

CHURCH OF THE FRONT RANGE

USE VARIANCE APPLICATION

UVAR-25-0002

MARCH 4, 2025 – REVISED APRIL 22, 2025 (Revisions noted in blue font)

PROJECT NAME: USE VARIANCE TO PERMIT OPERATION OF A CHILD CARE CENTER

1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION: *Describe the project and/or land uses proposed.*

Church of the Front Range (COTFR, DBA Revolution Church), located in Englewood, Colorado, is applying to the City of Colorado Springs, Department of Planning and Community Development, for approval of a **Use Variance** in an existing “R-E” Zoning District (Single Family Residential-Estate) **in order to establish a new Child Care Center, operated by the affiliated non-profit Hope Homes International, to support under-resourced families.**

The property is located at 2380 Montebello Drive West, Colorado Springs, CO 80918.

The maximum number of children to be served in the Child Care Center is 150.

Proposed hours of operation for the new Child Care Center are:

- SUMMER (June-August) : 8:00am – 5:00pm
- SCHOOL YEAR (August-May): 3:00pm – 9:00pm

Church of the Front Range (COTFR) also acknowledges that any use of the adjacent Garden Ranch Park which includes 50 or more people will require a City Events Permit to be completed, reviewed and approved prior to use of the park.

COTFR further acknowledges the following recommendations made by the Colorado Springs Department of Planning and Community Development regarding the development of this project and the associated site improvements:

- Landscape improvements to make alterations to trees and shrubs located adjacent to the building (removal/pruning/trimming) will be taken into account in order to improve natural surveillance of the building.
- Provide a min. 6’ enclosure around playground areas in order to discourage unwanted entry and increase security and child safety.
- Ensure adequate lighting at all doors/entryways, particularly at recessed locations.
- Give due consideration to creating a traffic management plan in order to mitigate the single point of entry, especially during peak hours.
- Give due consideration to conducting a full Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) site evaluation in order to maximize security and child safety.

Church of the Front Range intends to limit improvements to repairs to the existing building in order to occupy it “as is,” with the exception of anything required to meet compliance standards for a childcare center.

Because we have previously obtained a Conditional Use approval to operate as a church (CUDP-22-0005), our understanding is that this requested Use Variance is classified as a *minor amendment*. This is reflected in our application.

RESPONSE TO UDC CRITERIA FOR USE VARIANCE APPROVAL: Church of the Front Range (COTFR) is also pleased to provide the following responses to indicate how each of the six specific criteria listed in **Section 7.5.527 of the Colorado Springs Unified Development Code (UDC)** regarding applications for Use Variance have been met in this request:

***UDC CRITERIA 1:** That there are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applicable to the property involved or to the intended use of the property that do not apply generally to the property or class of uses in the same zone so that a denial of the Use Variance would result in undue property loss and not solely a mere inconvenience or financial disadvantage.*

COTFR RESPONSE:

- The R-E zoning district is generally for large residential lots, primarily for low-density, detached single-family residential uses – Child Day Care Centers are technically not an approved land use in this zoning district under Section 7.3.201 Of the Unified Development Code (UDC).
- However, because a Conditional Use of the property, a former YMCA facility, has been allowed in this District as an A-3 (Assembly) occupancy, the requested Use Variance would simply allow the church to use the building in its full capacity to provide additional resources to the residential community.
- In addition to church services, the variance would allow us to expand the use of the property to include much-needed affordable after-school childcare for under-resourced families. Following is a representative sample of those needs:
 - In El Paso County, 28% of families with kids under 18 are led by single parents—mostly women—earning a median income of just \$34,000 compared to \$72,000 for married-couple households.
 - Nearly 40% of these mothers spend over a third of their income on housing, teetering on the edge of instability.
 - The new Child Care Center would be located in Colorado Springs School District 11 – only 15% of this District’s 22,000 students have access to after-school programs, leaving many without the support they need while parents work late or juggle multiple jobs. (Based on available data, between 800 and 1,400 single moms in D-11 work evening hours.)

- We believe the addition of a thriving Child Care Center in the District with engaging, affordable after-school and summer camp options for kids could paint a different story: vibrant programs offering tutoring, ESL courses, as well as sports and creative outlets. We're not just filling hours, we're igniting futures—because a child who reads confidently today becomes a leader tomorrow.
- Conversely, *denial* of the Use Variance would prevent the church from being able to offer these additional services and restrict the building from being used to its full potential in providing a secure facility for low-cost care, education, language training, recreational and social activities, and meal service for children in this community.

UDC CRITERIA 2: *That the Use Variance is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a property right of the and if not approved, the property or structure cannot yield any beneficial use.*

COTFR RESPONSE:

The Use Variance permitting licensed childcare on the property is essential in order to allow the Owner (Church of the Front Range) to expand its services to the community beyond normal weekend and midweek church services. The building, which includes large recreational and educational spaces within its walls, would be vastly underutilized if it were restricted to providing only twice-weekly services. By granting this Use Variance, the City would be allowing and encouraging the development of this significant structure to its full potential, allowing multiple educational, language training, social skills, and recreational opportunities to be offered to children of all ages and their families on an everyday basis.

UDC CRITERIA 3: *That the Use Variance will not be detrimental to the public welfare or convenience nor injurious to the property or improvements of other owners of property.*

COTFR RESPONSE:

As opposed to being detrimental to public welfare, we firmly believe that transforming underutilized buildings into active businesses or community programs has been shown to significantly improve public welfare and have a positive impact on property values, as well as decreased crime, increased public safety, and catalyzed community development. Following is a representative sample of those positive impacts:

- **Property Values:** A report by the Urban Institute suggests that access to early childhood education and childcare services is a key factor in neighborhood desirability. Research by The Brookings Institution indicates that access to strong public services, including childcare, correlates with higher property values. *(For additional detail on this research, please see Section 2 of this Project Statement.)*

- **Crime/Public Safety:** There is also ample, compelling evidence that economic revitalization – such as launching new community-related businesses – plays a crucial role in crime reduction. There are numerous studies supporting how new business start-ups in underutilized buildings has the effect of deterring crime by increasing foot traffic and community engagement.
- **Fire Protection:** As part of this application process, COTFR has forged an excellent working relationship with the Colorado Springs Fire Department, proactively working with multiple personnel within CSFD to inspect the facility and lend their expertise and constructive guidance in helping us improve fire prevention and life safety on the property.
- **Community Development:** Populating local buildings with active, community-related services, such as a childcare center, has been shown to foster social cohesion and family connections while reducing vandalism, vagrancy, neglect, trash accumulation, and other activities detrimental to community development.
- **Building Improvements:** In addition to the improvements needed to develop a licensed Child Care Center within the facility, COTFR is committed to continuously improving this property, having invested over \$1 million to upgrade the building over the last two years, including the installation of an entirely new central plant.

UDC CRITERIA 4: *That the hardship is not the result of the applicant's own actions.*

COTFR RESPONSE:

Church of the Front Range purchased this property in 2022 following approval of a Conditional Use application to operate a church/religious institution within the building. Since then, we have grown to understand the real and critical needs of families living in the surrounding community, including a primary need for low-cost after-school childcare. Rather than ignoring this hardship, it is our desire to address it head-on by applying to the City of Colorado Springs for this Use Variance in order to expand the church's ability beyond the currently allowed approved land uses, and to work with City, State and Local agencies to actively pursue establishing a licensed Child Care Center to serve the Garden Ranch community.

UDC CRITERIA 5: *That because of these conditions, the application of the UDC prohibition on the requested use on the subject property would effectively prohibit or unreasonably restrict the use of the property.*

COTFR RESPONSE:

Because use of the building as a Child Day Care Center is not an allowed land use in an R-E zoning District (UDC 7.3.201), a strict application of the Unified Development Code without approval of the requested variance would prohibit the property from being used to provide these essential services to the surrounding district.

UDC CRITERIA 6: *That the Use Variance is not being requested primarily to avoid the time or expense of complying with UDC standards generally applicable to similar properties and development.*

COTFR RESPONSE:

It is our understanding that the Use Variance application is the only appropriate vehicle for gaining approval of a use of land or a structure that is not listed in UDC 7.3.2 as a Permitted or Conditional Use in the zoning district where the property is located. Church of the Front Range is not requesting this variance in any way to avoid development costs or compliance with the established UDC requirements. On the contrary, the church is applying for this variance in order to be able to proceed with the considerable investment required to establish and operate this new licensed Child Care Center on the property.

Additionally, we understand that **UDC Section 7.3.302.A** also includes the following three (3) use-specific standards for childcare uses. Each of these criteria is listed below, along with the COTFR response showing how this standard has been met:

(1) This use shall provide the minimum square footage of indoor and outdoor space pursuant to state requirements.

COTFR RESPONSE:

INDOOR SPACE: The State Department of Early Childhood Development requirement for indoor space requirement for a licensed day care center is **30 square feet per child**, exclusive of support spaces such as toilets, offices, storage, etc. (8 CCR 1402-1, Sec. 2.525.A)

For a new childcare center licensed for 150 children, the minimum required amount of space is:

150 children x 30 SF per child = **4,500 SF Required Indoor Space**

The table on the next page indicates the number of licensed spaces in the COTFR building for the requested Child Care Center use.

SPACE	NET AREA
CLASSROOM 1	920 SF
CLASSROOM 2	1,190 SF
CLASSROOM 3	610 SF
CLASSROOM 4	625 SF
CLASSROOM 5	625 SF
CLASSROOM 6	625 SF
CLASSROOM 7	810 SF
CLASSROOM 7	2,790 SF
GYMNASIUM	7,000 SF
TOTAL	15,195 NSF

TABLE 1: PROPOSED CHILD DAY CARE CENTER LICENSED INDOOR AREAS

The property's licensed indoor area of 15,195 SF far exceeds the state requirement of 4,500 SF for a licensed childcare center for 150 kids.

OUTDOOR SPACE: The outside play area requirement for licensed day care centers is **75 square feet per child** for a minimum of *one third of the licensed capacity of the center*, or a minimum of 1,500 SF (8 CCR 1402-1 Sec. 2.524.A.1).

For our proposed Child Care Center, that equates to:

50 children x 75 SF per child = **3,750 SF Required Outdoor Space**

The public park which is immediately adjacent to the new Center consists of approximately 10 acres (435,000 square feet), with the closest area which includes climbing structures, swing sets, grassy areas and volleyball/basketball courts being approximately **22,000 SF**.

The adjacent outdoor play area of 22,000 SF far exceeds the state requirement of 3,750 SF for a licensed childcare center for 150 kids.

NOTE: State regulations allow that, for licensed childcare centers, the "outdoor play area may be a city park or public school ground." (8 CCR 1402-1 Sec. 2.524.A)

(2) No part of the required outdoor space shall be situated within any front building setback.

COTFR REPONSE:

The required outdoor space for the new Child Care Center is located in the adjacent public park (Garden Ranch Park) which is quite distant from any front building setbacks.

COTFR will ensure that any future development of child outdoor play space on our property meets this criterion as well.

(3) The required outdoor space shall be screened from adjacent residential properties when necessary to reduce play area sounds.

COTFR REPONSE:

The required outdoor space for the initial opening phase of the new Child Care Center is located in the adjacent public park (Garden Ranch Park) which is approximately 400' from the closest residential property, and heavily screened by dense trees, shrubs and vegetation.

Additionally, the new Child Care Center will only allow 30 children (max.) to be outdoors at one time, with a minimum of two adult supervisors. We do not anticipate that this small group of supervised children will cause any significant noise disruptions to the surrounding neighborhood.

No children will be outdoors after dark (with the exception of parental pick-up or drop-off), and all outdoor activities will take place during daylight hours.

COTFR will ensure that any future development of child outdoor play space on our property meets this criterion as well.

2. JUSTIFICATION: *Justify the approval of the project and address the review criteria listed at the end of this checklist.*

Church of the Front Range (COTFR) proposes the following justifications for approval of this Use Variance, based on the following three areas of concern:

A. SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD: Rather than having any negative impact on the surrounding community, we believe that the value, quality, and desirability of the adjacent residential neighborhood will be enhanced by the addition of this new program.

While childcare centers are currently not permitted in a residential estate zone (the current zoning of the property), in 1982 a conditional use permit was approved for the building for “preschool within our zoning” CPC CU 82-120-A2, so there is a historical precedent for allowing a similar use.

Additionally, the immediate surrounding area of this location has a tremendous amount of need for extremely affordable afterschool and evening childcare.

What is distinctive about our program is not only what we offer in terms of programming elements that foster academic, physical, and social development, but also that they are offered at an extremely discounted rate for under-resourced families.

On the following page, you will see a list of the schools within five miles or less of the property, along with their needs, Title 1 status, and percentage of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. (This chart was provided by Lauren Mason, Director of Partnerships, District 11.) The schools in green are those most in need of care, followed by yellow, and finally orange.

School	Distance from Revolution	Has Onsite Care?	Title 1	FRL %
Fremont	1.3 miles	Yes - Subsidized heavily by D11. Families pay \$11/wk. The 25/26 school year is the last year we have funding for this program, so there will be a huge increase in need in 26/27.	Yes	76.30
King	1.6 miles	Yes - Subsidized heavily by D11. Families pay \$11/wk. The 25/26 school year is the last year we have funding for this program, so there will be a huge increase in need in 26/27.	No	58.52
Keller	1.7 miles	Yes - Has an outside vendor that provides fee-based, on-site care. A more affordable option may be desired by families, but this school probably won't be the first to advertise to.	Yes	66.26
Grant	1.8 miles	Yes - Has an outside vendor that provides fee-based, on-site care. A more affordable option may be desired by families, but this school probably won't be the first to advertise to.	Yes	65.71
Martinez	2.6 miles	No - Martinez has no after-school care of any kind.	No	45.48
Edison	3.2 miles	No - Edison has no after-school care of any kind.	Yes	77.57
Scott	3.5 miles	Yes - Has an outside vendor that provides fee-based, on-site care. A more affordable option may be desired by families, but this school probably won't be the first to advertise to.	No	44.10
Penrose	4.6 miles	Yes - Has an outside vendor that provides fee-based, on-site care. A more affordable option may be desired by families, but this school probably won't be the first to advertise to.	Yes	63.80
Carver	4.7 miles	Yes - Has an outside vendor that provides fee-based, on-site care. A more affordable option may be desired by families, but this school probably won't be the first to advertise to.	Yes	78.54

In researching afterschool and evening childcare solutions in proximity to this property, we have found that available care into later evening hours (beyond 5pm or 6pm) is non-existent and that the cost of programs would make them inaccessible for the majority of families in our district.

We anticipate that the childcare operations will be provided by Hope Homes International, a non-profit partner of the church that operates globally to end exploitation before it begins by providing a safe place to at-risk and vulnerable youth while moms or dads are at work. We know the need for an affordable, accessible, excellent childcare solution is felt in our county. In El Paso County, 28% of families with kids under 18 are led by single parents—mostly women—earning a median income of just \$34,000 compared to \$72,000 for married-couple households. Nearly 40% of these mothers spend over a third of their income on housing, teetering on the edge of instability.

Children in D-11 deserve more than the bare minimum—they deserve a chance to soar. Yet only 15% of the district's 22,000 students access after-school programs, leaving

many without the support they need while parents work late or juggle multiple jobs. (Based on available data, between 800 and 1,400 single moms in D-11 work evening hours.) With third grade reading proficiency at 38.2% and eighth-grade English scores lagging at 35.9%, the gaps are clear. Hope Homes International envisions a different story: vibrant after-school programs, offering tutoring, ESL courses, as well as sports and creative outlets. We're not just filling hours; we're igniting futures—because a child who reads confidently today becomes a leader tomorrow.

The facility is uniquely suited to provide excellent care for the students as it was previously operated by the YMCA and has a dedicated wing that serves as a childcare center. This facility also has an adjacent park, a pool, a full-size gym, and more to all assist with gross motor development. We also believe in children getting an opportunity to be children, having fun.

Hope Homes programming works to assist children with homework and tutoring, and we're exploring a program with The English Advantage to offer additional English courses to those who would benefit from it at no additional cost.

There is no greater investment in a community than an investment in the youth of that community, because they are the future and will shape the future. The heart of this project is to serve the community in a tangible way to see it flourish.

In addition to offering these after-school programs, Hope Homes will additionally provide summer camp options during the day that enable parents who work during the day to have an affordable childcare solution that does not impede their ability to gain income for their family.

B. INTENT OF THE ZONING CODE: The intent of the Colorado Springs Zoning Code is designed to ensure the most appropriate use of land and, in general, to promote health, safety and general welfare throughout the city. Hope Homes intends to meet the intent outlined in the Code in each of the following specific respects:

- *To ensure a logical growth of the various physical elements of the city.* For many years, the YMCA structure has been an anchor of this residential neighborhood. Both the current owner, Church of the Front Range (dba Revolution Church), and Hope Homes as a long-term tenant, intend to revitalize this important structure by providing both physical restoration and renewal to an aging building and campus, while also infusing an active, vibrant range of services, activities, and events for all ages to benefit the entire community.
- To ensure that there is no additional congestion of neighboring streets, and to facilitate the adequate provision of transportation, Church of the Front Range (dba Revolution Church) proposes that there be minimal overlap of church services and the childcare operations. In fact, the only time that the two programs will be in operation at the same time will be limited to Wednesday evenings from 5:00-9:00p, at which time the church will host its Wednesday night small groups and service (in another separate, secure area of the building) while the after-hours childcare is

open. Due to the oversized parking lot for providing off-street parking for both programs, we anticipate the impact on traffic to be minimal. Additionally, for the childcare and camp operations, it's important to know there is a drop-off and pick-up window, so not all families will be arriving nor leaving at the same time. Church of the Front Range (dba Revolution Church) is committed to continuing in our commitment to work with City traffic engineers as needed to ensure a positive impact on traffic patterns, congestion, and vehicle/pedestrian safety.

- *To secure safety from fire, panic, and other dangers.* We are meeting with the fire department to ensure compliance of the space for our intended use.
- *To provide adequate light and air.* Church of the Front Range (dba Revolution Church) anticipates that our move into this building will have no negative impact in this area.
- *To improve housing standards.* We anticipate no direct impact on housing standards, with the exception that a neighborhood childcare center tends to add a significant desirable component to residential communities.
- *To conserve property values.* Rather than just conserving property values, we believe our program will support the increase of property values. Studies show that childcare centers lead to an increased demand for housing.
 - Families with young children prioritize access to quality childcare when choosing where to live.
 - Neighborhoods with established childcare centers attract more families, increasing demand for housing and subsequently driving up property values.
 - The presence of childcare facilities signals a family-friendly environment, making the area more desirable.
 - Proximity to childcare reduces commute times and increases work-life balance for parents, making homes in such areas more attractive.
 - Studies have shown that homes closer to essential services, including schools and childcare, tend to have higher appreciation rates.
 - Childcare centers create jobs and support local economies, contributing to overall neighborhood stability.
 - In cities where there is a shortage of childcare services, properties near existing centers can command premium prices.

A report by the Urban Institute suggests that access to early childhood education and childcare services is a key factor in neighborhood desirability. Research by The Brookings Institution indicates that access to strong public services, including childcare, correlates with higher property values.

- *To facilitate adequate provision of utilities, schools, parks, and other public infrastructure services.* Hope Homes anticipates a positive impact on the community in this area, offering a service that will be of great benefit to the entire family unit.
- *To protect against flood conditions and poor geologic and topographic conditions.* Hope Homes also anticipates having a positive impact in this area, as we work with the current facility owners to revitalize an aging campus and provide ongoing maintenance and care for landscaping, parking areas, walkways, and other pedestrian paths; to prevent erosion and deterioration of site features; and to ensure drainage and storm systems are in good repair and are well-maintained.

- *Use:* We understand that, since this program will be operated by a separate non-profit, it will *not* be considered an accessory use to the church.

C. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: Hope Homes, in conjunction with the facility owner (Revolution Church) commits to a plan of owning, operating, and improving this campus in a way that is consistent and supportive of the bold vision of Colorado Springs' Comprehensive Plan. As a church in an ethnically and economically diverse neighborhood, we especially identify with each of the following initiatives in PlanCOS:

- **Vibrant Neighborhoods:** At Hope Homes, we resonate with the PlanCOS vision of supporting "diverse and safe neighborhoods with quality gathering areas, a mix of housing types, transportation choices, and a shared sense of pride." The demographic we are called to serve is represented by a wide range of culturally, economically, and ethnically diverse people, and we thrive on community gatherings where all are made to feel welcomed, included, and loved.
- **Unique Places:** At Hope Homes, we hope to become the "magnetic activity center" that the Comprehensive Plan promotes and endorses, breathing new life into an older campus and developing a unique center of spiritual formation, hosting events for all ages, and providing services and support for the entire neighborhood.
- **Strong Connections:** Our greatest contribution to this aspect of the Comprehensive Plan may be the environment of inclusivity that is a hallmark of Hope Homes. We plan to fully put this into practice with our new neighbors in the Garden Ranch community.

3. ISSUES: *Explain how the issues identified during the pre-application process have been addressed or mitigated.*

The following potential issues were identified during the pre-application process with the Department of Planning and Community Development. Responses are indicated in italics following each comment:

- **AMENDED DEVELOPMENT PLAN:** An amended Development Plan is included with this submittal Indicating the following:
 - Proposed new use
 - Area of proposed childcare center
 - Updated parking analysis
 - Internal circulation/Check-in
 - Updated amendment history table
- **TRAFFIC IMPACT:** Addition of a childcare program of this size appears to only increase the parking requirements of the facility by 18 spaces. The childcare and church operations will only operate concurrently one day per week, on Wednesday evenings while the church is hosting services (in a separate area of the facility) and the after hours childcare is also open (in a separate wing). However, even adding the maximum parking requirement for the church (50 spaces) and the childcare (18 spaces) we are still well below the 213 spaces available. It is also important to note that childcare clients do not

arrive or leave all at once, but arrivals, drop-offs and pick-ups are staggered throughout the hours of operation.