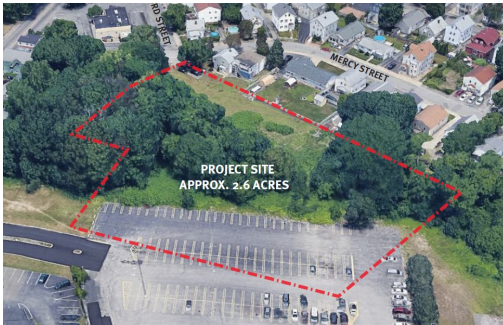


# Providence City Plan Commission

February 21, 2023



## AGENDA ITEM 6 ■ 740 PLAINFIELD STREET



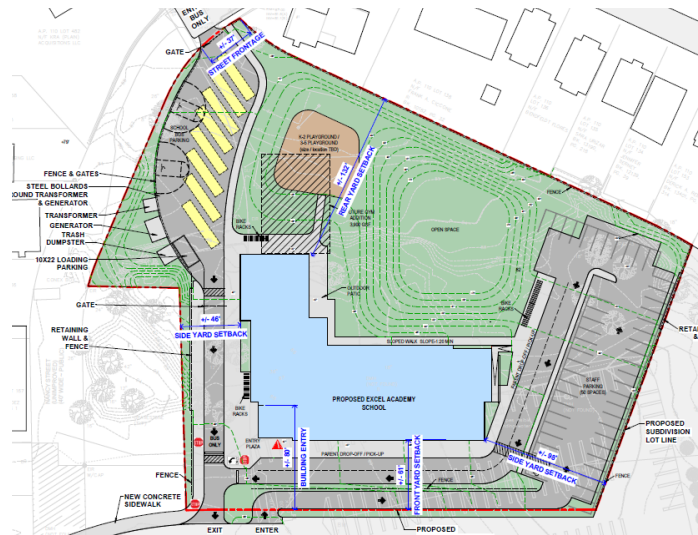
Aerial views of site



View from Plainfield Street driveway

### OVERVIEW

<b>OWNER/ APPLICANT:</b>	Excel Academy, Applicant Destiny Partners LLC, Owner	<b>PROJECT DESCRIPTION:</b>	The applicant is requesting master plan approval to construct an educational facility for grades K-8 on the site of a former market with vacant lots. The building will provide approximately 41,000 SF, and will measure 43' and 3 stories tall. The applicant is seeking certain variances pursuant to UDR, and a design waivers.
<b>CASE NO./ PROJECT TYPE:</b>	<b>23-007 UDR</b> Master Plan, variances and design waiver pursuant to Unified Development Review (UDR)		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION:</b>	740 Plainfield Street AP 110 Lots 143, 148, 156; C-2 zoning district	<b>RECOMMENDATION:</b>	Approval of the master plan, variances and design waivers as detailed
<b>NEIGHBORHOOD:</b>	Silver Lake	<b>PROJECT PLANNER:</b>	Choyon Manjrekar



Proposed site plan



WEST ELEVATION

SOUTH ELEVATION

Building elevations

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The development parcel is composed of five lots measuring approximately 323,789 SF (7.43 acres) and occupied by a former market and a vacant wooded area in the C-2 zone. The applicant is proposing to create a lot measuring approximately 113,256 SF (2.6) acres from the existing lots to construct a K-8 school building that will provide approximately 41,000 SF of space, 24 classrooms, and will be 43' and 3 stories tall. A playground, vehicle and bus parking and landscaping will be provided with the school building. In addition to master plan approval, the applicant is seeking design waivers, and variances pursuant to Unified Development Review (UDR). Variances from the front and interior side yard setback are requested with design waivers from the 50% front fenestration requirement in the C-2 zone, a cornice treatment on the roof and to maintain a recessed entrance over six feet from the front yard



Front and rear aerial elevation views

setback.

## ANALYSIS AND IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL ISSUES

### Use

The subject lot is zoned C-2 where educational facilities are permitted by right.

### Dimensions and site design

The subject lot, which will be created through an administrative subdivision, will be accessed from a two-way driveway originating on Plainfield Street located to the west of the school lot. The lot will be separated from Plainfield Street by a paper street (Nancy Street) and rows of lots. Vehicles and pedestrians will use the driveway and walkway to access the lot from Plainfield Street. Vehicles will turn into a parking area that leads to a pickup and drop-off area in front of the building. A bus parking area will be located to the rear of the school building and accessed from Sanford Street to the

north of the lot with egress provided from the Plainfield Street driveway. The transformer and trash collection area will be located in the northwest portion of the site.

The front of the building will be oriented to the southern lot line with the playground and bus parking area located to the rear. The applicant has requested dimensional variances from the front and side yard setback requirements pursuant to UDR.

The building will be three stories and approximately 43' tall, which is within the 50', four story height limit of the C-2 zone. The building's exterior will be composed of architectural concrete block, fiber cement paneling and brick, which are materials permitted by right. Recesses will be incorporated into the western portion of the façade, providing architectural variety to the building face. A two story rear addition for a gymnasium is also proposed. The applicant is requesting three design waivers related to the building's design related to the ground floor transparency requirement, to not include a roof parapet and ornamental cornice and a waiver to maintain a recessed entrance more than six feet from the required front setback.

#### Parking

Educational facilities require one parking space per three employees. The applicant will meet the parking requirement, providing 50 spaces for 80 employees. Three bicycle parking spaces are required per classroom. The applicant will meet this requirement, providing four bike rack locations located alongside the school and playground area.

Bus pickup and drop off areas will be located to the rear of the building, with the driveway accessible from Sanford Street. Eight angled bus parking spaces are proposed with egress provided onto the Plainfield Ave driveway. Buses will follow a first-in, first out process, with buses exiting in order of proximity to the exit.

#### Landscaping

With a lot area of approximately 113,256 SF, approximately 17,000 SF of canopy coverage is required. Per the conceptual plan, the applicant is proposing to meet the requirement by installing planting strips along the perimeter of the playground and parking area using a blend of trees and shrubs. The playground area is currently wooded. The City Forester conducted a walkthrough and found one significant tree in good health that could be affected by the development. The Forester required that the applicant make every effort to preserve the tree. The applicant shall plant an equivalent amount of trees or make restitution to the City should it need to be removed. A detailed landscaping plan with tree species and the canopy coverage calculation shall be presented at the preliminary plan stage.

#### Design Waivers

Three design waivers are requested:

- A waiver from the 50% front fenestration requirement in the C-2 zone
- Waiver from providing a three dimensional cornice treatment on the parapet walls
- Maintaining a recessed entrance over six feet from the front yard setback

Per the applicant, the waiver from the transparency requirement is being requested as maintaining 50% transparency would be inappropriate for a school building. Similarly, the decorative cornice treatment would be out of character with the building's design. As previously discussed, the building maintains a deep setback to accommodate vehicle drive aisles and to provide separation between vehicles and the school. The main entrance is further set back due to a recess incorporated into the building's design, which makes the waiver necessary.

It is the DPD's opinion that the design regulations from which the waivers are being requested mostly apply to commercial buildings, which have different design standards than school buildings. The need for waivers also relates to

the unique dimensions of the site. Therefore, the DPD recommends that the CPC grant the requested waivers.

### Public Outreach

The applicant is in contact with the State representative and City councilperson and intends to host a community meeting prior to the preliminary plan stage.

### **Discussion—Dimensional Relief**

The applicant is seeking dimensional relief from the following provisions of Table 5-1 of the ordinance:

- Front yard setback where a building is required to be located within the build-to zone of one to five feet from the front lot line, but a setback of approximately 61' is proposed.
- Side yard setback where a building is required to be located within the build-to zone of one to five feet from the front the corner side lot line, but a setback of approximately 46' is proposed.

### **Findings—Dimensional Variance**

Section 1902 of the zoning ordinance requires that the CPC find evidence of the following standards in order to grant a variance:

1. *That the hardship from which the applicant seeks relief is due to the unique characteristics of the subject land or structure and not to the general characteristics of the surrounding area; and is not due to a physical or economic disability of the applicant, excepting those physical disabilities addressed in Rhode Island General Laws §45-24-30 (16).*

As described, the subject property is unique because the building will not have direct frontage on a street and will only be accessible from two driveways. One which runs parallel to the front lot line and the second which originates on Sanford Street. Based on plans provided, relief from the front yard setback requirement appears necessary to allow for vehicular and pedestrian movement as vehicles will access the lot from the driveway to access the parking and pick-up/drop-off area and to exit the site. The width of the driveways, parking areas and the walkway in front of the building contribute to the expanded setback and the need for relief.

The side setback to the west of the building will measure approximately 46' and will accommodate a drive aisle for buses to exit the lot onto Plainfield Street and provide separation from the building. Upon the administrative subdivision being approved, a portion of Nancy Street will be coincident with the northern portion of the lot. However, the rest of the lot will be separated from Nancy Street by lot 149. Based on plans provided, the building cannot be located within the build-to zone of this setback area. The relief would not be required should Nancy Street be abandoned in the future.

Given the constraints presented by the lot's layout, the relief requested is directly related to the unique character of the site.

2. *That the hardship is not the result of any prior action of the applicant and does not result primarily from the desire of the applicant to realize greater financial gain.*

Based on plans provided, it appears that the hardship encountered by the applicant stems from the site's unique character which offers limited street frontage. The applicant is proposing to construct a public school, which is not for profit.

3. *That the granting of the requested variance will not alter the general character of the surrounding area or impair the intent or purpose of this Ordinance or the Comprehensive Plan.*

The relief from the front yard setback would be internal to the lot, which does not front on a public street and the corner side setback relief is for Nancy Street, which is an undeveloped paper street. Therefore, the variances will not have an effect on the character of the area or the intent of the comprehensive plan.



4. *That the relief to be granted is the least relief necessary.*

Based on submitted plans, the relief requested is the least necessary to locate an educational facility on the subject lot while allowing for appropriate ingress and egress from the site.

5. *In addition, the City Plan Commission, as part of unified development review, requires that evidence be entered into the record of the proceedings showing that in granting a dimensional variance, the hardship that will be suffered by the owner of the subject property if the dimensional variance is not granted will amount to more than a mere inconvenience.*

Based on a review of plans, denial of the relief could result in more than a mere inconvenience as it would affect access to the site and change the traffic pattern, which could in turn affect the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

### **Recommendation—Dimensional Variance**

Based on the foregoing discussion, the CPC should grant the requested dimensional relief for front yard and corner side setback requirements.

### **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 Master 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 neighborhood commercial/mixed use development. The plan describes this area as one intended for pedestrian oriented uses including retail, services and housing, which also includes schools. As schools are permitted by right, 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: Educational facilities are permitted by right in the zone.

Dimension and design: The development largely complies with the dimensional and design requirements of the C-2 zone. Subject to the CPC granting relief from the front yard and side yard setback requirements and the design waivers, the development is in conformance with the ordinance.

Parking: The applicant will meet the vehicle and bicycle parking requirements.

Landscaping: Based on the conceptual landscaping plan, the applicant will be able to meet the landscaping and canopy coverage requirements.

Lighting: A photometric lighting plan is required at the preliminary plan stage.

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.*

The applicant has submitted for an administrative subdivision to develop the lot as proposed in the plans. 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 Plainfield and Sanford Streets. Plans show that the Plainfield Street driveway passes over lots owned by Destiny Partners, the owners of the site. The owners shall grant access easements to Excel Academy in order to provide access to the site. A portion of the driveway is also coincident with Nancy Street, which is a paper street. The owners should explore abandoning this portion of Nancy Street so that the driveway can provide unimpeded access to the site.

#### **Recommendation—Design Waivers**

The CPC should grant the design waivers from the ground floor transparency requirement, provision of a cornice and for the recessed front entrance.

#### **Recommendation—Master Plan**

Based on the foregoing discussion, the CPC should approve the master plan finding it to be in conformance with the zoning ordinance and comprehensive plan and subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant shall apply for an administrative subdivision to create the lot as depicted on plans.
2. The detailed landscaping plan shall identify significant trees and include a canopy coverage calculation based on proposed tree species. The applicant shall make an equivalent number of plantings or pay restitution to the City, should the significant tree need to be removed.
3. The applicant shall document public outreach conducted prior to the preliminary plan stage.
4. The owners shall grant access easements to Excel Academy for use of the driveway.
5. The owners should explore abandoning the portion of Nancy Street that is coincident with the driveway in order to provide unimpeded access to the site.