

Providence City Plan Commission

October 21, 2025



AGENDA ITEM 1 ■ 1655 WESTMINSTER STREET



View of building with parking area



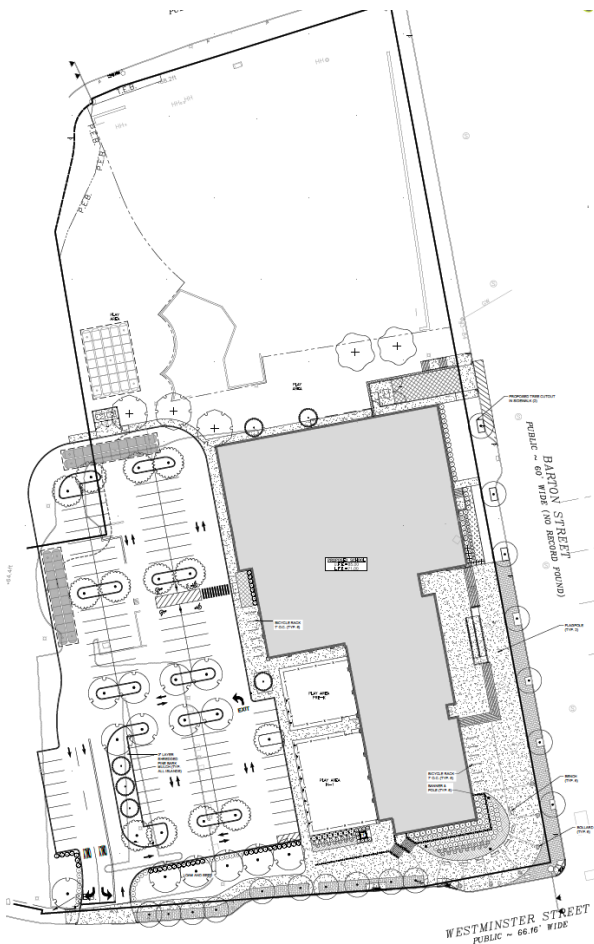
Barton Street Rendering



Aerial view of the site

OVERVIEW

OWNER/ APPLICANT:	Providence Public Buildings Authority, Applicant City of Providence, Owner	PROJECT DESCRIPTION:	The applicant is proposing to construct a four story, 54' tall school building with ancillary improvements serving pre-K to 8th grade students in the PS zone. A combination of the master/preliminary plan is requested in addition to a dimensional adjustment for height, which is a maximum of 50' in the zone.
CASE NO./ PROJECT TYPE:	25-059 MA Master and Preliminary Plan		
PROJECT LOCATION:	1655 Westminister Street AP 35 Lots 91, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98 and 322 Public space zoning district	RECOMMENDATION:	Approval of the master and preliminary plan and dimensional adjustment as detailed
NEIGHBORHOOD:	Federal Hill	PROJECT PLANNER:	Choyon Manjrekar



Site plan with parking and landscaping

East and south Elevations with exterior perspective

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The development site, which is zoned PS and measures approximately 224,653 SF (5.16 acres) is occupied by an elementary school that will be demolished. The applicant is proposing to construct a four story, 54' tall K-8 school building. A dimensional adjustment for height is requested as the proposed height exceeds the 50' height limit of the PS zone. The applicant is requesting to combine master and preliminary plan approval and requesting a waiver from submission of state approvals at the preliminary plan stage.

ANALYSIS AND IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL ISSUES

Use

The subject lot is zoned PS where educational facilities are permitted by right.

Dimensions and site design

The development fronts on Westminister Street to the south, Barton Street to the east, Broadway to the north and the route 6 highway to the west. The building's gross floor area (GFA) is expected to be approximately 137,906 SF. An entrance will be provided from Westminister Street, with parking provided in the side yard to the west of the building. Street access through raised stairs will also be provided from the main entrance on Barton Street. The site's grade slopes downward from Westminister Street toward Barton Street. A height of approximately 54' is proposed, when measured from average grade with a height of three stories on Barton Street and four stories from the western parking lot. A dimensional adjustment has been requested for the proposed height, which is limited to 50' in the PS zone.

Vehicular pickup and dropoff will be provided in the parking lot. Play areas will be located directly to the

west and rear of the building.

The building will be treated with a combination of brick, fiber cement paneling and aluminum curtain wall in different sections on the first floor. Metal paneling, aluminum curtain wall and glass will be used on the upper stories.

Findings—Dimensional Adjustments

The applicant is seeking a dimensional adjustment for a height of 54' where 50' is permitted by right in the PS zone. The DPD makes the following findings in conformance with section 1005.B of the Development Review Regulations (DRR).

1. The application is eligible for a dimensional adjustment because it meets one or more of the eligibility criteria of Section 1904.E.1 of the Zoning Ordinance.

The applicant is eligible for the adjustment per section 1904.E.1.a and c of the ordinance through provision of open space for public use and the location, size and type of use requiring an adjustment. The northern wing of the building is located at a lower grade than the southern portion fronting on Westminster Street, resulting in a slightly higher average grade than measured from a level surface. Per the applicant, the additional height is influenced by the Rhode Island Department of Education which requires classrooms to be of a regulation size with certain ceiling heights that result in an increased height. A baseball field located in the northern portion of the lot, that is not part of this development, will be available for public use.

2. The requested or approved dimensional adjustment is within the allowable adjustments listed in Section 1904.E.2 of the Zoning Ordinance.

The CPC may grant an adjustment for additional height up to 24' not to exceed two stories per section 1904.E.2 of the ordinance.

3. The extent of the dimensional adjustment is reasonably related to the condition that makes the project eligible for the dimensional adjustment.

The applicant is providing an amenity with publicly available open space on a large site with a slope. The DPD finds that the size, location and type of use is reasonably related to the dimensional adjustment.

ACTION—Dimensional Adjustment

The CPC should vote to grant the dimensional adjustment, finding that the applicant meets the criteria for dimensional adjustments in 1904.E of the ordinance and having made positive findings in conformance with section 1005.B of the DRR.

Parking

A total of 24 parking spaces are needed to meet the requirement of one space per three employees with 72 employees expected. The applicant will meet the parking requirement, providing a total of 109 standard spaces in the parking area. Two drop-off areas will be provided for students, one set against the building on Westminster Street and another within the parking area. Buses will be stacked along Barton Street, which will serve as the bus pickup and dropoff area. An additional drop-off lane will be provided on Westminster Street. A total of 108 bicycle parking spaces will be provided around the site.

Traffic Management

The applicant has provided a traffic memo outlining how proposed conditions are expected to improve on current conditions. The memo describes periods of congestion during pickup and drop off hours with cars parked in no-parking lanes and the drop off area, with further congestion contributed by neighboring schools being dismissed at the same

time. Buses parked in the parking area have to make multipoint turns to navigate in and out of the lot and have irregular arrival and dropoff times. The site is accessible to pedestrians through defined crossings and the services of crossing guards during peak hours.

The plan proposes to improve upon these conditions by having buses stacked along Barton Street and providing pickup and dropoff areas within the parking area to alleviate congestion on adjacent streets. A parent pickup/dropoff area within the lot is intended to bring vehicles off Westminster and Barton Streets. These changes are expected to reduce vehicular conflicts by improving efficiency within the site. The study proposes that Barton Street be changed to one-way southbound as a way to reduce flow and calm traffic. Should two way traffic on Barton Street be maintained, the street should be restricted to bus only parking between 7-8 am and 2-3 pm as a way to reduce traffic conflicts. The applicant shall work with the Traffic Engineer to implement these changes.

Landscaping

The PS zone requires 30% of canopy coverage for an area of disturbance of approximately 166,260 SF amounting to approximately 49,880 SF. The applicant will meet this requirement by planting large and medium trees around the perimeter of the site on Westminster and Barton Streets, and within the parking lot. Approximately 50,800 SF of canopy coverage is proposed for the site. Interior landscaping of 4,291 SF has been provided to meet the 10% interior canopy coverage requirement of 5,410 SF for the 54,100 SF parking lot. The applicant will work with the City Forester to find alternate planting spaces for the shortfall elsewhere on the site. The street tree plantings shall be subject to the Forester's approval. The City Engineer advised the applicant to explore alternate measures than the brick paving of the walkway as it would require additional maintenance.

Environmental management

A drainage plan and soil erosion control plans have been submitted. The applicant will use sediment barriers, a planting schedule and designated staging areas to control erosion during construction.

A stormwater management plan has been submitted. The plan describes the use of five sub-watershed areas that will use best management practices (BMP) to treat stormwater flowing off the site. The plan shows that stormwater runoff will be reduced for one to 100 year events. The plan shall be subject to the City Engineer's approval and approval from the Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC).

Waivers

The applicant has requested a waiver from submission of state approvals at the preliminary plan stage, including those from the Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC) and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM). 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 waiver as the time required by state bodies to take action can vary. 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.

Combination of stages

The applicant is requesting to combine master and preliminary plan approval. Subject to granting the waiver, the DPD recommends that the CPC combine approval, finding that the applicant has submitted the required elements for both stages.

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 the Providence Comprehensive Plan intends for public space/open space. The plan describes this area as one intended to include public buildings and open space. The development will conform to the comprehensive plan as schools are permitted by right and the applicant will also maintain a public baseball field. The development will conform to objective CS-8 of the comprehensive plan which encourages development of schools and improvement of the learning environment for City students.

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 PS zone.

Dimension and design: The development will comply with the dimensional requirements of PS zone subject to the CPC granting a dimensional adjustment for height.

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

Landscaping: The applicant will meet the canopy coverage requirement.

Lighting: A lighting plan indicating conformance with the ordinance has been submitted. The applicant will use a combination of freestanding and wall mounted luminaires to illuminate the site. Per the plan, there will be no light trespass onto neighboring properties.

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 Westminster and Barton Streets.

Action—Waiver

The CPC should grant the requested waiver from submission of state approvals at the preliminary plan stage subject to the condition that they be submitted with the final plan.

Action—Combination of stages

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

Action—Land Development Project

The CPC should vote to approve the master and preliminary plans subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant and their traffic engineers shall work with the City Traffic Engineer on implementation of the recommendations in the traffic memo.
2. The street tree plantings shall be subject to the City Forester's review. The applicant shall consider an alternative to paving the surroundings sidewalks with brick.
3. The drainage plan shall be subject to the City Engineer's approval.