerrito Specific Plan. The applicant will be required to demonstrate compliance with all current building and fire codes that are applicable to the proposed education school use through the city's plan check process. Furthermore, the proposed use is compatible with the surrounding commercial uses, and the property has adequate parking and access to meet the anticipated parking demand of the proposed use.*
 - b. *Reasonable conditions as necessary are being imposed to protect the public health, safety, and welfare and to establish full compliance with the applicable development standards of the Commercial District of the El Cerrito Specific Plan and Corona Municipal Code.*
3. The proposal is consistent with the General Plan for the following reasons:
 - a. *The proposed project contributes to the achievement of Land Use Policy LU-4.4 to promote the adaptive re-use and infill of economically underutilized, obsolete, and dilapidated commercial and industrial sites within existing urbanized areas, in consideration of the uses, scale, and character of adjoining uses. The proposed education school will occupy an existing three-story commercial office building.*
 - b. *CUP2023-0017 fulfills Land Use Policy LU-15.2 to allow for the development of new schools, parks, government, fire and police facilities, utilities, and infrastructure uses in any location of the City, regardless of the land use plan's designation, provided the use is environmentally suitable and compatible with adjoining land uses, and adequate infrastructure can be provided. The proposed education school site has existing infrastructure, vehicle access, and complies with parking requirement for the use, its operation is contained inside the existing building and will not result in noise impact to adjacent uses.*
4. The proposal is consistent with the El Cerrito Specific Plan (SP 91-2) for the following reasons:
 - a. *The project is consistent with the Commercial District of the El Cerrito Specific Plan with respect to building setbacks, parking, landscaping and access. Additionally, the proposed use is in harmony with the other existing commercial uses and the school will operate entirely inside the existing building which is consistent with the Commercial District requirements under Section 12.8.2 of the El Cerrito Specific Plan.*

PREPARED BY: EVA CHOI, SENIOR PLANNER

REVIEWED BY: SANDRA VANIAN, PLANNING MANAGER

SUBMITTED BY: JOANNE COLETTA, PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

EXHIBITS:

1. Resolution No. 2627.
2. Locational and Zoning Map.
3. Proposed Site Plan.
4. Site Plan with Outdoor Play Area.
5. Queuing Lane Diagrams.
6. Conditions of Approval.
7. Community Outreach Notice.
8. Operation Letters from School Superintendent and Senior Director of Facilities.
9. Floor Plans.
10. Traffic Management Information.
11. Environmental Documentation.