



PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: SEPTEMBER 22, 2025

ITEM NUMBER: PH-1

SUBJECT: CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT PCUP-25-0017 TO ALLOW OUTDOOR STORAGE OF MOTOR VEHICLES (TOW TRUCKS AND EMPLOYEE VEHICLES) AT 2648 NEWPORT BOULEVARD.

FROM: ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT / PLANNING DIVISION

PRESENTATION BY: JUSTIN ARIOS, ASSOCIATE PLANNER

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: JUSTIN ARIOS
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RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission adopt a Resolution to:

1. Find that the project is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15301 (Class 1) Existing Facilities; and
2. Approve Conditional Use Permit PCUP-25-0017 based on findings of fact and subject to conditions of approval.

APPLICANT OR AUTHORIZED AGENT:

The applicant and authorized agent is Steve Hartman representing the property and business owner, David Padua (Southside Towing).

PLANNING APPLICATION SUMMARY

Location	2648 Newport Boulevard	Application Number	PCUP-25-0017
Request	Planning Application PCUP-25-0017 is a request for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to allow outdoor storage of motor vehicles (tow trucks and employee vehicles), not including impound yards. The applicant, Southside Towing, currently operates at 1643 Placentia Avenue and proposes utilizing the parking lot at 2648 Newport Boulevard for tow truck and employee vehicle storage. The existing 4,228-square-foot building on the site is proposed to be used for secured storage. Importantly, no impound yard is proposed at this location.		
CEQA	Exempt per CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (Existing Facilities)		
Final Action	Planning Commission		

SUBJECT PROPERTY

Zoning District	C1 (Local Business District)
Specific Plan	Newport Boulevard Specific Plan
General Plan Land Use Designation	Commercial Residential
Lot Dimensions	Lot Width: 66' Lot Depth: 300'
Lot Area	19,800-square-feet (0.45-acres)
List of Approved Plans / Land Use Entitlements	N/A
Existing Development	Vacant lot with an existing 4,228 square-foot building (to remain).

SURROUNDING PROPERTY

	Zoning District	General Plan Land Use Designation	Existing Development
Northwest	N/A	N/A	State Route 55 (SR-55)
Northeast	C1 (Local Business District)	Commercial Residential	Star Inn Motel
Southeast	R2-MD (Multi-Family Residential, Medium Density)	Medium Density Residential	Multi-Family Residential Uses
Southwest	C1 (Local Business District)	Commercial Residential	Best Western Hotel

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The applicant is requesting Planning Commission approval of a CUP to allow outdoor storage of motor vehicles (tow trucks and employee vehicles), (not including impound yards). The applicant currently operates at 1643 Placentia Avenue (Southside Towing) and is proposing to park tow truck and employee vehicles at 2648 Newport Boulevard. The existing 4,228-square-foot building on the site is proposed to be used for secured storage. No impound yard is proposed at this location. Staff supports the request because the proposed use is consistent with applicable goals, objectives, and policies of the General Plan, complies with applicable provisions of the Zoning Ordinance and respective findings, and complies with the Newport Boulevard Specific Plan. Therefore, staff recommends that the Planning Commission find that the project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and approve the application based on findings of fact and subject to conditions of approval.

SETTING

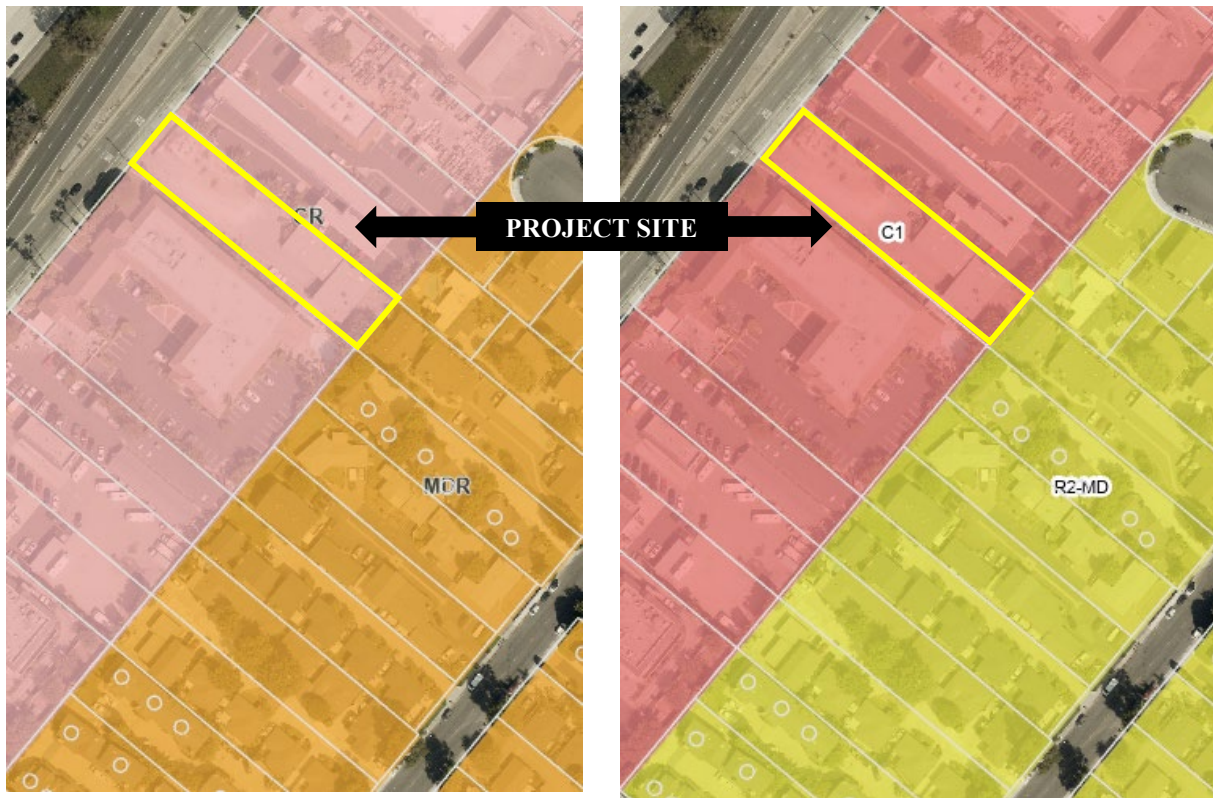
The subject property is a 19,800-square-foot parcel located at 2648 Newport Boulevard. The site is developed with a 4,228-square-foot storage building located toward the rear of the property. The existing building was originally constructed in the 1950s. The property is situated on the southeast side of northbound Newport Boulevard, mid-block between Del Mar Avenue and Mesa Drive (see Figure 1). Historically, the site was occupied by a piano repair business, which closed in 2014.

Figure 1. Vicinity Map



The property has a General Plan Land Use Designation of Commercial Residential (CR) and a Zoning Designation of Local Business District (C1). The Commercial Residential General Plan Land Use Designation applies to a limited area on the east side of Newport Boulevard between East 19th Street and Mesa Drive. The intent of this land use designation to allow a complementary mix of commercial and residential zoning along Newport Boulevard. It is anticipated that individual parcels will be developed as either a commercial or residential use. The proposed outdoor storage of motor vehicles (tow trucks and employee vehicles) is compatible with the existing site improvements and is listed as an allowable use pursuant to the City's Land Use Matrix, with approval of a CUP (pursuant to Table 13-30).

Figure 2. General Plan Land Use Designation & Zoning Maps



Additionally, the project site is located within the Newport Boulevard Specific Plan which includes the properties on the east side of Newport Boulevard between Mesa Drive and 19th Street. The purpose of the specific plan is to provide the long-term vision for this important area of the community. It is the intent of the specific plan to encourage viable commercial businesses to continue and prosper along the boulevard, as well as to encourage marginal uses to redevelop. It is also the intent of the specific plan to ensure land use compatibility and viability in the plan area and to re-attract traffic back to the boulevard.

Properties to the northeast and southwest have Commercial Residential (CR) Land Use designations and Local Business District (C1) zoning designations. The property to the northeast is developed with the Star Inn Motel and the property to the southwest is developed with the Best Western Hotel. Located to the northwest is State Route 55 (SR-55), which does not have a Land Use Designation or zoning designation. Properties to the southwest have a Medium Density Residential (MDR) Land Use Designation and Multiple-Family Residential District, Medium Density (R2-MD) zoning and are developed with multi-family residential developments.

Background

In the past, there have been a couple of proposed entitlement applications for redevelopment of the site; however, those projects never moved forward to a review body for decision.

REQUEST

The applicant, Steve Hartman, seeks approval of a CUP pursuant to Section and Table 13-30 of the Costa Mesa Municipal Code (CMMC) to allow outdoor storage of motor vehicles (tow trucks and employee vehicles), not including impound yards for Southside Towing at 2648 Newport Boulevard in the Local Business District (C1) zoning district. Specifically, the request would allow outdoor storage for an existing tow company (located at 1643 Placentia Avenue).

STANDARD OF REVIEW

To approve an CUP application under CMMC Section 13-29(g)(2)(a-c), the Planning Commission must find that the proposed use must meet specific criteria. The project must be compatible with surrounding developments and should not be detrimental to nearby properties. Additionally, granting the permit must not harm public health, safety, or welfare, nor permit a use, density, or intensity inconsistent with the general plan or specific plans for the property. Each application is project-specific and evaluated on its unique merits to ensure it aligns with the City's development standards and the zoning code.

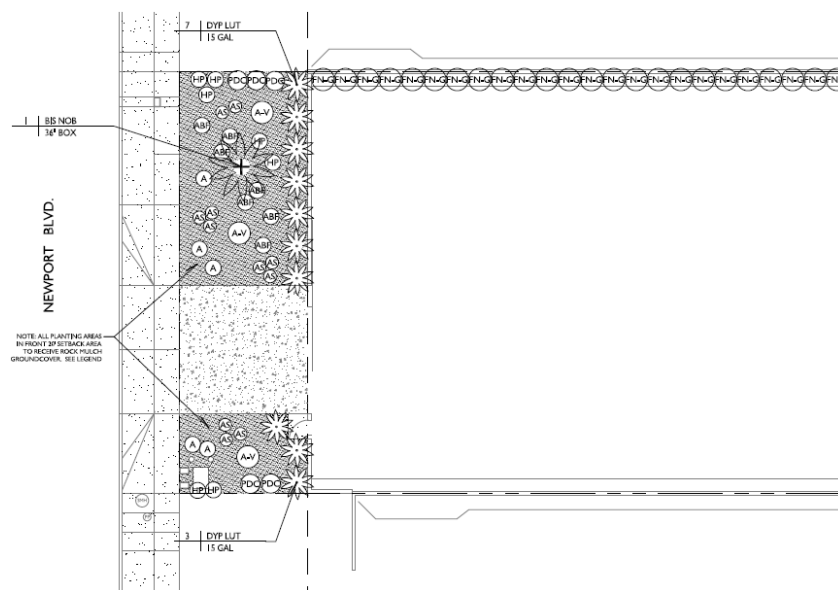
As necessary, proposed conditional uses may have conditions of approval applied to the development or their operations to ensure that the required findings can be met. An assessment of the project's relationship to the findings, General Plan and Specific Plan is provided later in this report.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Use and Operations

Southside Towing's main office is located at 1643 Placentia Avenue, which obtained a Minor Conditional Use Permit (MCUP) (ZA-07-27) allowing a towing service impound yard as well as CUP (PA-07-44) allowing vehicle auctions in the General Industrial (MG) zone. Notable conditional of approval for the use at 1643 Placentia Avenue include ensuring the use is limited to storage of vehicles for the towing business (no repair or dismantling onsite), that storage of their towed vehicles and tow truck are not being parked or stored on public streets, as well as conditions of approval specifically related to the operation of vehicles auctions (Attachments 5 & 6). The tow company also has active tow yards in the City of Orange and the City of Lake Forest.

Figure 3. Partial Landscape Plan



- Installing new landscaping along the street setback area and around the property (Figure 3);
- Rebuilding the sidewalk, curb and gutter along the property's street frontage and a new concrete driveway and drive approach, per City Standards.
- Refinish the asphalt paving internally in the lot and add parking wheel stops; and,
- Installation a new block wall with motorized gate.

-6-

Based on the Costa Mesa Municipal Code (CMMC), four parking spaces are required per 1,000-square-foot of gross building area. Therefore, the existing 4,228-square-foot building is required to provide 15 parking spaces. The applicant has provided a site plan demonstrating that the site with proposed improvements can accommodate the required 15 parking spaces (Figure 4). As described, tow truck drivers will come and go throughout the day to pick up their tow truck for their shift. They will park their personal vehicles onsite while working and returning at the end of their shifts to exchange the tow trucks for their personal vehicles.

[illegible]

Tow truck storage will be located toward the front of the property which is approximately 150 feet from the closest residence to the rear of the subject property. However, given the proximity to multi-family residential development, and to ensure the proposed use operates as proposed, additional conditions of approval have been applied to the project, including:

- 7-

9. Tow trucks, when not in use, shall not be parked or stored on a public street or any other property in violation of the Costa Mesa Municipal Code (CMMC) (ZA 07-27 Condition No. 12)
10. Onsite lien sales of vehicles is prohibited.

With the incorporation of the recommended operational conditions, the proposed use would not result in undue impacts on the surrounding properties. The use is limited to the storage of tow trucks and employee vehicles and would function primarily as a parking lot. The existing building on-site would serve only as secured storage, with no impound operations proposed. Thus, the use is compatible with the surrounding commercial and residential areas, as its operations would be similar in character to an outdoor vehicle storage use associated with a tow company. The project would not generate unusual noise, traffic, or parking impacts beyond those typically associated with commercially zoned properties.

The request to allow vehicle storage of tow trucks and employee vehicles is not limited to Southside Towing specifically. However, the use is restricted to vehicle storage only, and the conditions of approval are written to ensure that any future operator or property owner must comply with the same operational standards. If Southside Towing no longer uses the site, the property owner may lease it to another business, provided the new operator is engaged in the same approved use and complies with all conditions of approval. Any other type of use would be subject to the zoning requirements in place and may require separate review and approval.

GENERAL PLAN AND NEWPORT BOULEVARD SPECIFIC PLAN CONSISTENCY

The proposed project is in conformance with the City's General Plan in that the General Plan establishes the long-range planning and policy direction that guides change and preserves the qualities that define the community. The 2015-2035 General Plan sets forth the vision for Costa Mesa. This vision focuses on protecting and enhancing Costa Mesa's diverse residential neighborhoods, accommodating an array of businesses that both serve local needs and attract regional and international spending, and continuing to provide cultural, educational, social, and recreational amenities that contribute to the quality of life in the community. Over the long term, General Plan implementation will ensure that development decisions and improvements to public and private infrastructure are consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies contained in this Plan.

The following analysis evaluates proposed project consistency with applicable policies and objectives of the 2015-2035 General Plan:

1. **Policy LU-3.1:** "Protect existing stabilized residential neighborhoods, including mobile home parks (and manufactured housing parks), from the encroachment of incompatible or potentially disruptive land uses and/or activities."

Consistent. The subject property is abutting an existing multi-family residential development to the rear of the subject property (southeast). The proposed use would be operated outdoors, however the use is for vehicle storage and is located in the middle of the property, away from the existing residential development. The existing building, located toward the rear of the property, would be utilized for secured storage only. Conditions of approval have been placed to mitigate potential noise impacts to the nearby properties.

2. **Policy LU-6.7:** "Encourage new and retain existing businesses that provide local shopping and services."

Consistent. Approval of the proposed outdoor storage of motor vehicles (tow trucks) would allow for a local service business to store tow trucks and vehicles to improve the operations for an existing business. The applicant, Southside Towing, currently operates at 1643 Placentia Avenue and is proposing utilize the parking lot for the storage of company tow trucks and employee vehicles. The existing 4,228-square-foot building on the site is proposed to be used for secured storage.

The use would be compatible with the existing uses along Newport Boulevard and meets the intent of the General Plan's Commercial Residential land use designation. The proposed use is consistent with the land use designation's intended land uses and complies with the applicable development standards of the Zoning Code. The Commercial Residential land use designation is intended to allow a complementary mix of commercial and residential zoning along Newport Boulevard. The proposed outdoor storage of motor vehicles (tow trucks and employee vehicles) is compatible with the existing site improvements and is an allowable use pursuant to the City's Land Use Matrix, with approval of a CUP. The proposed project would not increase the size of the existing commercial building and would not increase traffic volume to the site beyond that typical for a commercial use.

The Newport Boulevard Specific Plan indicates that new commercial land uses should stimulate economic activity along the boulevard while considering compatibility issues with existing and future adjacent residential land uses, when applicable. In addition, the specific plan restricts specific uses including motor vehicle dealerships, automotive repair and body work, and tire sales. The site has been unused since the piano repair business vacated the site in 2014. The use of the site as outdoor storage of motor vehicles (tow trucks) would activate the site and attract employees to the area which is consistent with the specific plan. With the inclusion of a perimeter block wall, motorized gate, and new landscaping, the site will be adequately screened from public view, minimizing potential visual or operational impacts.

FINDINGS

Pursuant to Title 13, Section 13-29(g), Findings, of the CMMC, to approve the project, the Planning Commission must find that the evidence presented in the administrative record substantially meets the following applicable required Conditional Use Permit findings:

- *The proposed development or use is substantially compatible with developments in the same general area and would not be materially detrimental to other properties within the area.*

Consistent. The existing site and commercial building were previously occupied by a piano repair use and is proposed to be utilized for the storage of company tow trucks and employee vehicles with the existing building used for secured storage. Conditions of approval have been implemented to ensure the site is not used as an impound lot and that no repair of vehicles occur on site. In addition, conditions have been included to ensure that there is no use of backup alarms or idling of vehicles and is not open to the public. As such, the proposal would not generate adverse noise, traffic or parking impacts that are unusual for commercially zoned properties.

- *Granting the conditional use permit will not be materially detrimental to the health, safety and general welfare of the public or otherwise injurious to property or improvements within the immediate neighborhood.*

Consistent. Granting the approval of the outdoor storage of motor vehicles (tow trucks and employee vehicles) would not be detrimental to the health, safety and general welfare of the public or otherwise injurious to property or improvements within the immediate neighborhood as the proposed use at the property would be more similar to an outdoor vehicle store use. The existing 4,228-square-foot building will be used solely for secured storage associated with the business. With the inclusion of a perimeter block wall, motorized gate, and new landscaping, the site will be adequately screened from public view, minimizing potential visual or operational impacts. Conditions of approval will ensure that no outdoor vehicle repair or dismantling occurs, that all operations remain orderly, and that noise, traffic, and site activity remain consistent with surrounding uses, thereby protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the community.

- *Granting the conditional use permit will not allow a use, density or intensity which is not in accordance with the General Plan designation and any applicable specific plan for the property.*

Consistent. The proposed project is in conformance with the Newport Boulevard Specific Plan in that the use will activate the unused property and the use is allowable by the specific plan. The proposed project is in conformance with the City's General Plan in that the use would be compatible with the existing uses along Newport Boulevard and meets the intent of the General Plan's Commercial Residential land use

designation. The proposed use is consistent with the General Plan's Commercial Residential land use designation's intended land uses and complies with the applicable development standards of the Zoning Code. The Commercial Residential is intended to allow a complementary mix of commercial and residential zoning along Newport Boulevard. The proposed outdoor storage of motor vehicles (tow trucks and employee vehicles) is compatible with the existing site improvements and is an allowable use pursuant to the City's Land Use Matrix, with approval of a CUP. The proposed project would not increase the size of the existing commercial building and would not increase traffic volume to the site beyond that typical for a commercial use. Furthermore, the proposed project is consistent with General Plan Land Use Policies LU-3.1 and LU-6.7 in that the existing building, located toward the rear of the property, would be utilized for secured storage only. Conditions of approval have been placed to mitigate potential noise impacts to the nearby properties and would allow for a local service business to retain and expand their existing operation.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

The project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, Permitting and/or Minor Alteration of Existing Facilities. The site is located in an urbanized area that is fully developed and does not contain any sensitive species or habitat including nearby water bodies. This project site contains an existing building, and the application does not include any new construction that would adversely affect native plants or species. The project would result in limited interior improvements to adequately address operation and safety concerns. The project is consistent with the applicable General Plan designation and all applicable General Plan policies as well as with applicable zoning designation and regulations and the Newport Boulevard Specific Plan. Furthermore, none of the exceptions that bar the application of a categorical exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply. Specifically, the project would not result in a cumulative environmental impact; would not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances; would not result in damage to scenic resources; is not located on a hazardous site or location; and would not impact any historic resources.

ALTERNATIVES

As an alternative to the recommended action, the Planning Commission may:

1. Approve the project with modifications. The Planning Commission may suggest specific changes that are necessary to alleviate concerns. If any of the additional requested changes are substantial, the item should be continued to a future meeting to allow a redesign or additional analysis. In the event of significant modifications to the proposal, staff will return with a revised Resolution incorporating new findings and/or conditions.

2. Deny the project. If the Planning Commission believes that there are insufficient facts to support the findings for approval, the Planning Commission must deny the application, provide facts in support of denial, and direct staff to incorporate the findings into a Resolution for denial. If the project is denied, the applicant could not submit substantially the same type of application for six months.

LEGAL REVIEW

The draft Resolution and this report has been approved as to form by the City Attorney's Office.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Pursuant to CMMC Section 13-29(d) three types of public notification have been completed no less than 10 days prior to the date of the public hearing:

1. **Mailed notice.** A public notice was mailed to all property owners and occupants within a 500-foot radius of the project site September 9, 2025. The required notice radius is measured from the external boundaries of the property.
2. **On-site posting.** A public notice was posted on each street frontage of the project site on September 11, 2025.
3. **Newspaper publication.** A public notice was published once in the Daily Pilot newspaper on September 12, 2025.

As of the completion date of this report, one written public comments have been received and is provided as an attachment to the report (Attachment 7). Any public comments received prior to the September 22, 2025, Planning Commission meeting will be provided separately.

CONCLUSION

Approval of the project would allow outdoor storage of motor vehicles (tow trucks and employee vehicles) at 2648 Newport Boulevard. Southside Towing would utilize the parking lot area the storage of tow trucks and employee vehicles with the existing 4,228 square-foot building proposed to be used for secured storage. The proposed use is in conformance with the General Plan, Zoning Code, Newport Boulevard Specific Plan, Planning Application Review Criteria, and the required CUP findings can be made. The proposed use, as conditioned, would be compatible with the surrounding residents and commercial businesses and would not be materially detrimental to other properties within the area. Therefore, staff recommends approval of the proposed project, subject to the conditions of approval contained in the attached resolution.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft Planning Commission Resolution
2. Vicinity & Zoning Maps
3. Applicant Letter
4. Plans
5. PA-07-44 Resolution & Staff Report
6. ZA-07-27 Resolution & Staff Report
7. Public Comment