



**City of Santa Ana
20 Civic Center Plaza, Santa Ana, CA 92701
Planning Commission Staff Report
October 14, 2024**

Topic: Conditional Use Permit No. 2024-12 – Saigon Reform Presbyterian Church (5321 West McFadden Avenue)

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Adopt a resolution approving Conditional Use Permit No. 2024-12 allowing for construction and operation of a church.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bao Pham, with BPDO Architects (applicant), on behalf of Bao Xuan Nguyen with Saigon Reform Presbyterian Church (property owner), is requesting approval of Conditional Use Permit (CUP) No. 2024-12, to allow for construction and operation of a new church (Saigon Reform Presbyterian Church) at 5321 West McFadden Avenue. The applicant is making the request pursuant to Section 41-232.5(a) of the Santa Ana Municipal Code (SAMC), which permits churches and accessory church buildings, subject to review and approval of a CUP by the Planning Commission. Staff recommends approval of the applicant's request for a CUP, as the proposed project would significantly enhance site conditions and bring the site into compliance with the SAMC. The location was also previously developed as a church, is surrounded by similar land uses, and the project is not expected to create secondary impacts on parking, lighting, or noise in the surrounding community. Furthermore, the project aligns with various goals and policies of the General Plan.

DISCUSSION

Project Description

The applicant proposes to construct a new 6,000-square-foot worship building and a 2,665-square-foot multi-purpose building on a site previously developed as a church. Due to a fire in 2005, the site is now mostly vacant, with only the office buildings that once served the church remaining. The worship building would be constructed during the first phase of construction and the multipurpose building would be constructed at the second

phase of construction. The proposed project includes site-wide improvements that will not only enhance the site's condition but also bring it into compliance with applicable City standards.

Site improvements include shifting the existing drive aisle along the west property line to accommodate the required five-foot landscape planter and align with a newly proposed 20-foot-wide driveway apron and curb cut. The drive aisle would also be widened to meet the minimum 20-foot drive aisle requirement. Additionally, a secondary driveway would be constructed to facilitate the overall circulation on and off the site, and the parking lot would be reconfigured for improved circulation, as well as incorporating required landscape planters. These parking improvements would result in sufficient parking for the proposed use as the site would offer 70 parking spaces, with the SAMC requiring 52 parking spaces. A new trash enclosure, conforming to city standards, would also be constructed.

The oval-shaped worship building features a contemporary architectural style utilizing materials such as plaster, stone veneer, aluminum storefront, and metal coping with stained glass windows, a neutral color scheme, split-face masonry, smooth stucco finishes, and a dark bronze cross at the steeple. The worship building would be 35 feet tall at the tallest point. The remaining office buildings would also be refinished with similar materials and be painted to match the worship building for visual cohesion. The multi-purpose building is designed with recessed walls that mirror the entryways of the worship building. The site's landscaping would also be rehabilitated and designed to complement the modern worship building. The planting palette includes Chinese pistache, cherry blossom, carrotwood, and crape myrtle trees, along with various forms of ground cover and flowering shrubs to create a vibrant color contrast.

Table 1: Project and Location Information

Item	Information	
Project Address and Council Ward	5321 West McFadden Avenue – Ward 1	
Nearest Intersection	McFadden Avenue and Euclid Street	
General Plan Designation	Low Density Residential (LR-7)	
Zoning Designation	Single Family Residence (R-1)	
Surrounding Land Uses	North	Water Channel
	East	Religious Assembly and School
	South	Religious Assembly
	West	Single-Family Residences
Property Size	1.46 acres (63,698 square feet)	
Existing Site Development	Office buildings previously associated with Church.	
Proposed Building Size	6,000 square foot Chapel and 2,665 square foot assembly building	
Use Permissions	Allowed with a conditional use permit (CUP)	
Zoning Code Sections Affected	Uses	SAMC 41-232.5(a)

Operationally, the multi-purpose building would provide meeting space for workshops and smaller group gatherings, while the primary worship services will take place in the new worship building. Services will be held Monday through Sunday at various times throughout the day, each lasting about an hour, with a minimum of thirty minutes in-between services to allow for the transition of attendees arriving and leaving. Services would be offered in Spanish, English, and Vietnamese.

In addition to regular services, the church offers weekday activities, including youth meetings, women's Bible studies, and other small group sessions. Holiday services for Easter, Christmas, and Holy Week are also anticipated. However, the current proposal does not include plans for a banquet facility to accommodate weddings, funerals, or other community assembly events. Further details related to operations and service times are included in Exhibit 8.

Table 2 below provides a detailed comparison of the project's compliance with the applicable land use and development standards.

Table 2: Development Standards

Standard	Required by the R1 Zoning District	Provided
Front yard	15 feet minimum	Complies; 20 feet
Side yard (adjacent to residential zoned or used properties)	20 feet minimum	Complies; East: 20 feet Complies; West: 100 feet
Rear yard	15 feet minimum	124 feet
Landscaping	5 foot landscape buffer	Complies; East: 5 feet Complies; West: 5 feet
Building Height	35 feet maximum	Complies; Steeple: 35 feet, Building: 24 feet
Parking	1 space for each 3 fixed seat (52 spaces required)	70 spaces provided
Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R.)	0.50 FAR (31,847 square feet maximum)	Complies; 0.31 FAR (9,899 square feet)

Project Background

The site was originally developed with a single-family residence and garage built in the early 1950s, which remained temporarily throughout the proposed redevelopment by Calvary Church. In March 1961, CUP No. 61-31 was approved, allowing for the construction of a sanctuary with 175 permanent seats in the first phase, and a new, larger sanctuary with 400 seats in the second phase, during which the existing residence was to be demolished. The site was approved with 132 parking spaces. In July 1961, CUP No. 61-55 was granted, approving a revised site plan on a smaller portion of the land, as certain properties included in the original plan had not been secured. This approval was

otherwise consistent with the improvements granted under CUP No. 61-33, and was subsequently constructed in early 1962. The church remained in operation up until 2005 during which a fire severely damaged the sanctuary and was demolished in late 2005.

In 2010, CUP No. 2010-24 and Variance No. 2008-34 were conditionally approved to allow for reconstruction of the church, which would allow for a 216 people sanctuary, 1,050 square foot multi-purpose room, three offices, and kitchen. The variance allowed for a deviation in maximum height requirements to construct a 62-foot bell tower. However, the entitlements were not executed and the approvals ultimately expired. The site is currently improved with an office building, asphalt parking, and minimal landscaping.

Project Analysis

Conditional Use Permit (CUP) requests are governed by Section 41-638 of the SAMC. CUPs may be granted when it can be shown that the proposed project will not adversely impact the community. If these findings can be made, then it is appropriate to grant the CUP. Conversely, the inability to make these findings would result in a denial. Moreover, pursuant to Section 41-232.5 of the SAMC, church uses in the R1 zoning district require discretionary review and approval of a CUP by the Planning Commission. As designed, staff is recommending approval of the applicant's request for a CUP, as the proposed project would significantly enhance site conditions and bring the site into compliance with the SAMC. The location, previously developed as a church, is surrounded by similar land uses, and the project is not expected to create secondary impacts related to operations, parking, lighting, or noise to the surrounding community. Furthermore, the project aligns with various goals and policies of the General Plan.

The project site was previously developed by a church that served Calvary Chapel, which remained in operation from 1962 until 2005, when it was destroyed by fire. The site improvements and site configuration at the time, and the existing site configuration as well as the previous approvals, did not meet all applicable requirements of the SAMC. With approval of the proposed project, the site would address current deficiencies by providing the required landscape buffer along the west property line, creating a conforming western drive aisle, improving on-site circulation, and ensuring compliance with height restrictions of the applicable zoning district. Additionally, the improvements would transform the site into a new place of worship that would not only enhance the safety but the appearance of the area and create a positive community gathering space. The worship building's contemporary design, coupled with thoughtfully planned landscaping, will significantly improve the site's street presence, replacing a neglected lot with an inviting and aesthetically appealing environment. These improvements would also help deter any illicit activity that the vacant lot has attracted.

As part of the project analysis, traffic, lighting, and noise impacts on surrounding communities were carefully evaluated through various technical studies prepared by RE Consulting and peer reviewed by Chamber Group, whom the City retained to perform the peer review. The proposed site lighting would provide a minimum of one foot-candle to ensure safe travel for church members to their vehicles while remaining under 5 foot-candles to prevent light spillover onto neighboring properties including the single-family dwellings along to the west property line. The majority of visits to the site are expected to occur on Sundays as services are held throughout the day in various languages. A Focused Traffic Study confirmed that the project's traffic generation would not significantly affect nearby intersections and negatively impact the surrounding community. Additionally, the site will offer 70 parking spaces, exceeding the SAMC requirement of 52 based on the number of proposed fixed seats.

The project will comply with exterior noise standards, maintaining a noise level below 55 decibels [dB(A)] between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m., and offer all services indoors. A condition of approval has also been added to ensure no weddings, funerals, or other religious events generating amplified noise are held without further review or approval. The existing block wall along the western property line would also help attenuate noise associated with the increased visits to the site in addition to the proposed landscaping planter installed along the west property line. Lastly, a property maintenance agreement would also be recorded against the property as part of the conditions of approval, ensuring that all improvements are properly maintained including the landscaping.

General Plan Consistency

The requested CUP will be consistent with several goals and policies of the General Plan. Notably, the project supports Urban Design Element (UD) Goal UD-1, which aims to enhance the physical character, livability, and community identity of the City. The worship building's high-quality design, along with improved landscaping, will enhance the lot's appearance and create an inviting pedestrian experience along McFadden Avenue. The project also meets Policy UD-1.1, which requires that all developments feature high-quality design, materials, finish, and construction. This is demonstrated by the use of smooth stucco finishes, split-face blocks for contrasting texture, and stained glass windows. Furthermore, the project aligns with Policy UD-2.2, which promotes the use of buffers and other urban design strategies to ensure that new development is compatible with the scale, bulk, and pattern of surrounding structures. The site plan achieves this by placing the worship building near the east property line, adjacent to a structure of similar scale, while positioning the office building closer to the western property line, where it better matches the scale of nearby residential dwellings. The inclusion of a landscape buffer and driveway further enhances the separation and compatibility with the surrounding environment.

The project also supports Land Use Element (LU) Goal LU-1, which seeks to implement a land use plan that enhances quality of life while respecting the existing community. The proposed development is of a smaller scale than the previously approved project and will improve current conditions by activating a long-vacant site, thereby enhancing the quality of life for neighboring residents. Goal LU-2 aims to provide a balanced mix of land uses to meet the diverse needs of Santa Ana. In line with this goal, the project will offer services in Spanish, Vietnamese, and English, addressing the linguistic diversity of the community. Additionally, the project aligns with Policy LU-2.6, which promotes the rehabilitation of properties and encourages increased capital investment to create a safe and attractive environment. By reactivating a site that has been vacant since 2006 and ensuring appropriate lighting and safety measures, the project is consistent with this policy and represents a significant reinvestment in the area. Lastly, the project aligns with Policy LU-3.4, which ensures that the scale and massing of developments are compatible and harmonious with the surrounding built environment. As previously mentioned, the site plan strategically places the worship building near the eastern property line, adjacent to a structure of similar scale, while positioning the office and assembly buildings closer to the existing residential dwellings to maintain compatibility with the neighborhood.

The project aligns with Community Element (CM) Policy CM-3.5, which promotes positive community interactions and neighborhood pride to foster secure communities and safe public spaces. In line with this policy, the proposed site improvements will create an inviting and secure environment for the new place of worship, providing a positive gathering space for the community.

The project is also consistent with Noise Element (N) Goal N-1, which ensures that land uses are compatible with current and future local and regional noise conditions. The proposed use aligns with this by complying with SAMC's exterior noise limit of 55 dB(A) between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Furthermore, all services would be held inside the worship building, with the final service ending by 8:00 p.m. The project also aligns with Policy N-1.1, which promotes the use of established Citywide Noise Standards and guidelines to inform land use decisions and guide noise management strategies. Additionally, the project adheres to Policy N-1.4 by protecting noise-sensitive land uses from excessive, unsafe, or disruptive noise levels. As previously described, the project conforms to applicable exterior noise standards and includes a block wall and landscaping along the western property line, where adjacent single-family homes are located.

Public Notification and Community Outreach

Project notifications were posted, published, and mailed in accordance with City and State regulations. Copies of the public notice, including a 1,000-foot notification radius map, and the site posting are provided in Exhibit 10. The site is located within the Riverview

Neighborhood Association and in close proximity to the West Grove Valley Neighborhood Association, whose leadership was notified of the project.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and its Guidelines, the project is exempt from further review under Section 15332 (Class 32 – Infill Development). The project qualifies for this exemption as it involves infill development consistent with the applicable general plan and zoning designations, is located within city limits on a site of less than five acres, is substantially surrounded by urban uses, has no habitat value for endangered species, and would not result in significant impacts related to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality. Additionally, the site can be adequately served by all necessary utilities and public services. The applicant engaged an environmental consultant to conduct an analysis of biological resources, traffic, and air quality, which was peer-reviewed by a CEQA consultant hired by the City (Exhibit 9). As such, a Notice of Exemption, Environmental Review No. 2023-06 will be filed for this project.

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACTS

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

EXHIBIT(S)

1. Conditional Use Permit Resolution
2. Vicinity Zoning and Aerial Map
3. Site Photo
4. Project Site Plan
5. Project Floor Plan
6. Project Elevations
7. Conceptual Landscape Plan
8. Project Operations Plan
9. Environmental Studies
10. Copy of Public Notices

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