

#31

SEP 24 2009



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MEMORANDUM Planning & Development – CC Memo No. 09-120

DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 2009

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

THRU: W. MARK PENTZ, CITY MANAGER ^{RPD}
 PATRICK MCDERMOTT, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER *[Signature]*
 JEFF KURTZ, ASSISTANT PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR *[Signature]*

FROM: KEVIN MAYO, ACTING PLANNING MANAGER *KM*

SUBJECT: UP09-0037 CHANDLER PREPARATORY ACEDEMY

Request: Use Permit approval to operate a high-school component of a charter school on property zoned Community Commercial District (C-2)

Location: 1951 N. Alma School Road (SEC of Alma School and Warner Roads)

Applicant: Ralph Smith
 Smith Design Studio, Inc.

RECOMMENDATION

Upon finding the request to be consistent with the General Plan, Planning Commission and Staff recommend approval of the Use Permit subject to conditions.

BACKGROUND

The request is for Use Permit approval to operate a high-school component of a charter school on property zoned Community Commercial District (C-2). Charter schools and educational institutions encompassing grades K-8 are permitted by right in the Neighborhood Commercial (C-1), and Community Commercial (C-2) zoning districts. Institutions encompassing high-school grades 9-12 are permitted by right only in the Regional Commercial (C-3) zoning district, and are considerable by Use Permit in the Community Commercial (C-2) zoning district.

The subject site surrounds an existing fuel station located at the immediate southeast corner of Alma School and Warner Roads. Existing commercial retail developments are located at the northeast, northwest and southwest corners of the intersection. The site is surrounded to the south and east by the existing residential subdivision, Warner Park. The 10-acre site includes an existing approximate 104,000 square-foot building originally constructed as a Smitty's grocery store. Most recently the building was owned and utilized by Bank First as a call center. The site and building currently remain un-occupied being recently purchased by the charter school.

Chandler Preparatory Academy, a member of the Great Hearts Academies, is a small tuition-free college preparatory charter school. The existing campus, serving grades 6-12, is located at the northwest corner of Arizona Avenue and Warner Roads within the East Valley Mall commercial development. The recent acquisition of the subject site provides the school the opportunity to expand the grades offered to now include grades K-12. As previously stated, grades K-8 are permitted by right at the subject site, while grades 9-12 are the subject of this Use Permit request.

The existing building is located along the site's eastern side facing west. The majority of the site is encompassed by parking fields that include a number of parking shade canopies, necessitated by the building's previous call-center tenant. With the charter schools relocation, a larger number of the parking spaces will no longer be needed. Per Code, the school would require 184 parking spaces. However, the school will provide 264 parking spaces leaving 80 spaces for overflow parking. Of the six existing parking shade canopies, two will be removed, and one will be relocated to the site's northwest corner along Warner Road. The site will be secured by a six-foot tall wrought iron fence located along Alma School and Warner Roads as indicated on the attached site plan. Gates will be provided at the sites vehicular drive access points to be closed primarily when the school is closed for holidays.

The attached conceptual site plan and landscape plan indicate the school's plans to re-use this un-occupied commercial site. The parking along Alma School Road will be removed making way for a grass outdoor sports recreation field that could include ball-field lighting in the future. The remaining parking field west of the building will be reconfigured with new landscaped islands. The site proposed amended site plan provides for a lengthy safe drop-off and pick-up route that is adequately separated from the parking areas. Infact, during the drop-off/pick-up hours, the school will utilize traffic directional cones and signs to ensure the one-way traffic flow is maintained. Additionally, textured pavement will be added at the buildings two western entries as well as along the building's northern side to enhance the drop-off and pick-up areas.

The site, where applicable, will upgrade the existing landscaping to comply with the Commercial Design Standards. The arterial street frontages will be upgraded replacing any missing or dead plant material. Trees and shrubs will be added in the landscaped area between the wrought iron fence and 4-foot tall bleachers on the recreational field's west side to provide a visual buffer. Two playgrounds will be added at the buildings northeast corner, while an existing outdoor patio at the buildings southwest corner will be upgraded with new landscaping and shaded tables and chairs. Finally, the building will be repainted with earth-toned desert hues.

DISCUSSION

Staff supports the Use Permit request finding the addition of grades 9-12 compatible with the permitted grades K-8 as well as the surrounding area. Schools such as Chandler Preparatory Academy maintain daytime hours of operation that have historically proven compatible with adjacent residential neighborhoods. Staff supports the requested setback encroachments for the parking shade canopies, bleachers and fencing finding the overall site improvements meritorious and consistent with other educational facilities located in Chandler along arterial streets.

From an Economic Development standpoint, the relocation of this charter school represents a great re-use of an un-occupied commercial site located at a four-corner commercial arterial street intersection. The removal of this commercial retail corner will only increase the remaining three corners long-term viability. Additionally, the new twice-daily parent drop-off/pick-up traffic will generate a ‘shot-in-the-arm’ for the remaining commercial businesses.

PUBLIC / NEIGHBORHOOD NOTIFICATION

- The request was noticed in accordance with the requirements of the Chandler Zoning Code.
- A neighborhood meeting was held on 08/12/09 at the Chandler Community Center. Two neighbors attended the meeting, offering support for the request. The neighbors, who live directly east of the adjacent fire station, have provided a letter of support indicating a desire for the school to replace the existing 6-foot tall block wall with a new 8-foot tall wall. The school has responded the intention to replace the wall with the desired 8-foot tall wall in the future once the existing wall deteriorates. A time frame has not been indicated due to the existing walls acceptable condition.

At the time of this writing, Staff has received one telephone call from a neighboring property owner with questions regarding the request. This neighbor also offered support for the requested Use Permit.

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE REPORT

Motion to approve:

In Favor: 7 Opposed: 0

Discussion occurred during the study session regarding the proposed sports field and potential stray balls leaving the field entering Alma School Road. Commission added conditions 7 and 8 to address the concern. The trees along the field’s west side will be 12-feet high at the time of planting, and temporary netting, of a height to be determined, will be put up during all games and practices. Finally, Commission recommended a modification to condition 4.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Upon finding consistency with the General Plan, Planning Commission and Staff recommend approval of the Use Permit to operate a high-school component of a charter school on property zoned Community Commercial District (C-2), subject to the following conditions:

1. The Use Permit shall be for a charter school grades Kindergarten through 12.

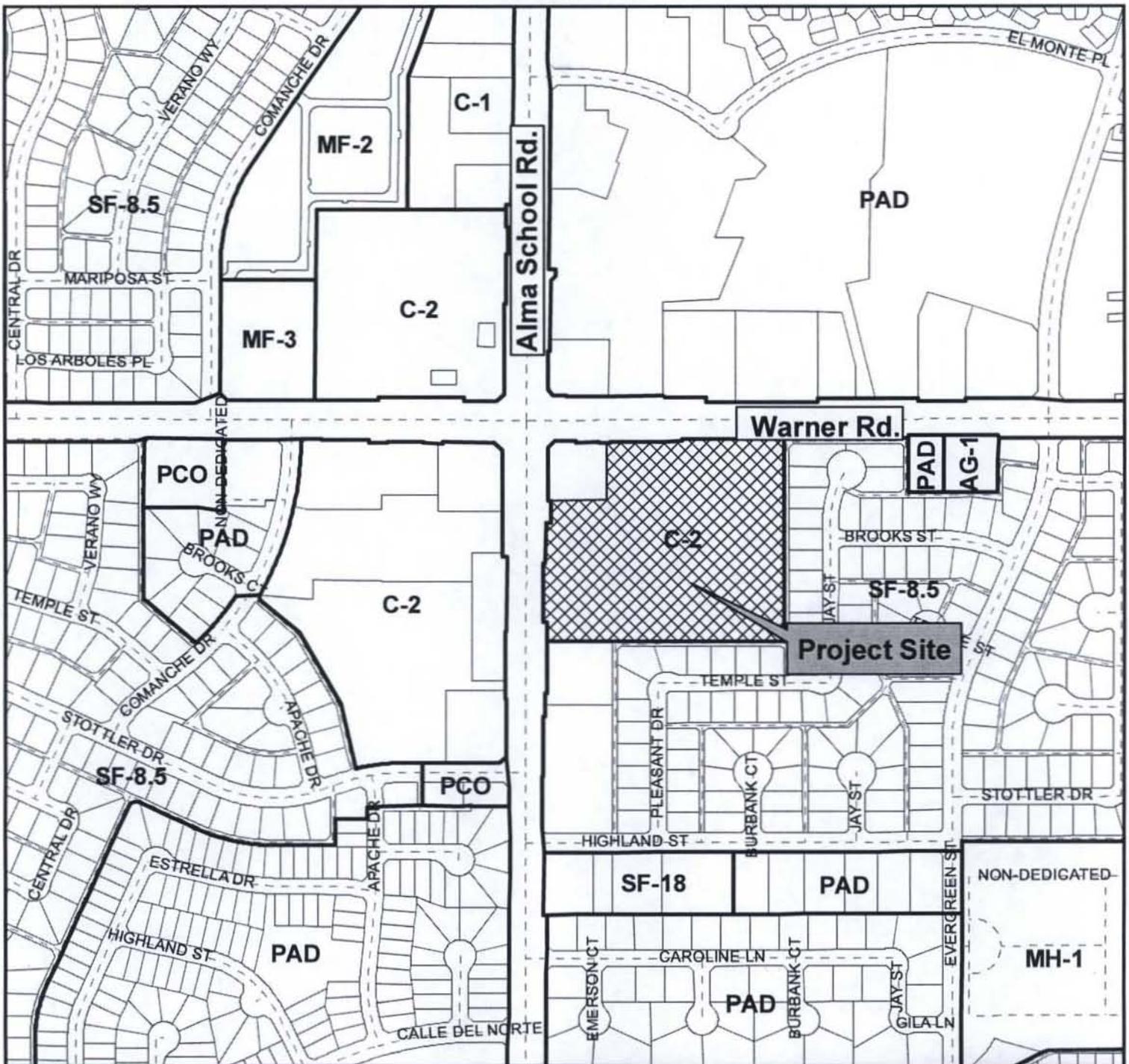
2. Use Permit approval does not constitute Final Development Plan approval; compliance with the details required by all applicable codes and conditions of the City of Chandler and this Use Permit shall apply.
3. All signage, whose text shall be limited to business name identification only, shall be in conformance with the Chandler Sign Code.
4. The site shall be maintained in a clean and orderly manner. Any dead or missing landscaping shall be replaced.
5. Any future recreational field lighting shall be shielded to prevent light rays from exiting the property.
6. Failure to comply with these conditions, upon standard notice issued by the City, will constitute revocation of the Use Permit without further action.
7. Tress at least 12-feet high at the time of planting shall be installed along the west side of the sports field.
8. Temporary netting shall be installed along Alma School Road during practices and games.

PROPOSED MOTION

Move to approve the Use Permit UP09-0037 CHANDLER PREPARATORY ACEDEMY subject to the conditions recommended by Planning Commission and Staff.

Attachments

1. Vicinity Map
2. Site Plan
3. Landscape Plan
4. Floor Plan
5. Building Elevations
6. Narrative
7. Letter of Support
8. Development Booklet



Vicinity Map



UP09-0037

Chandler Preparatory Academy



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Vicinity Map



UP09-0037

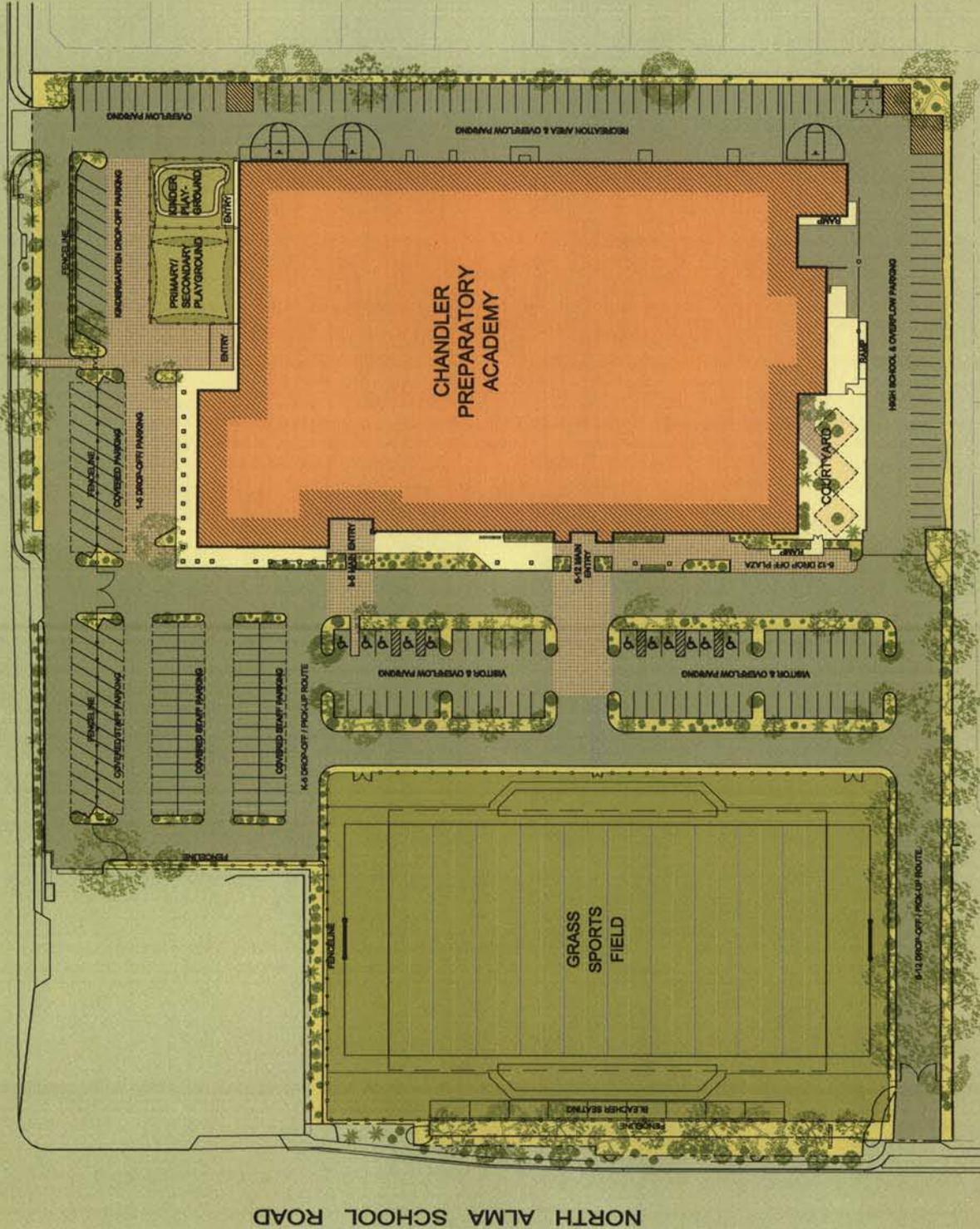
Chandler Preparatory Academy



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CITY OF CHANDLER 7/6/2009

EAST WARNER ROAD



NORTH ALMA SCHOOL ROAD

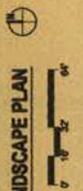
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project involves the relocation of Chandler Preparatory Academy to 1951 North Alma School Road, at the southeast corner of Warner Road and Alma School. The academy, a small, tuition-free, college prep school currently serving grades 6 through 12, has outgrown its facilities at Warner Road and Arizona Avenue and this new location provides an opportunity to further serve the community by offering kindergarten through grade 5 as a separate primary school component.

This proposed new facility previously housed Bank First and its call center and before that it was the old Smyth's store. The building is about 100,000 square feet and occupies a site of approximately 10 acres with easy access from both Alma School Road and Warner Road. A new grass sports field will replace a large portion of the existing parking lot. This will alleviate the drainage problems associated with the current site and, since most of the occupants are children, the parking need is much less than that of the previous call center.

Chandler Preparatory Academy is a member of the prestigious Great Hearts Academies' network of public preparatory schools here in the valley. The network includes Great Hearts Academies in Phoenix, Mesa Prep, Scottsdale Prep, Glendale Prep and Tempe Prep. These schools and Great Hearts Academy, founding sister school, Tempe Preparatory Academy, are substantially outperforming other public and private schools by providing a core, liberal arts curriculum in smaller, more efficient schools and setting higher expectations for all students. Please visit Great Hearts Academies' website at www.greatheartsaz.org to see their outstanding record of college board scores and placement.

CONCEPTUAL LANDSCAPE PLAN



**CHANDLER PREPARATORY ACADEMY
1951 NORTH ALMA SCHOOL ROAD**

CHANDLER PREPARATORY ACADEMY 1951 NORTH ALMA SCHOOL ROAD

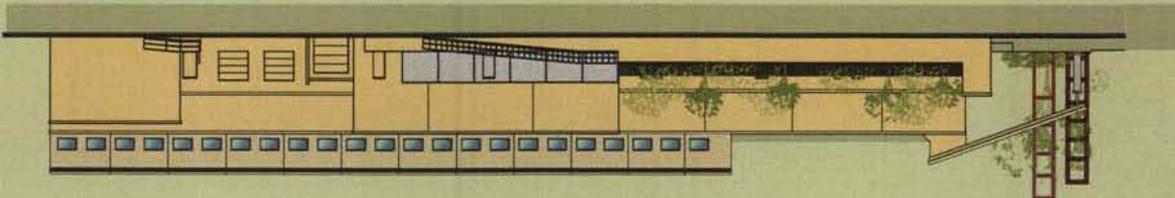


BUILDING ELEVATIONS

NORTHWEST BUILDING CORNER



SOUTH ELEVATION



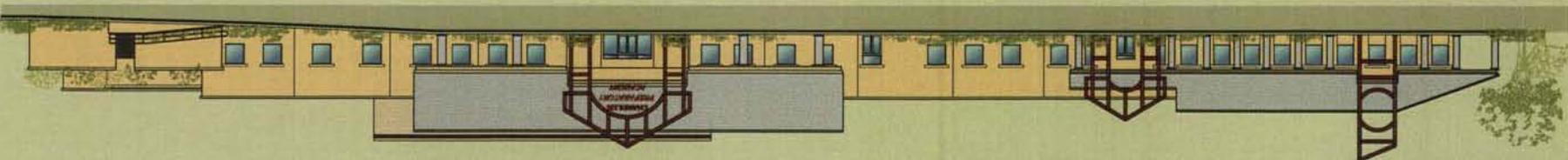
NORTH ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION



WEST ELEVATION





CHANDLER PREPARATORY ACADEMY
1951 NORTH ALMA SCHOOL ROAD

CHANDLER PREPARATORY ACADEMY

UP09-0037

Project Narrative

September 4, 2009

Introduction

This project involves the relocation of Chandler Preparatory Academy to 1951 North Alma School Road, at the southeast corner of Warner Road and Alma School. The academy, a small, tuition-free, college prep school currently serving grades 6 through 12, has outgrown its facilities at Warner Road and Arizona Avenue and this new location provides an opportunity to further serve the community by offering kindergarten through grade 5 as a separate primary and secondary school component. The site is zoned C-2 and we are requesting conditional use approval for the 6th through 12th grade component of the school.

Chandler Preparatory Academy is a member of the prestigious Great Hearts Academies network of public preparatory schools here in the valley. The other academies in the network include Veritas Prep, Mesa Prep, Scottsdale Prep, Glendale Prep and Teleos Prep. These schools and Great Hearts founding sister school, Tempe Preparatory Academy, are substantially outperforming other public and private schools by providing a core, liberal arts curriculum in smaller, more efficient schools and setting higher expectations for all students. Please visit Great Hearts Academies' website at www.greatheartsaz.org to see their outstanding record of college board scores and placement.

Project Location

This proposed new facility previously housed Bank First and its call center and prior to that it was occupied by the Smitty's store. The building area is 104,237 square feet and occupies a site of 428,102 square feet (9.8 acres) with easy ingress and egress from both Alma School Road and Warner Road. The site is well-suited for a school of this type as the building sits back from the road providing security and allowing room for smooth vehicular flow; ample parking for faculty, staff and visitors; and some open recreation space. The building has frontage on two sides, west and north, providing for separate K-5 and 6-12 entry points as well as plenty of drop-off / pick-up access along the building edge.

Site Circulation

Students are transported to and from school primarily by their parents over periods of time in the morning and the afternoon. There are no buses transporting students to and from the school on a daily basis. The school will have about 65 faculty members and a few other staff personnel. A few visitors have business throughout the school day.

The proposed plan is for the parents of middle and high school students to enter the southern driveway from Alma School Road and drop-off students near the shaded courtyard. This allows plenty of queuing from the road to the building and the school uses cones and movable signage to ensure that all traffic flow is one-way during drop-off and pick-up times. This greatly improves the flow by allowing a vehicle to exit the line and pass any stopped vehicles once students are safely outside or inside the vehicle, making space readily available for other vehicles. Parents who also have elementary school students can continue around to the north side of the building where elementary parents are entering from Warner Road. Others can loop around and exit onto Alma School Road. There is no need for parents of elementary school students to pass through the middle and high school side and vice versa.

Parking

The proposed plan provides 264 parking spaces, including 11 handicapped accessible spaces located nearest the two main building entrances. The required number of parking spaces is 184 per City of Chandler Unified Development Manual 35-1804 (2). This leaves 80 spaces available for overflow parking.

Drainage

The site has adequate slope throughout except for the areas very near to Alma School Road as can be seen by the topographic survey included with the ALTA. Most of the existing site, though, is either paved or covered by building footprint with very little permeable surface area for adequate percolation. This has resulted in ponding in the parking lot, particularly in areas near Alma School Road, and this can be observed where the asphalt has been deteriorating for some time. A new natural grass sports field will replace a large portion of the existing parking lot, including the area where ponding has occurred. This will alleviate the drainage problems associated with the current site by replacing about 100,000 square feet of impervious surface with permeable natural root structure at the area of the site with the lowest elevations. And, since most of the occupants are children, the parking need is much less than that of the previous call center.

Architecture

The existing building is of masonry and steel frame construction with two wood frame mansard type canopies along the west and north facades. Three decorative steel frame towers were added to the building in 1999 along the west side.

The proposed plan includes a gymnasium and possibly some other areas within the existing building envelope with a new roof at a higher elevation than the existing roof but well below the C-2 zoning requirements (approximately 34 feet). The exterior surfaces of this proposed addition will be of integral colored maintenance-free masonry and are exposed only above 20 feet. Other exterior building modifications include new exit doors and overhead doors at existing window openings. No changes in the building footprint are proposed.

Building Setbacks

We are requesting approval for decorative metal fencing at a height of 6 feet to be located within the setback lines along the two arterial streets. We are considering the fencing to be "optional" as it may not be within the reach of the initial budget but may be part of a future phase. The configuration of the proposed fence running parallel to Warner Road has been revised per city request to allow vehicles plenty of room to exit the road without entering the site or discovering a closed gate. The revised plan allows a "frontage drive" along the edge of the road at the north end of the site.

The request for the fencing along Alma School Road also involves the location of portable aluminum bleachers at the edge of the sports field. Per city request, we have increased the distance from the right of way to the back of the bleachers. In the revised proposal, the top row seat height of the bleachers is only 4'-0" and the back of each set is 15 feet from the right of way. The revised fence line is at the back of the bleachers per city request, allowing for a landscape buffer where trees will shade the bleachers from the afternoon sun.

A final request is to relocate an existing metal parking shade canopy from the south side of the site to a location next to an existing identical canopy parallel to Warner Road. This, along with the other canopies in that area, will provide shaded parking for all faculty and staff.

John & Rosemary Watkins
1714 N. Pleasant Dr

September 6, 2009
Chandler, AZ 85225

Ralph Smith
Principle Architect
Smith Design Studio, Inc.
1402 W. Pepper Place
Mesa, AZ 85201

Dear Mr. Smith,

As you requested I am presenting this letter endorsing the project to place the "Chandler Preparatory Academy" next door to our property, that was presented in the neighborhood meeting on 8/12/09 at the Chandler Community Center. As the property owner I can endorse having the "Chandler Preparatory Academy" as our next door neighbor with the following condition.

That condition is that the present five foot dividing wall be removed and replaced (or the current wall modified) to bring it up to a height of eight feet. We feel this would abate most of the increase in noise generated by having the school next door, and also provide a safer environment for the students by discouraging them from climbing over the wall into the alley.

We realize this places a burden of expense on the school. However, the cost of the wall would be much smaller than the loss of property values caused by the noise generated by the school for those of us that border that area. The isolation of an eight foot wall should also remove any excuse our insurance companies would have to raise our rates with the school next door. I am sure that those involved in this project with the "Chandler Preparatory Academy" would agree that the safety of the students is of prime importance. The current wall allows an easily accessible, unsupervised area with in close reach of the school that in our opinion could pose a hazard to the students. In the past there have been several incidents of persons camping or visiting the alley that certainly did not belong there. One only has to turn on the news or pick up a news paper to understand our concern about a secluded alley next to a school. Of course there is the obvious concern of the students climbing the wall in the first place. At some point an arm, a leg will be broken, or worse accident occur.

We believe the wall would also abate most of the noise generated by the school. In the past when the store was next door, we know there were frequent complaints by neighbors to the city about the noise.

Sincerely yours,

John & Rosemary Watkins

