



# PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: May 12, 2025

ITEM NUMBER: PH-2

**SUBJECT: CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT PA-23-05 FOR A NEW PRIVATE SCHOOL (K-12) WITHIN AN EXISTING CHURCH (MESA VERDE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH) AT 1701 BAKER STREET**

**FROM: ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT/  
PLANNING DIVISION**

**PRESENTATION BY: CHRIS YEAGER, SENIOR PLANNER**

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends the Planning Commission adopt a Resolution to:

1. Find that the project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (Class 1) Existing Facilities; and
2. Approve Conditional Use Permit PA-23-05 based on findings of fact and subject to conditions of approval.

## **APPLICANT OR AUTHORIZED AGENT**

The authorized agent is Adrienne Gladson, representing the property owner, Mesa Verde United Methodist Church.

## **PLANNING APPLICATION SUMMARY**

Location:	1701 Baker Street	Application Number:	PA-23-05
Request:	Conditional Use Permit to allow for a new private school (K-12) within the existing church (Mesa Verde United Methodist Church)		

### SUBJECT PROPERTY:

### SURROUNDING PROPERTY:

Zone:	I&R (Institutional and Recreational District)	North (across Baker Street):	I&R
General Plan:	Public & Institutional	South:	R1 (Single Family Residential District)
Lot Dimensions:	Irregularly shaped. Approximately 220 FT x 400 FT	East (across Mesa Verde Drive E):	I&R and R1
Lot Area:	3.1 acres	West:	R1
Existing Development:	An existing 3,508-square-foot sanctuary building, 5,923-square-foot fellowship hall building, 4,566-square-foot administrative and education Building, 3,711-square-foot nursery school building, and associated site features including a 113-space surface parking lot, play yards, and landscaping.		

## **DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS COMPARISON**

Development Standard		I&R Standards	Proposed/Provided
Density/Intensity			
Floor Area Ratio		0.25	0.12
Building Height			
		4 stories	1 Story / 15'
Development Lot Setbacks			
Front		20'	Approx. 25'
Side (left / right)		(20' / 5')	Approx (35' / 70')
Rear		5'	140'
Parking			
Church Use (Peak)		69	113
Final Action			
CEQA Review	Planning Commission		
	Exempt per CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (Existing Development)		

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The applicant requests a Conditional Use Permit to allow the establishment of a new private K-12 school with a maximum enrollment of 120 students and up to 40 staff members within the existing Mesa Verde United Methodist Church located at 1701 Baker Street. The 3.1-acre site is zoned I&R and currently accommodates active church and preschool operations, which are proposed to remain. The school will utilize the existing Fellowship Hall and a portion of the Administration Building with no exterior expansions. To manage traffic and parking impacts, the applicant has proposed a detailed circulation plan, including staggered student drop-off and pick-up times, mandatory parking lot parent training, and dedicated staff supervision. Adequate on-site parking is provided to support all concurrent uses, with 37 surplus spaces available beyond projected peak weekday demand. The project is consistent with the City's General Plan and zoning regulations and is categorically exempt from CEQA as an adaptive reuse of existing facilities with no significant environmental impacts anticipated. Staff recommends approval based on the proposal's compatibility with surrounding uses and minimal anticipated impacts to the neighborhood.

## **BACKGROUND**

The subject 3.1-acre property is located at 1701 Baker Street on the southwestern corner of the intersection of Baker Street and Mesa Verde Drive (see Exhibit 1 below). The site has a General Plan Land Use Designation of Public and Institutional and is zoned I&R (Institutional and Recreational District). The Public and Institutional designation applies to publicly and privately owned properties that provide recreation, open space, health, and educational opportunities, as well as uses that provide services to the public. The I&R zone allows land uses which provide recreation, open space, health and public services. Development in this land use designation may occur on either public or private property. The subject property is generally surrounded by single family dwellings zoned R1 to the south and west with eight single family residences directly abutting the parking lot. Each residence is buffered from the parking lot by a minimum six-foot block wall and approximately five feet of landscaping. Additional single-family homes zoned R1 are also located across Mesa Verde Drive with side and rear yards facing the school.

Additional I&R zoned properties developed with Early College High School, Calvary Chapel, and the Mesa Verde Library are located at the other corners of Baker Street and Mesa Verde Drive respectively with R1 properties surrounding.

The project site contains four separate buildings including a 3,508-square-foot sanctuary building, 5,923-square-foot fellowship hall, 4,566-square-foot administrative and education building, and a 3,711-square-foot nursery school. The project site also features an existing 114 space surface parking lot to the south of the buildings and a large open area to the north of the buildings which would be utilized as a play yard. The project site has an approved master plan and has had multiple amendments approved over the years.

## Exhibit 1 Vicinity Map



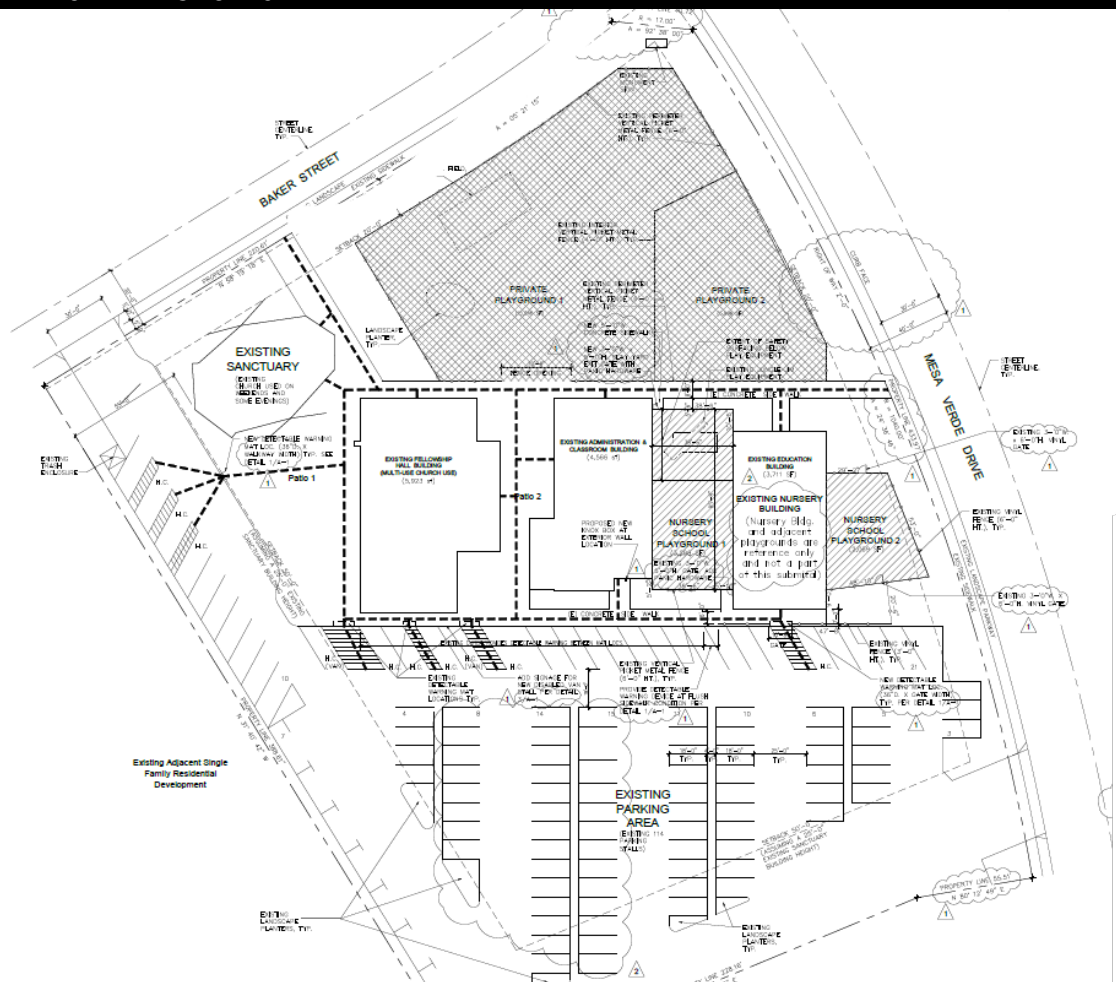
Zoning application ZA-05-28 amended the master plan to bring the site into its current form by allowing an addition to the classroom/administration building and a 900-square-foot addition to the fellowship hall. An 1,850-square-foot expansion to the sanctuary and an 850-square-foot expansion of the fellowship hall was authorized by ZE-84-109. And master plan amendment ZE-5-69 allowed for the operation of the preschool. The fellowship hall and education building were constructed in 1969 and the church sanctuary was constructed in 1962. Prior to the construction, according to historical imagery, the site remained undeveloped while the surrounding neighborhood was constructed following City incorporation in 1953. Prior to incorporation, the surrounding area was undeveloped and used for agricultural purposes.

The project site (Exhibit 2 below) hosts existing church and preschool activities which are proposed to remain with the addition of the new private school. The existing church operates at a peak capacity on Sunday mornings with church services in the mornings. During the traditional work week, two church staff are on-site during school hours with limited visitors.

Seaside Preschool occupies the Nursery Building with two existing play yards designated for preschool aged children - one play area is located by the Administration and Education building and another between the Education building and Mesa Verde

Drive. The existing preschool has an open drop-off starting at 7:00 a.m. and the typical pick-up time is 2:30 p.m. with extended after-care hours available until 6:00 p.m. The preschool was originally approved with a maximum capacity of 45 children. According to the applicant, the current enrollment of the preschool is 37 students with a total of nine staff. Generally, guardians dropping preschoolers off will park their vehicles and walk or carry the child into the preschool.

## Exhibit 2 Site Plan



## ANALYSIS

Conditional Use Permit application PA-23-05 is a request to allow the existing 5,923 square-foot Fellowship Hall and an approximately 2,650-square-foot portion of the Administration Building at the Mesa Verde United Methodist Church to be converted into a private school with a maximum enrollment of 120 students (grades K-12). The maximum number of anticipated staff is 40. The hours of operation for the proposed school are from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday including before and after school care with some activities outside school hours which would be coordinated with all onsite uses. The school's operator will stagger student drop-off and pick-ups to



ensure only 40 students will arrive or leave the site within 15-minute intervals. The existing church and preschool are proposed to remain on the site. Each class is assigned a 15-minute recess and 30-minute lunch break which are staggered to ensure that there are no more than 40 students assigned to these break areas. The Church anticipates leasing out the space to a school operator and does not intend to operate the school itself.

Using an existing church as a school is appropriate due to the architectural and communal alignment between the two uses. Churches often have large, flexible spaces like fellowship halls, classrooms, and gathering areas that can be readily adapted for educational purposes with minimal renovation. In addition, churches may attract large groups of people at the same time, similar to schools, albeit churches attract their largest gatherings on weekends. The uses are appropriate because the I&R zone is intended to provide public uses such as schools and churches, both of which would be provided on site and would be consistent with the zoning classification.

Pursuant to CMMC Table 13-30, Primary schools, secondary schools, and colleges require a CUP to operate in the I&R zone. Pursuant to CMMC Section 13-30(g)(2), to approve the CUP application, the Planning Commission must make findings that the use is compatible with developments in the nearby area, would not be detrimental to other nearby properties, will not be detrimental to the public health, safety and general welfare, will not injure nearby property or improvements, and will not allow a use, density or intensity not in accord with the General Plan. As necessary, proposed uses may have conditions of approval applied to the development or their operations to ensure that the required findings can be met.

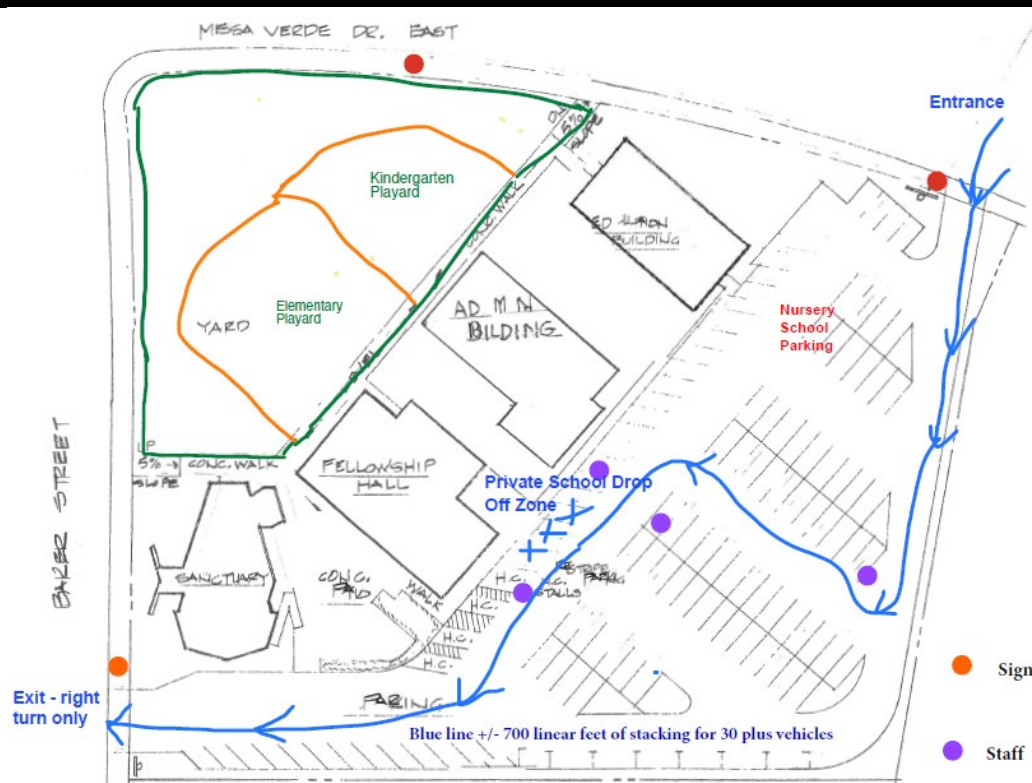
## **Circulation**

Generally, the largest impact of schools is on the circulation systems because large numbers of students arrive and depart at the same time. This is generally the same impact of churches as well. The applicant's proposal reduces potential impacts to circulation by including operational characteristics including staggered schedules, dedicated circulation routes, and parent/guardian training. The school's proposed arrival/departure plan includes the following measures:

- A mandatory tutorial video demonstrating the student drop-offs and pickup system shall be viewed and attested by guardians as part of the school orientation;
- Students will be dropped and picked up from vehicles entering the property from Mesa Verde Drive East;
- Students will be assigned a 15-minute arrival group (each group will be 40 students) starting at 8:00 a.m. for a total arrival window of 45 minutes in the morning;
- Vehicles will exit the campus on Baker Street with a right turn only;

- A minimum of four school employees will be on duty in the parking lot in the designated student drop-off and pick-up areas to receive students in the morning and to ensure a safe pick-up in the afternoon;
- For the first two weeks of the school year, a minimum of two additional school employees will be stationed along the west side of Mesa Verde East Drive to guide and direct student arrivals in the morning;
- All vehicles traveling to school will be instructed to use Baker Street (traveling westbound) and then turning left onto southbound Mesa Verde Drive East or Mesa Verde Drive West (travelling north from Adams Avenue) and then make a right turn into the campus. Use of the northbound Mesa Verde East Drive from Adams Avenue will not be part of the vehicle entrance pattern.
- School staff will supervise all parking lot activities to limit noise impacts to the residents' uses to the south and west and ensure student safety.
- Staff will be required to arrive before 7:30 am to avoid peak traffic times and park in staff assigned parking areas of the parking lot.
- Students are not permitted to drive to the campus but would be allowed to bike or walk.

### Exhibit 3 Internal Circulation Plan



The mandatory vehicle circulation pattern, shown in Exhibit 3 above, will be implemented Monday through Friday for pick up and drop off. The plan includes the use of directional signage along the project perimeter and multiple staff members directing flow of traffic and ensuring safety in the parking lot.

The existing pre-school's student drop-off runs from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. with pick up from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Traffic impacts during these hours are generally low, averaging less than 10 cars per hour at their peak.

To ensure that the project would operate with minimal impacts on the surrounding neighborhood, conditions have been included to ensure that the circulation pattern is observed on all school days, that a mandatory video tutorial be watched and attested by guardians annually, that students be assigned an arrival window of 15 minutes and that no more than 40 students receive the same arrival window, that a minimum 4 staff be on duty in the parking lot during pick up and drop off times, that students are not permitted to drive to campus, and that no vehicle stacking occur in the public right of way. Additionally, a condition requires that directional signage be installed at the site exit adjacent to Baker Street advising that the exit is "Right Turn Only" from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on school days. All directional signage shall require a permit and shall be installed on the subject property, outside the public right-of-way and required visibility triangles.

## **Parking**

The CMMC does not prescribe a parking ratio for schools - instead parking is established through the CUP process. The existing parking lot includes 113 parking spaces which can accommodate 51 staff including the 40 proposed school staff, 9 current preschool staff, and two church staff that are anticipated during weekdays. The Mesa Verde Methodist Church currently rents 25 parking spaces to the neighboring Pacific Academy located at Calvary Chapel. The parking lot will include 37 excess parking spaces which can be utilized by other visitors to the site including parents dropping off preschoolers. Including the parking demand for the proposed school, existing preschool, church staff, and offsite parking agreement, there will be 37 excess parking spaces on site during school hours and therefore there is ample parking to accommodate the proposed use and existing uses.

In addition, staff and students may walk or bike to the campus, or commute through a carpooling system with students from multiple families or siblings in one vehicle to further reduce parking and circulation demand. Conditions have been added that if parking problems arise, that operational changes be instituted to immediately alleviate the problems. In addition, conditions have been added that the church, preschool, and private school shall coordinate and agree on the timing of after-hours events to ensure the parking demand can be met on the site.

In order to ensure active transpiration opportunities, an additional condition has been included requiring the installation of bike racks for the use of students, teachers, and visitors and providing an area for future installation of additional bike racks should the capacity of the racks be reached.



## Residential Proximity

As shown in exhibit 4 below, the school's play yards are approximately 100 feet from the closest residential property across Mesa Verde Drive. The residence's side yard faces the school and is located behind an existing 6-foot block walls on the residential property. Additional residences are located south of the parking lot with the closest residence being approximately 180 feet from the play yard. These residences are located on the other side of the existing buildings, landscaping, and a block wall from the proposed play yards. Due to the distance of the play yards from the residences, the daytime operation of schools, and the limited use of the play yards, there should be no undue impacts on the surrounding neighborhood due to the proposed use. Other than pick-up and drop-off activities, the parking lot will not be heavily used throughout the day and would also not negatively impact the adjacent neighbors because of the existing block wall and vegetative screening between the two uses.



## Playground Requirements

Play yards and playgrounds are subject to review and approval pursuant to the attached Development Services Policy (P-20-01) related to outdoor play areas. The policy includes various requirements for play yards including that their placement shall be sensitive to other nearby uses, that shade be incorporated into permanent play equipment, that adequate safety barriers be in place between play yards and streets, that play equipment be made available to various ages and handicap users, and various other requirements. The CUP application does not propose any permanent play

equipment at this time. Should the applicant propose permanent play equipment, the proposal will be reviewed based on the policy.

Various conditions have been included related to future playground equipment including that the play yard and equipment comply with the Development Services Policy. Additional conditions are prescribed in the policy and have also been included for the project.

### **General Plan Conformance**

The following evaluates the proposed use's consistency with specific goals, objectives, or policies of Costa Mesa's 2015-2035 General Plan:

1. **Policy LU-1.1:** Provide for the development of a mix and balance of housing opportunities, commercial goods and services and employment opportunities in consideration of the need of the business and residential segments of the community.

**Consistency:** The project will allow for a new private school with capacity for up to 120 students. The proposed school would maintain and provide a local educational opportunity that supports the City's goals of providing high quality and diverse services to residents. The school would also provide a new employment opportunity for teachers and staff.

2. **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.

**Consistency:** The project has been designed to ensure that potential conflicts with residential land uses are minimized. Surrounding land uses share compatibility with the project including a preschool, school, church, and library. The project will utilize a space which sits largely vacant during weekdays on the subject site. Circulations, queuing, and parking spaces have been reviewed by the Public Works Department for adequacy, efficiency, and safety. Lastly, the project has been designed and conditioned to protect the character and enjoyment of nearby residents.

### **FINDINGS**

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

The proposed private school improvements and operating characteristics are compatible with the allowed public/private institutional, and residential uses in the vicinity. Physical alterations to the church are minimal and would only be to meet current building and safety standards. The school's parking demand will not exceed the parking available within the parking lot and will not interfere with preschool or church access. The location of outdoor play areas have been located as far from residential uses as possible and will only be utilized intermittently during the day.

- 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.

The school's operations, including circulation, parking, operational hours and playground location are designed to avoid conflicts with surrounding properties. Additionally, the operation of the school will be required to comply with all local, State, and federal regulations. Pedestrian and vehicular access would be provided from Mesa Verde Drive East via an existing on-site driveway with circulation exiting onto Baker Street. The proposed site design includes the provision of adequate emergency vehicle access and public services and utilities.

- 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.

The project, as proposed and conditioned, complies with the General Plan, and with approval of the CUP, the standards prescribed in the Zoning Code. The proposed use as a private school is consistent with the Public and Institutional General Plan land use designation and Institutional and Recreational zoning classification. The proposed project does not increase the building square footage and does not otherwise change the site's existing density or intensity. There are no Specific Plans applicable to this site.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION**

The project is categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301 (Class 1) "Existing Facilities".

The Class 1 CEQA exemption exempts minor alterations to existing facilities involving negligible or no expansion of the existing or prior use. The proposed new private school involves no expansion of the existing or prior use because it will have little or no

impact on the surrounding area since all parking and circulation required by the private school use will be accommodated at the project site. Church uses involve the congregation of many people at a site at the same time which is similar to the use of the proposed school. The project is consistent with the General Plan designations and policies and is consistent with all applicable zoning regulations upon approval of the requested entitlement.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

As an alternative to the recommended action, the Planning Commission may consider one of the following:

1. Approve the project. The Planning Commission may approve the project as proposed, subject to the conditions outlined in the attached Resolution.
2. Approve the project with modifications. In consideration of any required findings or project use operations, the Planning Commission may suggest specific project changes. If any of the additional requested changes are substantial, the hearing could 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.
3. 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 have been approved as to form by the City Attorney's Office.

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Pursuant to Title 13, Section 13-29(d) of the Costa Mesa Municipal Code, 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 on April 30, 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 May 2, 2025.

3. **Newspaper publication.** A public notice was published once at least 10 days before the Planning Commission meeting in the Daily Pilot newspaper on May 2, 2025.

As of the date of this report, one written public comments have been received. Any public comments received prior to the May 12, 2025, Planning Commission meeting will be forwarded separately to the Planning Commission.

### **CONCLUSION**

The applicant proposes a new private school within an existing church in a residential neighborhood surrounded by other similar uses including schools, library, and churches. The school is proposed in the I&R zone and Public Institutional Land Use Designation which specifically allows for school uses. The school includes operational characteristics and conditions which will ensure that the project does not unduly impact the surrounding neighborhood while also providing for a diverse, high quality educational opportunity. The school will provide an additional educational opportunity for children in Costa Mesa.