

Providence City Plan Commission

June 21, 2022



AGENDA ITEM 5 ■ 35 MERINO STREET



View of existing building with proposed parking area



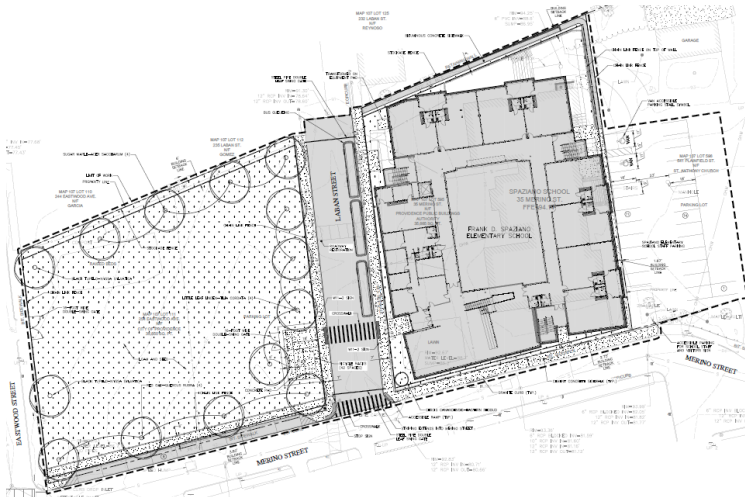
Aerial view of the site



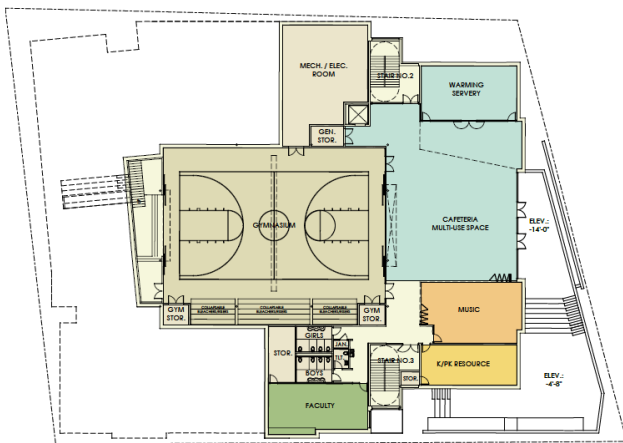
Proposed north elevation from Laban Street

OVERVIEW

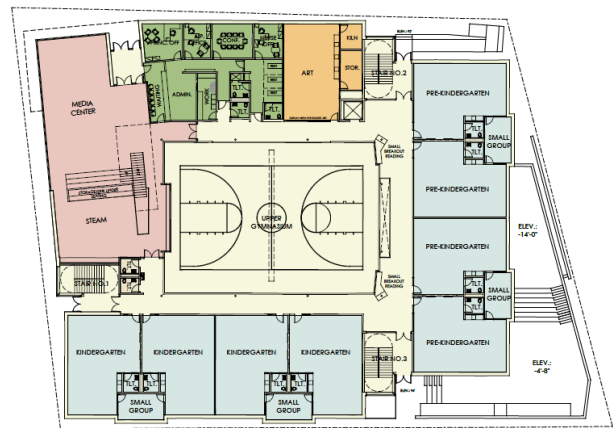
OWNER/ APPLICANT:	Providence Public Buildings Authority, Owner and Applicant	PROJECT DESCRIPTION:	The applicant is requesting preliminary plan approval to construct an educational facility for grades pre-K-5 on the site of a former vacant school annex building. A height of three stories and 42' is proposed with the first floor located below grade. The CPC granted variances related to parking, lot coverage and setbacks at the master plan stage.
CASE NO./ PROJECT TYPE:	22-022 UDR Preliminary Plan pursuant to Unified Development Review (UDR)		
PROJECT LOCATION:	35 Merino Street AP 107 Lot 595; R-2 zoning district	RECOMMENDATION:	Approval of the preliminary plan
NEIGHBORHOOD:	Hartford	PROJECT PLANNER:	Choyon Manjrekar



Proposed site plan



Floor plans for the garden and main levels



PROJECT OVERVIEW

The lot measures approximately 35,665 SF and was occupied by a former school annex building in the R-2 zone. It has frontage on Merino and Laban Streets. The applicant is proposing to construct a new pre-K-5 school that will be three stories and 42' tall with the first floor located over 50% below grade. A total of 79,447 SF of gross floor area will be created within the building. The site will be developed in tandem with 249 Laban Street (AP 107 lot 111), north of the subject lot which will provide green space, bicycle parking and accessible parking. Pursuant to UDR, the CPC granted variances from parking, lot coverage and rear yard setback requirements at the master plan stage.

ANALYSIS AND IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL ISSUES

Use

The subject lot is zoned R-2 where elementary

educational facilities are permitted by right.

Dimensions and site design

The first floor of the building known as the garden level with storage space and a gymnasium will be located over 50% below grade and is therefore not counted as a story. Classrooms and office space will be provided in the three levels above the garden level, resulting in a height of 42' and three stories which is within the 45' height limit of the zone. The building will be set close to the front, rear and side lot lines, covering over 87% of the lot.

The exterior will be composed of a brick veneer cementitious panels, aluminum trim and glass with ample transparency provided on the ground floor and upper stories.

Mechanical equipment will be located on the roof and garden level with the transformer located at the northeast corner of lot 595.

The CPC granted relief for exceeding the maximum building coverage and maximum impervious surface limits of 45% and 65% respectively. The CPC also granted relief from the rear yard setback requirement. Therefore, the project is in conformance with the dimensional requirements of the ordinance.

Parking

Bus pickup and drop off areas will be located in front of the building on Laban Street. A total of 26 parking spaces are needed to meet the requirement of one space per three employees with 78 employees expected. The project is in conformance with the ordinance as the CPC granted relief from the parking requirement at the master plan stage.

Three bicycle spaces are required per classroom, for a total of 84 spaces, but 42 will be provided on lot 111. The project is in conformance with the bicycle parking requirement as the CPC granted a dimensional adjustment for the 50% reduction at the master plan stage.

Traffic Management

A memo providing a traffic safety assessment and recommendation for the site indicates that operation of a 680 student school will result in 442 vehicle trips during the morning peak hour and 231 vehicle trips during the evening peak. Two hundred feet of Laban Street is expected to be gated to contain school buses when boarding students to prevent student movement onto the street. The gated area will also be striped to distinguish between vehicle and pedestrian areas. Vehicle drop off and pickup areas will be provided along Merino Street and Eastwood Ave. Reversal of the one way operation on Eastwood Ave has been proposed to allow for drop off on the north side of the lot. As pedestrian activity is expected to increase, sidewalks will be ADA compliant in addition to provision of bike racks.

Landscaping

With a lot area of 35,665 SF, approximately 10,700 SF of canopy coverage is required. The applicant will meet some, but not all of that requirement on the subject lot. According to the landscape plan, the canopy coverage requirement will be met by making offsite plantings on lot 111, which can be approved by the City Forester. A total of 14 trees and almost the entire area of the lot 111 will be composed of pervious coverage, which is currently paved. Per the applicant, the lot will be used as open space by the school and also open to the public.

Stormwater and site management

The stormwater management plan will employ a combination of Best Management Practices (BMP) and Low Impact Development (LID). Runoff from the roof and surface will be treated with an infiltration system located on both subject lots and discharge into a combined sewer through connections on Laban Street and Eastwood Ave. Per the plan, the system will reduce runoff from one to 100 year storm events. A site maintenance plan outlining procedures and schedules for upkeep of the stormwater system, landscaping and drainage plans is also included. A stormwater construction permit is required from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) and a Stormwater Connection permit is required from the Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC). The applicant has requested waivers from submission of approvals from these state bodies at the preliminary plan stage.

Sediment and erosion control

A sediment and erosion control plan outlining procedures to prevent erosion during construction have been submitted. Temporary vegetative cover and mulching will be used to prevent soil erosion. Measures for dust control, waste disposal and street sweeping are also included.

Lighting

The submitted lighting plan meets the requirements of the ordinance with light transmittance from wall packs on the

building façade not exceeding 1 footcandle at the lot lines. Submitted cut sheets show that the light fixtures will be shielded and cut off as required by the ordinance.

Waivers

The applicant has requested a waiver from submission of state approvals at the preliminary plan stage, particularly from the RIDEM and NBC, and is requesting that they be submitted with the final plan. It is the DPD's opinion that the CPC should grant the waiver finding that it is required in the interest of good planning practice as the approval periods for state bodies may vary. Granting the waiver would allow the applicant to proceed with the development process.

Findings—Land Development Project

Section 806 of the Commission's *Development Review Regulations* requires that the City Plan Commission make the following findings as part of their approval of all land development project applications. Based on the analysis contained herein and subject to the conditions contained in this report, staff has prepared the following findings regarding the request for approval of the Preliminary Plan stage:

1. *Consistency—The proposed development is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and/or has satisfactorily addressed the issues where there may be inconsistencies.*

The subject property is located in an area that the future land use map of Providence Tomorrow: The Comprehensive Plan intends for low density residential development. The plan describes this area as one intended for one to two family dwellings. As schools are permitted by right in residential zones, the development would conform to the comprehensive plan. The development would conform to objective CS-1 of the comprehensive plan which encourages development and provision of public educational facilities in the City.

2. *Compliance with Zoning Ordinance—The proposed development is in compliance with the standards and provisions of the Zoning Ordinance.*

Use: Elementary Educational facilities are permitted by right in the zone.

Dimension and design: The development complies with the dimensional and design requirements of the R-2 zone. The development is in conformance with the ordinance as the CPC has granted relief from the lot coverage and rear yard setback requirements.

Parking: The applicant will meet the vehicle parking requirement as the CPC has granted a variance for parking. The bicycle parking requirement will be met with the dimensional adjustment granted by the CPC.

Landscaping: The applicant will meet the landscaping and canopy coverage requirement by making offsite plantings at 249 Laban Street. The plan shall be subject to the City Forester's approval.

Lighting: The lighting plan complies with the zoning ordinance.

State approvals: The CPC should grant a waiver from submission of all state approvals at the preliminary plan stage subject to the applicant submitting the approvals with the final plan.

3. *Environmental Impact—There will be no significant environmental impacts from the proposed development as shown on the final plan, with all required conditions for approval.*

No negative environmental impacts are expected as the applicant is expected to conform to all environmental regulations.

4. *Buildable Lot—The subdivision or development project, as proposed, will not result in the creation of individual lots with such physical constraints to development that building on those lots according to pertinent regulations and building standards would be impracticable.*

There are no physical constraints that impact development of this property.

5. *Street Access—All proposed development projects and all subdivision lots shall have adequate and permanent physical access to a public street. Lot frontage on a public street without physical access shall not be considered compliance with this requirement.*

Physical access to the site is provided from Merino and Laban Streets.

Recommendation—Land Development Project

1. The CPC should grant the waiver from submission of all state approvals at the final plan stage subject to the condition that the applicant submit the approvals with the final plan.
2. The landscaping plan shall be subject to the City Forester's approval.
3. The CPC should approve the preliminary plan finding it to be in conformance with the zoning ordinance and comprehensive plan.
4. Final plan approval should be delegated to DPD staff.