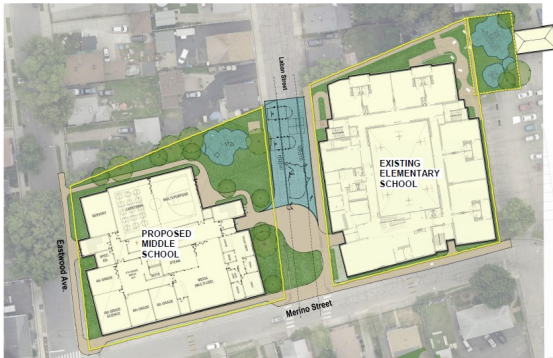


Providence City Plan Commission

March 19, 2024



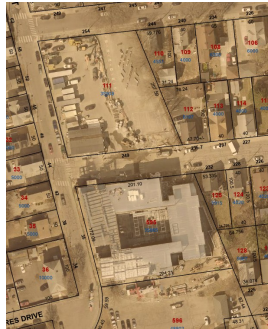
AGENDA ITEM 4 ■ 254 EASTWOOD AVE



View of site with parking area



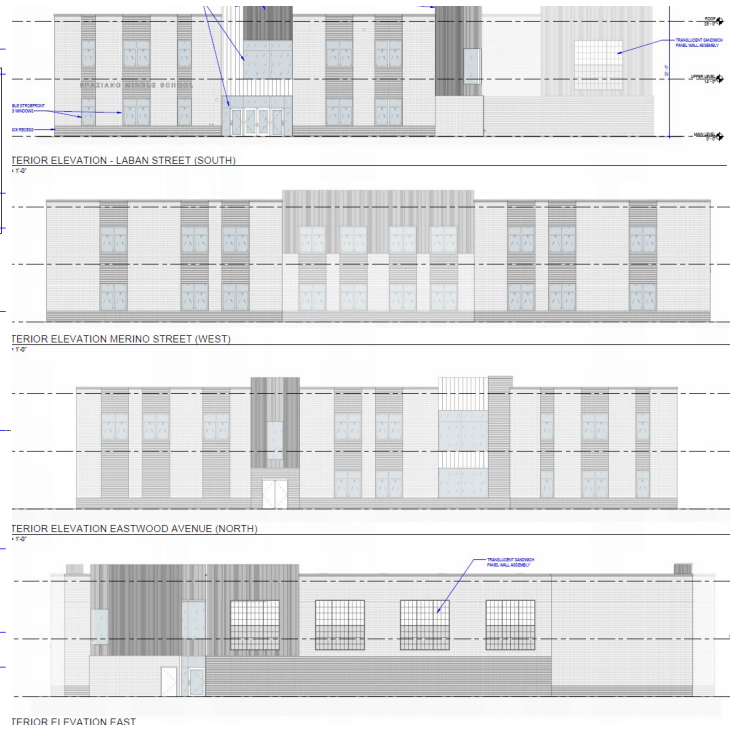
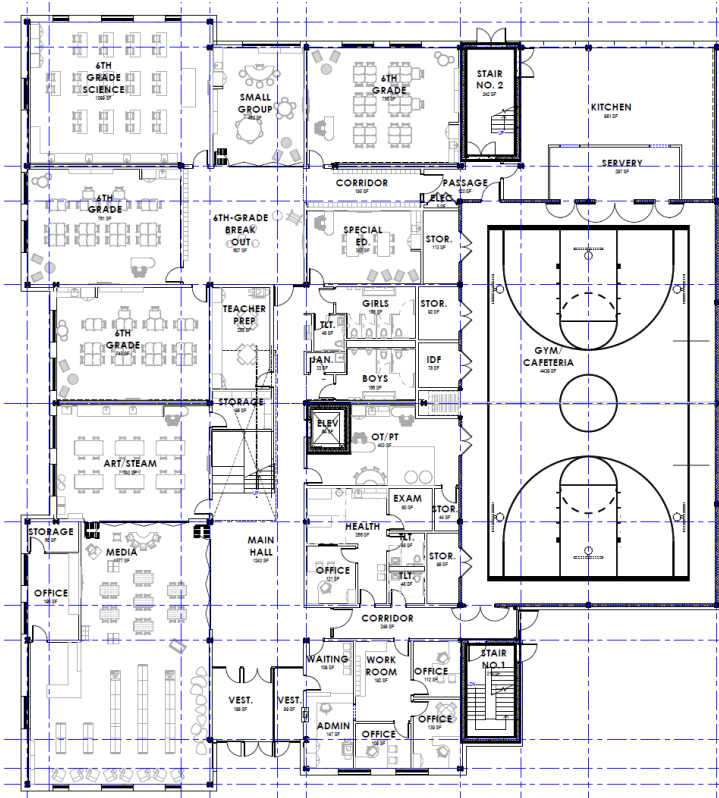
Site plan with building rendering



Aerial view of the site

OVERVIEW

OWNER/ APPLICANT:	City of Providence, Owner and Applicant	PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The applicant is requesting to combine master and preliminary plan approval for construction of a two story middle school building with variances and waivers from submission of certain items at the preliminary plan stage.
CASE NO./ PROJECT TYPE:	24-005 UDR Master and Preliminary Plan and variances pursuant to Unified Development Review (UDR)	
PROJECT LOCATION:	254 Eastwood Ave AP 107 Lot 111; R-2 zoning district	RECOMMENDATION: Approval of the master and preliminary plan and variances as detailed
NEIGHBORHOOD:	Hartford	PROJECT PLANNER: Choyon Manjrekar



First floor plan with elevations

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The lot is vacant and measures approximately 35,909 SF in the R-2 zone with frontage on Eastwood Ave and Laban and Merino Streets. The applicant is proposing to construct a two-story, 36' tall middle school building providing floor area. Pursuant to UDR, the applicant is seeking variances for parking, lot coverage and setbacks. The applicant is proposing to combine master and preliminary plan approval and requesting waivers from submission of certain items at the preliminary plan stage.

ANALYSIS AND IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL ISSUES

Use

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

Dimensions and site design

Eastwood Ave has been designated as the front yard with entrance also provided from Laban Street. A gymnasium, cafeteria, classrooms and office space will be provided on the first floor with additional classroom space on the second floor. A basement containing mechanical equipment will be provided under a portion of the first floor. A recreational area with grass and plantings is proposed for the southeast portion of the lot. A height of approximately 36' is proposed. The building will be set within the front yard build-to zone on Eastwood Ave and address the side and rear setbacks on Laban and Merino Streets respectively. The applicant has requested relief from the side and rear setback requirements as described below. Additional relief from the respective maximum coverage limits of 45% and 65% for maximum building coverage and total maximum impervious coverage has also been requested.

Parking

A total of 17 parking spaces are needed to meet the requirement of one space per three employees with 50 employees expected. The applicant has requested relief from the onsite parking requirement, proposing to provide parking offsite.

Three bicycle spaces are required per classroom, for a total of 36 spaces. Sixty three parking spaces will be provided in the rear yard. Relief has been requested for 21 spaces as the amount of parking includes 42 spaces required for the adjoining elementary school.

Landscaping

With a lot area of 35,850 SF, approximately 10,700 SF of canopy coverage is required. The applicant has requested relief from the requirement, proposing to provide a total of 8,400 SF of coverage in the recreational area to the northwest portion of the site.

Waivers

The applicant has requested waivers from submission of a lighting plan, signage plan, submission of state approvals and a stormwater management plan at the preliminary plan stage. Per the applicant, the building's siting would need to be finalized before preparing a lighting and signage plan. The applicant has contacted state agencies to begin the submission process and has included the location of drainage infrastructure on the site. The DPD is not opposed to granting the requested waivers as some are contingent on the building's design being approved. It is the DPD's opinion that the applicant will conform to applicable regulations, having begun the process. The DPD recommends that the CPC grant the requested waivers with the condition that the items be submitted with the final plan. This would be consistent with good planning practice as it would allow the applicant to proceed with the approval process.

Discussion—Dimensional Relief

The applicant is seeking dimensional relief from the following provisions of Table 4-1 of the ordinance:

- Maximum building coverage where 45% is permitted but 58% is proposed.
- Total maximum impervious surface coverage where 65% is permitted but 67% is proposed.
- Minimum interior side setback where 10 feet is required and 7.5 feet is proposed.
- Corner side setback where 10 feet is required but 8.5 feet is proposed
- Minimum rear setback where 30 feet are required by 24 feet is proposed.
- Parking for 17 onsite parking spaces
- Bicycle parking where 36 spaces are required but 27 will be provided
- Tree canopy coverage where a total of 10,755 SF is required but 8,400 SF will be provided

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).*

The subject property is unique as it is zoned R-2, which is intended for two-family dwellings but will be used for a middle school in conjunction with the elementary school at 35 Merino Street. Per the applicant, the building's

layout and design are necessary to meet the educational programming needs outlined in State and City regulations. The relief requested is not influenced by the character of the surrounding area but by the unique character of the proposed building, which is intended for an educational use in a residential zone. The needs of the facility contribute to the excess impervious coverage, proposed setbacks and lack of parking. Given the dimensional requirements of the use, relief from the parking requirement is requested as parking cannot be provided on the lot.

2. *That the hardship is not the result of any prior action of the applicant.*

Based on plans provided, it appears that the hardship encountered by the applicant stems from the need to operate a school building that meets contemporary educational standards. As this is a public facility, the relief requested is not the result of a prior action of the applicant.

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 requested is required to operate a school, which is in character with the adjacent building at 35 Merino Street. Therefore, a negative effect on neighborhood character is not expected due to the proposed use. The building will exceed the allowable impervious coverage and building coverage limits. Per the applicant, the excess coverage is to allow for necessary educational programming within one building. Provision of open space, which prevents parking on site, would have a positive effect on the neighborhood's character.

The proposed corner and interior side setbacks are not expected to affect neighboring property as the interior side lot line will be fenced from neighboring property and the corner side setback abuts a street. The rear yard setback maintained by the building abuts a portion of Laban Street proposed for the school's use and not a building, which minimizes the effect on neighboring property. Therefore, the building's design will not result in a negative effect on the neighborhood's character or surrounding property.

Parking will be provided offsite. As discussed, parking cannot be provided on the lot due to the building's programming requirements. The applicant could provide some parking on the lot, but that would necessitate additional paving which would further increase the amount of relief requested for excess impervious coverage. The vacant area in the southeast portion of the development will be used as a green space and recreational area which would have a more positive effect on the surrounding neighborhood.

The applicant has requested relief from the canopy coverage requirement, providing 8,400 SF where 10,755 SF are required. It is the DPD's opinion that there are opportunities to meet the canopy coverage requirement either onsite, or by making plantings within the public right of way. The applicant can consult with the Forester on alternate means to meet the requirement.

4. *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 prevent the applicant from providing adequate educational programming and require additional paving and reducing the amount of greenspace, which could have a negative effect on students and the surrounding neighborhood.

Recommendation—Dimensional Variance

Based on the foregoing discussion, the CPC should grant the requested dimensional relief subject to the following condition:

The applicant shall consult with the City Forester about making additional plantings to meet the canopy coverage requirement.

Findings—Land Development Project

Section 1005 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 and Preliminary Plans:

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: Educational facilities are permitted by right in the zone.

Dimension and design: The development largely complies with the dimensional and design requirements of the R-2 zone. Subject to the CPC granting the relief requested through UDR, the development will conform to the ordinance.

Parking: The applicant will meet the vehicle and bicycle parking requirement subject to the CPC granting a variance for parking.

Landscaping: The applicant will meet the canopy coverage requirement subject to consulting with the City Forester on making additional plantings offsite.

Lighting: A lighting and signage plan shall be submitted at the final plan stage subject to the CPC granting the waiver from submission 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.*

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—Waivers

The CPC should grant the requested waivers from submission of a lighting plan, signage plan, submission of state approvals and a stormwater management plan at the preliminary plan stage subject to the condition that they be submitted with the final plan.

Recommendation—Combination of stages

The CPC should vote to combine master and preliminary plan approval, having approved the requested waivers.

Recommendation—Land Development Project

1. The CPC should approve the master and preliminary plans
2. Final plan approval should be delegated to DPD staff.