



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT REPORT

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DATE: May 30, 2002

TO: Orange County Zoning Administrator

FROM: Planning and Development Services Department, Current Planning Services Division

SUBJECT: Public Hearing on Planning Application PA01-0037 for a Use Permit, Variance and Parking Modification.

PROPOSAL: To expand the existing Church with a new 1,200 seat, 17,000 square foot building, as well as the relocation, remodeling and demolition of other structures on site. The project includes a parking modification to use a football field for required parking, and a variance to exceed the R-1 zoning district's 35 foot height limit by 25 feet.

LOCATION: 11712 N. Hewes Street. Orange, within the Third Supervisorial District.

APPLICANT: John Ahern, agent for La Purisima Catholic Church.

STAFF Marta B. Crane, AICP, Project Manager

CONTACT: Phone: (714) 834-5144, FAX: (714) 834-4652

SYNOPSIS: The Current Planning Services Division recommends Zoning Administrator approval of Planning Application No. PA01-0037, subject to the attached Findings and Conditions of Approval.

BACKGROUND:

The project site is located within the R-1 (Single Family Residential) zoning district on the northeast corner of Hewes and Spring Streets in the El Modena area of unincorporated Orange County. The property is currently developed with a church, a school, a rectory and a convent. The site was originally established in late 1959, with a 450-seat church and a rectory. The school, the convent and the other buildings have been added over time (UP87-35P; UP81-12Z and UP3534).

The proposal consists of the construction of a new church and the remodeling, demolition and relocation of other structures on site, including demolition of the rectory and several single family homes that the Church recently acquired to make way for this expansion. The proposal includes the use of a remote football field to meet the minimum parking requirements for this project. Construction of the new church building will also require approval of a variance from the maximum district height of 35 feet to allow the church building to rise 60 feet 4 inches high to the highest point. The expansion of the proposed church use may be permitted in the R-1 district with the approval of a Use Permit by the Zoning Administrator, per to Section 7-9-74.4(a)(1) of the County of Orange Zoning Code (Exhibit 1).

SURROUNDING LAND USE:

The project is in El Modena, a single family residential neighborhood in unincorporated Orange County. The site is surrounded by mostly single family homes to the south, west and north, and town homes and apartments to the east. The site is directly adjacent to a mortuary business and a small apartment complex (Exhibit 2).

REFERRAL FOR COMMENT AND PUBLIC NOTICE:

A Notice of Hearing was mailed to all owners of record within 300 feet of the subject site. Additionally, a notice was posted at 300 N. Flower, at the subject site, and as required by established public hearing posting procedures. A copy of the planning application and a copy of the proposed site plan were distributed for review and comment to various reviewing Orange County Divisions and to the City of Orange. The City of Orange reviewed the project in May 2001, and forwarded comments, which have been incorporated by staff as conditions of approval number 12 and 15 (Exhibit 3). A letter was received from the adjacent property owner to the north during the review period (Green Creek Properties); comments from this letter regarding access and circulation are discussed below. (Exhibit 4). As of the writing of this staff report, there are no issues raised by any Orange County Divisions.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

Negative Declaration PA 01-0037 has been prepared for the project and was posted for public review from May 9, 2002 through May 29, 2002. Prior to project approval, the Zoning Administrator must find this Negative Declaration adequate to satisfy the requirements of CEQA. Appendix A contains the required CEQA Findings.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

La Purisima Catholic Church was established at this site in late 1959, with a sanctuary and a rectory that was located where the existing community center is now. Over the years, the Church has expanded to its present campus operations, which include the 450 seat Church, a community center, a rectory, a convent and an elementary school. The overall existing campus is 45,314 square feet plus the school in a 6.8 acre site. The existing parking lot has 124 striped spaces. There is additional unmarked parking space for approximately 150 vehicles available beyond a dividing wall and gates where the schoolyard and basketball courts are located. The school has also a remote football field for various sports activities where parking is available during peak days.

The proposed project includes the construction of a new church that will be built where the rectory and the front parking lot are currently located, directly to the north of the existing church building. The proposed expansion includes the demolition of four single family homes that the Church recently acquired to facilitate this expansion, and provide additional parking. In addition, parking will also be provided on the site of the existing convent, which is remote and inconveniently located between the school and the football field. The convent will be relocated to one of the vacated home sites in order to consolidate it with the main church facilities. The convent structure will no longer serve as a home for the nuns; this structure will be remodeled to function as the pastoral offices. The project no longer includes plans for any residential facilities.

The Church intends to implement project incrementally, which in summary, consists of the following:

Project Summary

1. Construction of a new, 17,000 square foot, 1,200 seat Church and Chapel, with maximum building heights of 46’ in the clearstory, 56’ in the bell tower, and 60’ to the top of the major dome.
2. Remodeling of existing 6080 square foot Church for meeting rooms and offices.
3. Acquisition and demolition of four single-family properties.
4. Demolition of the Rectory.
5. Relocation and reuse of the existing 5,100 square foot Convent for Pastoral Offices.
6. Redesign of the overall parking and circulation to include 463 total spaces.
7. Use of the football field to provide 107 required parking spaces unpaved and unmarked.
8. The use of a portion of the parking lot (154spaces) as the schoolyard when the Church is not in service.
9. Remodeling of the School Hall building to accommodate indoor lunch tables.
10. Continue operations of the K-8th La Purisima Elementary and Sunday School.

Church Operations

The campus operations for the project are as follows:

Land Use	Operations			
	Weekday		Weekend	
	AM	PM	AM	PM
New 17,000 square feet, 1,200 seat church.			X	X
Existing 6,080 square feet, 450 seat church to be remodeled for meeting and office space.	X	X		
Elementary School K through 8 th grade - 300 students	X	X		
Sunday School.			X	

Parking

Staff reviewed the traffic study submitted for this project, dated October 8, 2001 (Exhibit 6). The survey documented that attendance to the existing 450-seat church, can be as high as 1,100 persons, which is more than double its seating capacity. Consistent with this observation is the church’s parking demand, which the survey documented to be greater than the code requirement of 150 spaces, and peaking at 221 vehicles. These observations suggest that the true parking demand is not fully detected by the code assumption that parking demand is strictly governed by the number of seats in a church. It is safe to state that the “excess” occupancy of the church (55% standing parishioners) is a contributing factor to the excess parking demand observed by the study. These observations translate into a ratio of 1 parking space for every 2 seats (i.e. 221 spaces for 450 seats), compared to the code requirement of 1 parking space per 3 seats.

Although the high occupancy of the church at 55% over seating capacity obviously contributes to the parking demand, a strict application of the 2 to 1 ratio observed appears to be excessive for this church, given the large amount of pedestrian traffic observed by the survey. Therefore, a more accurate estimate of the church’s parking demand appears to be a combination of the survey observations based on the church’s occupancy limits at 1 space per every 2 seats (standing and seating capacity) and the code requirements based on seating capacity alone at 1 space per 3 seats. A more accurate measure to estimate parking at this church can be based on a typical Sunday morning. The survey observed a Sunday morning parking demand of 180 vehicles, which translates into a ratio of 2.59 seats per parking space. It appears that this ratio, which is 15 % over the code requirements, reflects more accurately the true parking demand anticipated for this church, since Sunday morning is the peak time for church activities

Based on the analysis of data supplied, and assuming the church is the only traffic generator on Sundays, the estimated parking demand will be approximately 15 % greater than the minimum parking requirements of the Orange County Zoning Code. Therefore, the parking demand for the 1,200 seat church is estimated to be at least one space per every 2.59 seats, for a total of 463 parking spaces required.

TABLE 1
Parking Analysis

Existing Church	Observed Attendance	Parking Required per code	Peak Parking observed by Traffic Analysis*
450 seats	Up to 1100 persons (peak)	1 space per 3 seats or 150 spaces	1 space per 2 seats or 221 spaces 1 space per 2.59 seats or 180 spaces on Sunday AM.
Proposed Church	Seating Capacity	Parking Required per Code	Parking estimated based on Traffic Analysis*
1,200 seats	na	1 space per 3 seats or 400 spaces	463 spaces based on 1 space per 2.59 seats Sunday AM

* Ratio estimated based on Parking Analysis submitted by La Purisima Church, by Katz, Okitsu & Associates.

The proposed project includes a total of 463 spaces, which will fully comply with the requirements. However, the Church is proposing to use a remote football field to meet these parking requirements by locating 107 spaces or 23 % of the parking required in this field. The field will not be paved, nor striped as required by the code; therefore, approval of a parking modification by the Zoning Administrator will be required.

Staff supports approval of the parking modification since the primary and greatest benefit from this field is for the sports and recreational activities of La Purisima School. Satisfying the parking requirements is essential for the successful operation of the Church, therefore, full and unrestricted access to this and all parking areas in the entire campus will be a condition of approval for this project. Annual performance evaluation of the parking situation will be required to ensure that adequate parking is available at all times, and that all fields of parking are available whenever the 1,200 seat church is operating. No other assembly uses operating concurrently with the church services will be allowed. Traffic and circulation concerns expressed by the community, the adjacent property owner and staff will be addressed by proper scheduling of the Saturday night and Sunday morning masses, which shall be scheduled to allow for 30 minutes between the end of a mass, or any other event and the start of another. In summary, the parking on site will be provided as follows:

- A) 107 (23%) spaces in the grass field unpaved and unmarked;
- B) 154 (33%) spaces in the schoolyard behind a fence, paved and marked; and
- C) 202 (44%) spaces to be located throughout the site paved, striped and unrestricted.

Access and Circulation

This project was originally submitted with the proposal to use Drew Way, a private circulation easement off of Hewes Street, as a two-way driveway access into the site. The location of the access driveway was approximately six feet from the adjacent residential building walls. The adjacent residential property owner, the Green Creek Properties, who is a grantor to this easement, expressed traffic concerns about the use of this private drive for Church purposes. The primary concern was traffic and noise generated by as many as 200 vehicles in such close proximity to his residential property. There were also differing understandings between property owners about the easement and prescriptive rights to which they are entitled. As a result of staff's concerns and the concerns expressed by the adjacent property owner, the applicant was requested to limit the access on Drew Way to two outbound lanes, to be contained within the limits of the existing road.

The Church alternatively chose to redesign this access, and proposes to relocate it completely outside the Green Creek property, but still within the boundaries the Drew Way easement. In addition, the Church is proposing a third inbound lane to be located on the south side of Drew Lane, within the adjacent mortuary property directly to the south. However, because the Church's proposed inbound lane is the current and proposed outbound lane out of the mortuary's property, a condition of approval will be placed on the project to redesign the circulation at this point. Exhibit 7 shows the redesigned access intended to correct the inadequate and unsafe condition when vehicles entering the site are in the direct path of, and competing for the same lane as, vehicles leaving the mortuary.

The mortuary property is solely within the limits of the City of Orange, therefore, approval of this additional right turn lane into the site is contingent upon the City's review and approval. Should the City of Orange not support this access, or in the event that said access layout is not resolved, the applicant will be required to revert back to the County of Orange requirement consisting of two egress lanes out of Drew Way. The main driveway on Hewes Street will also have to revert back to provide two inbound lanes and one outbound lane (Exhibit 7).

Architecture – Height Variance

The new church is a large square shaped building oriented towards the parking lot, backing up to Hewes Street. The main nave includes most of the parishioner's seating, with a choir area to the side adjacent to the altar and sanctuary. The building includes a small group of offices to one side and a small chapel on the other side. The elevations of the building include a clearstory spanning across the building and measuring 44 feet high. The church has a bell tower and two domes, one of which rises 53 feet high. The cross above this dome is the highest point of the building, proposed to reach 60 feet 4 inches in height (Exhibit 8).

The maximum building height in the R1 zoning district is 35 feet; therefore, construction of this church will require approval of a variance from the maximum district height. The intent of the building height restrictions in the R1 zone is to maintain residential structures within a reasonable height in harmony with the neighborhood character, however, a church, albeit being a conditionally permitted use, utilizes a different set of architectural design elements that typically rely on height to express its architectural identity. Staff recognizes that these architectural features are essential to the nature of a place of worship and approval of the variance can be justified on these grounds. The architectural design for La Purisima's new church is attractive and within the traditional ecclesiastic architectural style. The new church is expected contribute to the El Modena neighborhood, one of the older neighborhoods in Orange County.

CONCLUSION OR SUMMARY:

La Purisima Church has operated at this site for many years coexisting with its residential surrounding and being an important institution in El Modena's cultural and social establishment. The proposed expansion project is expected to revitalize and promote the neighborhood's vitality. It includes improvements that will contribute the Church's improved operations and further support to the community at large. The project as presented is the outcome of consensus building reached during the design review process, with input from County staff and the community as well, therefore, staff supports approval of this project, subject to the findings and conditions of approval in appendices A and B.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The Current Planning Services Division recommends the Planning Commission:

- a. Receive staff report and public testimony as appropriate; and,
- b. Approve Planning Application PA01-0037, subject to the attached Findings and Conditions of Approval.

Respectfully submitted

Chad Brown, Chief
Site Planning and Consistency Section

MBC

/staff reports/PA 010037 La Purisima

APPENDICES:

- A. Recommended Findings.
- B. Recommended Conditions of Approval.

EXHIBITS:

- 1. Aerial View of Surrounding Land Uses.
- 2. Aerial View of Existing Site.
- 3. Letter from the City of Orange
- 4. Letter from adjacent property owner, Green Creek properties.
- 5. CEQA documentation.
- 6. Applicant's Letter
- 7. Traffic Study
- 8. Driveway Design
- 9. Architectural Elevations

APPEAL PROCEDURE:

Any interested person may appeal the decision of the Zoning Administrator on this permit to the Orange County Planning Commission within 15 calendar days of the decision upon submittal of required documents and a filing fee of \$ 760.00 filed at the Development Processing Center, 300 N. Flower St., Santa Ana.