



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Planning Commission

DATE ISSUED: September 19, 2024 REPORT NO. PC-24-049

HEARING DATE: September 26, 2024

SUBJECT: University of San Diego (USD) Master Plan Amendment, Process Five Decision

PROJECT NUMBER: [PRJ-1099954](#)

REFERENCE: Previously approved USD Master Plan Update, [September 11, 2017](#), City Council documents.

OWNER/APPLICANT: University of San Diego, Owner / CityThinkers, Applicant

SUMMARY

Issue: Should the Planning Commission recommend that City Council approve an amendment to the USD Master Plan and Conditional Use Permit to increase student housing opportunities on campus, vacate public service easements, add the property at 5701 Josephine Street to the USD Master Plan, and update the Design Guidelines to reflect the revisions for the campus located at 5998 Alcala Park in the [Linda Vista Community Plan](#) area?

Staff Recommendation:

1. Recommend to the City Council to APPROVE Conditional Use Permit No. PMT-3234656, Site Development Permit No. PMT-3234657 (an amendment to Conditional Use Permit No. 1605027 and Site Development Permit No. 1831047), and Planned Development Permit No. PMT-3302312; and
2. Recommend to the City Council to APPROVE Easement Vacation No. PMT-3304403 (Water) and PMT-3304405 (Storm Drain).

Fiscal Considerations: None with this action. All costs associated with the processing of this application are recovered through a deposit account funded by the applicant.

Code Enforcement Impact: None

Housing Impact Statement: The Project would increase student housing opportunities on campus from 1,262 student housing beds to 3,101 student housing beds to serve the existing and future on-campus student population. The 2024 California Tax Credit Allocation Committee Opportunity Area Map identifies the areas adjacent to the USD Campus as Highest and High Resource Areas.

Community Planning Group Recommendation: On March 25, 2024, the Linda Vista Community Planning Group voted 11-0 to recommend approval of the Project without conditions (Attachment 9).

Environmental Impact: The City as Lead Agency has reviewed and accepted a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Section 15162 – Subsequent Environmental Impact Reports and Negative Declarations consistency evaluation prepared for the Project (Attachment 7). The consistency evaluation was performed to determine if conditions specified in CEQA Guidelines Section 15162 would require preparation of additional CEQA review for the USD Amendment. Staff determined that the Project is consistent with the USD Master Plan Update [Subsequent Environmental Impact Report \(SEIR; SCH No. 1993121032\)](#) certified by the City Council on September 11, 2017, (Resolution No. 311298).

The Project does not require major revisions nor results in new impacts or changed circumstances that would require a new environmental document consistent with the previously certified and adopted environmental documents. Staff also determined that none of the three criteria listed under CEQA Section 15162 has occurred and the evaluation determined that the previously identified certified and adopted environmental documents adequately covers the actions being proposed. Therefore, based on the evaluation no subsequent document is required.

BACKGROUND

Location

The University of San Diego (USD) occupies an approximately 180-acre site at 5998 Alcalá Park within the Linda Vista community (Attachments 1-3). The USD campus is located approximately four miles north of Downtown San Diego, east of Interstate 5 and north of Interstate 8. The campus is located 0.4 miles from the Morena/Linda Vista Trolley Station which is served by the Green Line and 0.9 miles from the Tecolote Trolley Station which is served by the Blue Line.

Existing Land Uses

The Tecolote Canyon Natural Park contains undeveloped regional open space to the north of the campus. Morena Boulevard is located to the west with Via Las Cumbres bordering the university campus on the east, and Linda Vista Road to the south. The primary land uses surrounding the university campus are residential, commercial and open space uses.

Multi-Habitat Planning Area

The City's Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) consists of approximately 7.6 acres along the northern edge of the campus and extends offsite into Tecolote Canyon.

Zoning

The USD Master Plan area is in the OP-2-1, OR-1-1, RS-1-7, RM-1-1, RM-3-7, CC-4-2, CC-4-5 and CC-5-Zones, Airport Influence Area (San Diego International Airport and Montgomery Field), Community Plan Implementation Overlay Zone (CPIOZ) Type A and the Parking Impact Overlay Zone (Campus Impact Area) within the Linda Vista Community Plan area (Community Plan).

Planned Land Use

The USD campus is designated for Institutional, Public and Semi Public Facilities, Residential, Open Space and Multiple Uses within the General Plan and Residential, Open Space, and Community Village within the Linda Vista Community Plan.

Previous Discretionary Permit Approvals

Previous amendments to discretionary permits have been issued to allow for growth of the campus, which operates under Conditional Use Permit/Resource Protection Ordinance (CUP/RPO) No. 92-0568 which was approved by City Council in October 1996 and CUP No. 1605027/Site Development Permit (SDP) No. 1831047 which was approved in September 2017.

Previous Master Plan Approvals

1996 Master Plan: The USD Master Plan and Design Guidelines approved in 1996 guided the phased buildout of the USD campus through the year 2030 to allow the construction of 26 projects and expand student population at the time to 7,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. The environmental impacts of the 1996 Master Plan were identified in the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) prepared for the 1996 Master Plan (1996 Master Plan FEIR; EIR No. 417090; State Clearinghouse No. 1993121032).

2017 Master Plan: The USD Master Plan Update approved in 2017 provided a comprehensive revision of the 1996 Master Plan and Design Guidelines, including addressing building space and infrastructure needs associated with increasing enrollment from 7,000 to 10,000 FTE students over a 20-year period. The 2017 Update increased the amount of physical development permitted on the USD campus, as well as the number of enrolled students. The 2017 Update included 14 projects that would be constructed as the campus grows over the 20-year period, including new academic/administrative buildings, student housing and services, athletics and athletic support/administrative buildings, physical plant and facilities, parking structures and lots, pedestrian circulation/plaza/bridge, and trails/landscape enhancements. The phased development of the 14 projects added 471,738 square feet of new building space to the campus and 1,003 student housing beds at the time. The environmental impacts of the 2017 Update were identified in the USD Master Plan Update [Subsequent Environmental Impact Report \(SEIR; SCH No. 1993121032\)](#) certified by the City of San Diego City Council in September 2017, (Resolution No. 311298).

Master Plan Implementation

The existing discretionary permits provide for the orderly development and implementation of 30 future building and landscape projects and improvements on the university campus to accommodate anticipated growth over a 20-year period. At the time of project implementation, the original USD Master Plan authorizes the submittal of project plans through a Substantial Conformance Review (SCR) for a staff level determination (Process 1). The goal of the SCR is to determine if a proposed

project is in conformance with the USD Master Plan. The SCR process includes a review of future projects against the approved exhibits, permit conditions, environmental documentation, applicable land use policies and prior permits. Staff will recommend approval if the project falls within the parameters of the previously approved USD Master Plan. To date, Project No. 1, 3, 4, 5, and 21 of the USD Master Plan has been constructed through the SCR process, and the construction of Project No. 9 and 16 is underway.

DISCUSSION

Project Description

The proposed Project (Attachment 11) provides for increased student housing opportunities on the university campus and results in an increase from 1,262 student housing beds to 3,101 student housing beds to serve the existing and future on-campus full-time equivalent (FTE) student population of 10,000. The Project proposes no changes to the previously approved FTE student population. The additional on-campus student housing will help the university remain competitive for attracting and retaining students and reduce the demand for off-campus housing available to the community.

Specifically, the Project modifies six of the thirty previously approved project sites. The modifications include an increase in gross and assignable building square footages, building stories and number of beds for Master Plan Project No. 11, 15, 23, 27, and 30, including modifications to Project No. 22 consisting of a decrease in lot area and an increase in lot coverage. The modifications to the six projects will result in an increase in overall gross building square footage to 769,395 gross square feet and an increase of 1,839 student housing beds. The Project also includes adding a 0.32-acre property at 5701 Josephine Street into the USD Master Plan area and vacating public service easements (water and storm drain) that are outdated and are necessary to make way for the future development on the university campus.

The Project includes updating the approved Master Plan Design Guidelines (Design Guidelines) to reflect revisions to the future development on the university campus. The Design Guidelines provide a framework for future development, including addressing architecture, landscaping, circulation, parking, lighting, signage and sustainability features. Compliance with the updated Design Guidelines will help to ensure that future development is compatible with existing buildings and landscaping on campus and the surrounding Linda Vista neighborhood.

Deviations

The Project complies with the regulations of the San Diego Municipal Code except for deviations for height and floor area ratio (FAR) for the future development in the RS-1-7, RM-1-1, and RM-3-7 base zones. Staff has reviewed and approved the following requested deviations to the zoning regulations:

Requested Deviations

Description	Required	Proposed
Height limit: RS-1-7 Zone	24/30 feet	65 feet maximum
Floor area ratio: RS-1-7 Zone	0.45	1.0
Height limit: RM-1-1 Zone	30 feet	65 feet maximum
Height limit: RM-3-7 Zone	40 feet	65 feet maximum

The university is an institutional use primarily located within the RS and RM residential base zones. The deviations are needed to support the institutional use and provide a design that is consistent with the existing buildings located within the university campus, including architectural style and landscaping character. The deviations also result in minimizing expansion of the development footprint and provides for more energy efficient structures.

The deviations to the base zone development regulations will not result in any impacts to visual resources. The Project does not adversely impact the character of the neighborhood due to the size, scale, architectural style, color, and exterior details of the future buildings and facilities. The Master Plan and CUP requires that each of the structures be designed with the Spanish Renaissance and Mission architectural theme which is consistent with the existing structures on the university campus. Building massing will be stepped and terraced to integrate into the hillsides while taking advantage of existing slopes and topography. Breaks in the facades would also be provided to reduce the visual bulk and scale of buildings. Additionally, the siting of future facilities and massing of project sites will be implemented in a manner that maintains views of iconic landmarks, such as the Church of the Immaculata from locations on and off-campus.

Open Space, Slopes and Hillsides

The Project will not adversely impact the Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) and will comply with policies protecting environmental resources in the MHPA, as specified in the MSCP Subarea Plan. The Project will not result in the encroachment into designated open space and shall maintain scenic hillsides and sensitive vegetation through a recorded covenant of easement. Steep slopes and sensitive habitat areas around the perimeter of the mesa will be retained as important resources. The Project will also comply with the maintenance, usage, and development guidelines of the Tecolote Canyon Natural Park Plan.

Conformance with the Design Guidelines for grading, slopes and hillsides, including applicable regulatory guidelines shall be required for each future development of the USD Master Plan. Additionally, compliance with the Environmental Land Use Adjacency Guidelines will avoid potential impacts to the resources in the MHPA related to grading/land development, drainage and toxics, lighting, public access, barriers, invasive species, brush management, and noise.

Community Plan Analysis

Housing

The Project is consistent with the Community Plan goals of expanding on-campus housing opportunities for students and to retain regional facilities, such as its educational institutions. The additional on-campus student housing will help the university remain competitive for attracting and retaining students and reduce the demand for off-campus housing available to the community, which is consistent with the Community Plan policy of encouraging students, faculty and staff to live on or near campus to reduce commuting distances.

Mobility

The Project is consistent with the Community Plan policies of providing on-campus parking for students, faculty, and employees and minimizing impacts to the circulation system and on-street parking by accommodating for projected parking demand triggered by the approved growth in student FTE with a combination of on-campus parking structures and surface parking. The Project also provides for a range of circulation improvements and landscaping to enhance mobility and the pedestrian experience.

Design

The Project is also consistent with the Community Plan policies of maintaining the existing 16th Century Spanish Renaissance theme since the structures will be designed in similar architectural style, color, and exterior detail to the existing structures on the university campus. Additionally, the siting of future facilities and massing of project sites will be implemented in a manner that maintains views of iconic landmarks, such as the Church of the Immaculata from locations on and off-campus. The Project is consistent with the Community Plan policy of not encroaching into designated open space and includes maintaining scenic hillsides and sensitive vegetation. Steep slopes and sensitive habitat areas around the perimeter of the mesa will also be retained as important resources.

Required Actions

The following discretionary actions have been consolidated under this application and processed concurrently, pursuant to the Consolidation of Processing regulations. Before the project is considered by the City Council, the request shall be presented to the City's Planning Commission for a recommendation, pursuant to SDMC section [112.0509](#).

- A Process 5 City Council decision to amend the previously City Council approved Conditional Use Permit No. 1605027 and Site Development Permit No. 1831047 is required, pursuant to SDMC Section [141.0407\(c\)](#) and [143.0110\(b\)](#), respectively.
- A Process 5 Public Easement Vacation (Water and Storm Drain) is required, pursuant to SDMC Section [125.1030](#).
- A Process 4 Planned Development Permit is required for proposed base zone deviations, pursuant to SDMC Section [126.0601](#).

The Project permit contains specific conditions of approval with the intent that the use be developed to fully protect the public health, safety and welfare (SDMC Section 126.0301). Permit conditions include the following:

- Prior to the issuance of any construction permits, a project specific drainage study shall be required to ensure that peak flows are properly mitigated;
- All public water and sewer facilities shall be designed and constructed in accordance with the approved Addendum Water and Sewer Study;
- Buildings contributing wastewater to the Linda Vista Road Sewer Basin shall demonstrate that the existing downstream sewer facilities meet city standards. Should City standards not be met, construction shall be required to upsize the existing public sewer mains along the Azusa Street and Gaines Street public right-of-way;
- Implementation of the Multi-Habitat Planning Area Land Use Adjacency Guidelines;
- All grading shall conform to SDMC requirements;
- All proposed driveways shall provide visibility area triangles;
- Developing City standard curbs, gutters and sidewalks;
- Implementation of a site-specific Storm Water Quality Management Plan and Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan;
- Maintenance of all landscape improvements;
- All public water lines serving the project must pass through a private backflow prevention device; and
- A geotechnical investigation report shall be submitted that specifically addresses the proposed construction plans.

Conclusion:

Staff has reviewed the proposed Project and all issues identified through the review process have been resolved in conformance with the adopted City Council policies and regulations of the Land Development Code. Staff has provided draft resolutions and conditions of approval and recommends that the Planning Commission recommend to the City Council approval of the USD Master Plan Amendment.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Recommend to the City Council to APPROVE Conditional Use Permit No. PMT-3234656, Site Development Permit No. PMT-3234657 (an amendment to Conditional Use Permit No. 1605027 and Site Development Permit No. 1831047), Planned Development Permit No. PMT-3302312 and Easement Vacation No. PMT-3304403 (Water) and PMT-3304405 (Storm Drain) with modifications; or
2. Recommend to the City Council NOT APPROVE Conditional Use Permit No. PMT-3234656, Site Development Permit No. PMT-3234657 (an amendment to Conditional Use Permit No. 1605027 and Site Development Permit No. 1831047), Planned Development Permit No. PMT-3302312 and Easement Vacation No. PMT-3304403 (Water) and PMT-3304405 (Storm Drain), if the findings required to approve the Project cannot be affirmed.

Respectfully submitted,

Lara Gates On behalf of
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Development Services Department

Xavier Del Valle
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Attachments:

1. Location Map
2. Aerial Photograph
3. Community Plan Land Use Map
4. Permit Resolution with Findings
5. Permit with Conditions
6. Easement Vacation Resolutions
7. CEQA Environmental Consistency Memo
8. Planning Commission Recommendation
9. Community Planning Group Recommendation
10. Ownership Disclosure Statement
11. USD Master Plan Amendment/Technical Appendix
12. Previous CUP/SDP Permit