

Catlin Elementary School Site Conditional Use Permit

404 Long Avenue
Kelso, Washington

Prepared for:

Kelso School District 458
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PROJECT SUMMARY

Introduction

This narrative accompanies the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) application for the Kelso School District (District or Applicant), who is seeking approval for a Type III Conditional Use Permit. The application package was submitted to the City of Kelso (City) in accordance with the provisions of the Land Use and Development Code of the Kelso Municipal Code (KMC).

Site Information

The project property (site) is located on one tax lot totaling 4.44 acres. The site address is 404 Long Avenue in Kelso, Washington, identified by the county assessor as Parcel ID 23863. The site is in the East ½ Section 27, Township 8 North, Range 2 East, of the Willamette Meridian, City of Kelso, Cowlitz County, Washington.

The site is located between Long Avenue (on the west), Fishers Lane (on the north), 2nd Avenue NW (on the east), and Cowlitz Way West and NW 3rd Avenue (on the south). There is existing public right of way access on the west, east, and south sides of the site.

The site is a former District elementary school building, whose building continues to house educational programs. The site has been heavily utilized as a school for decades, and there are no known critical areas on site.

The existing zoning is Residential Mixed Density (RMD). Schools are listed in the KMC as a conditional use in the RMD zone. As the code states, the purpose of the RMD zone is to promote diverse housing options in new and existing neighborhoods, high-quality design, reinvestment in existing buildings and properties, and the revitalization of existing residential neighborhoods. Most of the land surrounding the site is RMD, but there is a small amount of General Commercial (GC) on the northern, western, and southern sides. The purpose of the GC is to support business activities and mixed-use developments designed primarily to serve the local community.

Surrounding Uses and Zones

The uses and zones surrounding the site are noted as follows:

Table 1. Surrounding Uses and Zones

Direction	Uses	Jurisdiction	Zone
North	Gas station, grocery mart, daycare, church, multi-family housing facility	City of Kelso	GC, RMD
South	Hotel, single-family houses	City of Kelso	GC, RMD
East	Single-family houses	City of Kelso	RMD
West	Long Avenue/single-family houses	City of Kelso	GC, RMD

Project Description

The Catlin Elementary School site is a former elementary school within the District. Students from Catlin Elementary School and Beacon Hill Elementary School were moved into a new school building, Lexington Elementary School, in Spring 2021. In Fall 2021, the District utilized Catlin Elementary School site with students from Huntington Middle School while the middle school was being modernized. In Fall 2023, the District once again utilized Catlin Elementary School site with students from Rose Valley Elementary School while new construction was being completed by Spring 2024.

The District continues to use the former elementary school buildings to support several different educational programs and the District's technological department. There are two main school buildings that create an upside down "L" shape on the site. One building fronts Long Avenue, the other building runs perpendicular to Long Avenue. The northern building houses Kelso Virtual Academy, an alternative curriculum school within the District. The building that fronts Long Avenue houses a variety of educational programs, including Children's Discovery Museum and a preschool program.

The hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm. The buildings are used throughout the year. As an elementary school, Catlin housed approximately 400 students and staff. The new proposed use will house approximately 70 full-time students and staff, with additional occupancy for the Children's Discovery Museum anticipated at approximately 40 during normal operations. Special events would bring in larger occupancy, though much less than when the site was a traditional elementary school.

There is an existing conditional use permit for the site that imposed certain conditions on the site. When the District was still using the school buildings as a traditional school, the District needed to add portable buildings to house the additional students from Huntington Middle School. Since the students have been moved to the new school buildings, the portables are no longer required, and the applicant needs to move them to another school. The City is requiring the district to submit a new CUP as they are not meeting that 2021 condition by returning the site to pre-portable condition. The proposed CUP aims to provide the flexibility to the district.

The former CUP was approved with the condition that when the portables were moved, the site would be returned to the condition prior to the portable installation. To do so, the District would need to restore a play area and a grassy field, among other things. This would not be desirable to the District, as the District no longer needs or wants a playground at this site and the surrounding area has been paved and graveled. As the needs of the District have changed, the site restoration conditions in the 2021 CUP decision would cause the District unnecessary cost and would not serve the public need. The District has removed three of the five portables, and desires to keep the remaining two for future use either on site or at another school site location.

No new buildings or site features are proposed at this time. As the current buildings house a variety of smaller educational programs, there will be interior tenant improvements that occur. In the eventuality that the District is required to build a new school to accommodate a growing student population, this permit will accommodate that educational use as it continues to be a school as originally intended.

The applicant is maintaining the educational goal in the current building uses, but the District needs greater flexibility in the permit. The existing building's new life is to provide a cost-effective place for smaller, educational programs to be housed. The new permit must provide guiderails to keep the educational use but allow the District room to accommodate a variety of different programs over the years. The District will remain true to the ideals of education and learning through whatever form the buildings take on the site, all the while adhering to the City land use and stormwater city codes.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

Goal #1: Promote the public health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Kelso.

Response: The educational use of the site promotes cognitive development and discovery of new ideas.

Goal #2: Promote and sustain a diverse and well-balanced local economy.

Response: The educational use of the site promotes the local economy by educating the Kelso residents. An educated workforce that knows how to evaluate information supports a diverse and well-balanced local economy.

Goal #3: Promote and sustain a range of employment opportunities for Kelso residents.

Response: The educational use of the site promotes cognitive development and discovery of new ideas which promotes employment opportunities for Kelso residents.

Goal #4: Improve the vibrancy and stability of residential neighborhoods and mixed-use development with housing for diverse income age groups and lifestyles.

Response: The educational use of the site provides a safe and healthy place for students and families of all ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds.

Goal #5: Provide a safe, family-oriented environment in all residential neighborhoods.

Response: The educational use of the site promotes a safe place for families of all types and economic backgrounds.

Goal #6: Respect the cultural heritage and history of the community.

Response: The educational use of the site promotes learning not only about the cultural heritage and history of the area, but of the world, promoting greater understanding of the world we live in.

Goal #7: Establish and maintain the downtown as a vibrant activity center.

Response: The educational use of the site promotes educational activities that inspire learning and understanding.

Goal #8: Protect and enhance the quality of the natural environment.

Response: The educational use of the site will maintain the use as it is currently, which is mostly paved. There is an opportunity for programs that will allow students to learn about the ecological benefits of the natural environment.

Goal #9: Maintain a strong fiscal base for the provision of city services.

Response: The educational use of the site promotes a strong fiscal base for the city, as an educated workforce is a resilient and stable workforce.

Goal #10: Actively involve all citizens in the governance of their community.

Response: The educational use of the site provides opportunities for learning about policies and how the city's governance functions.

Goal #11: Address regional priorities, challenges, and opportunities through partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies, local organizations, and the business community.

Response: The educational use of the site provides learning opportunities by teaming with educational partners across the region to give the students of Kelso a first-class learning experience.

VEHICULAR TRIPS

The number of anticipated vehicular trips that will be generated by the proposed use, including shipments, deliveries, customers, and employees.

Response: The use of the building will stay primarily the same as it is now. The vehicular trips are not anticipated to increase past the original intent and design of the building and site design. The Children's Museum will draw groups of students from a variety of programs, but the site is already designed to accommodate students arriving in a large group. The applicant anticipates that groups arriving to visit the museum will not exceed the number of students that the site was designed to accommodate.

ALL ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

List all anticipated impacts to be generated by the proposed use, including shipments, deliveries, customers, and employees.

Response: The proposed use will remain the same as it currently, serving as an educational hub for a variety of smaller educational businesses. The applicant does not anticipate that there will be a large increase in shipments, deliveries, customers, and employees.

DAYS AND HOURS OF OPERATION

The days and hours of operation for the proposed use, floor plan including the type of restroom facilities that will be provided on site, other necessary building changes and the number of employees.

Response: The hours of operation are 9 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday. The school buildings are existing and are not proposed to change, barring some interior tenant improvements. The buildings have restroom facilities that have served a school full of teachers and students for decades and will continue to serve the public well. The new proposed use will house approximately 70 full-time students and staff, with additional occupancy for the Children's Discovery Museum anticipated at approximately 40 during normal operations. Special events would bring in larger occupancy, though much less than when the site was a traditional elementary school. The only change during the year would be the lack of preschool students and preschool staff during the summer months.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Any other information that you believe is pertinent and necessary to completely describe your proposal and for staff to conduct their review.

Response: The District has had a school here for decades as a center of learning and community under the blessing of the formerly approved CUP. This updated CUP is simply to address a condition in the April 2021 decision that once the portables were no longer needed and the school was no longer needed to house students, the District would be required to return the site to pre-portable condition. This would mean removing the portables, the temporary parking area and returning it to a grassy field as well as restoring a playground area. Since the building no longer serves as a traditional school, the District no longer needs these previous site elements for daily use. In fact, the return of these elements would considerably hinder the use of the east side of the site. The District requires the flexibility to provide excellent learning opportunities while remaining within the site plan criteria set forth in KMC 17.10.130.

CHAPTER 17.10 PERMIT PROCESSING

17.10.130 Site plan review.

The purpose of a site plan review is to help ensure that new development activities do not adversely affect the public health, safety and welfare of residents of Kelso, and that new development activities are compatible with existing patterns of development and the provisions of the Kelso comprehensive plan.

Response: As the KMC does not currently address CUP application criteria, the site plan application criteria is a good guideline. The following finding of fact relates to the CUP update for the existing Catlin Elementary School site.

1. *The project is consistent with the Kelso comprehensive plan and meets the requirements and intent of the Kelso Municipal Code, including the type of land use and the intensity/density of the proposed development.*

Response: As shown in this narrative, the educational use of this site supports the Kelso comprehensive plan. This criterion has been met.

2. *The physical location, size, and placement of the development on the site and the location of the proposed uses within the project minimizes impacts to any critical resource or floodplain area to the greatest extent possible or are compatible with the character and intended development pattern of the surrounding properties.*

Response: All the building and site elements exist and there are no new impacts. Although no buildings are currently proposed, any new buildings or reconfigured building would not be imposing new impacts onto an already impacted site. This criterion has been met.

3. *The project makes adequate provisions for water supply, storm drainage, sanitary sewage disposal, emergency services, and environmental protection to ensure that the proposed project would not be detrimental to public health and safety.*

Response: The school site has been occupied for many years and has adequate provisions for water, storm, sanitary, emergency services, and environmental protection. This criterion has been met.

4. *Public access and circulation including non-motorized access, as appropriate, are adequate to and on the site.*

Response: The school site has an existing system of public roadways that provide direct access to three out of the four sides of the property. There were traffic improvements made prior to the Huntington Middle School combination. These improvements will ensure safe and easy access to the school site. This criterion has been met.

5. *Adequate setbacks and buffering have been provided. Any reduction to setbacks or buffer widths is the minimum necessary to allow for the reasonable economic use of the lot and does not adversely impact the functional value of the critical resource area or adjoining land uses.*

Response: The school site has been built and occupied for decades. The existing buildings already meet the zoning and site plan requirements set forth in the code. No new building construction is proposed at this time, only paving work. This criterion has been met.

6. *The physical location, size, and placement of proposed structures on the site and the location of proposed uses within the project are compatible with and relate harmoniously to the surrounding area.*

Response: The school site has been built and occupied for decades. No new building construction is proposed at this time, only limited paving work. This criterion has been met.

7. *The project adequately mitigates impacts identified through the SEPA review process, if required.*

Response: The proposed paving work is exempt from the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review process, as the proposed amount of cut is 279 cubic yards, far below the earthwork threshold of 500 cubic yards. This criterion has been met.

8. *The project would not be detrimental to the public interest, health, safety, or general welfare.*

Response: The school site has been built and occupied for decades. No new building construction is proposed at this time, only limited paving work. The educational use of this site will serve the community of Kelso both now and in the future. This criterion has been met.

CONCLUSION

The applicant is looking forward to working with the City to ensure the continuation of the District's educational programs at 404 Long Avenue. They look forward to providing educational opportunities to promote not only building a stronger local economy, but also teaching critical thinking skills to produce well-rounded citizens that will help the City and the region thrive.