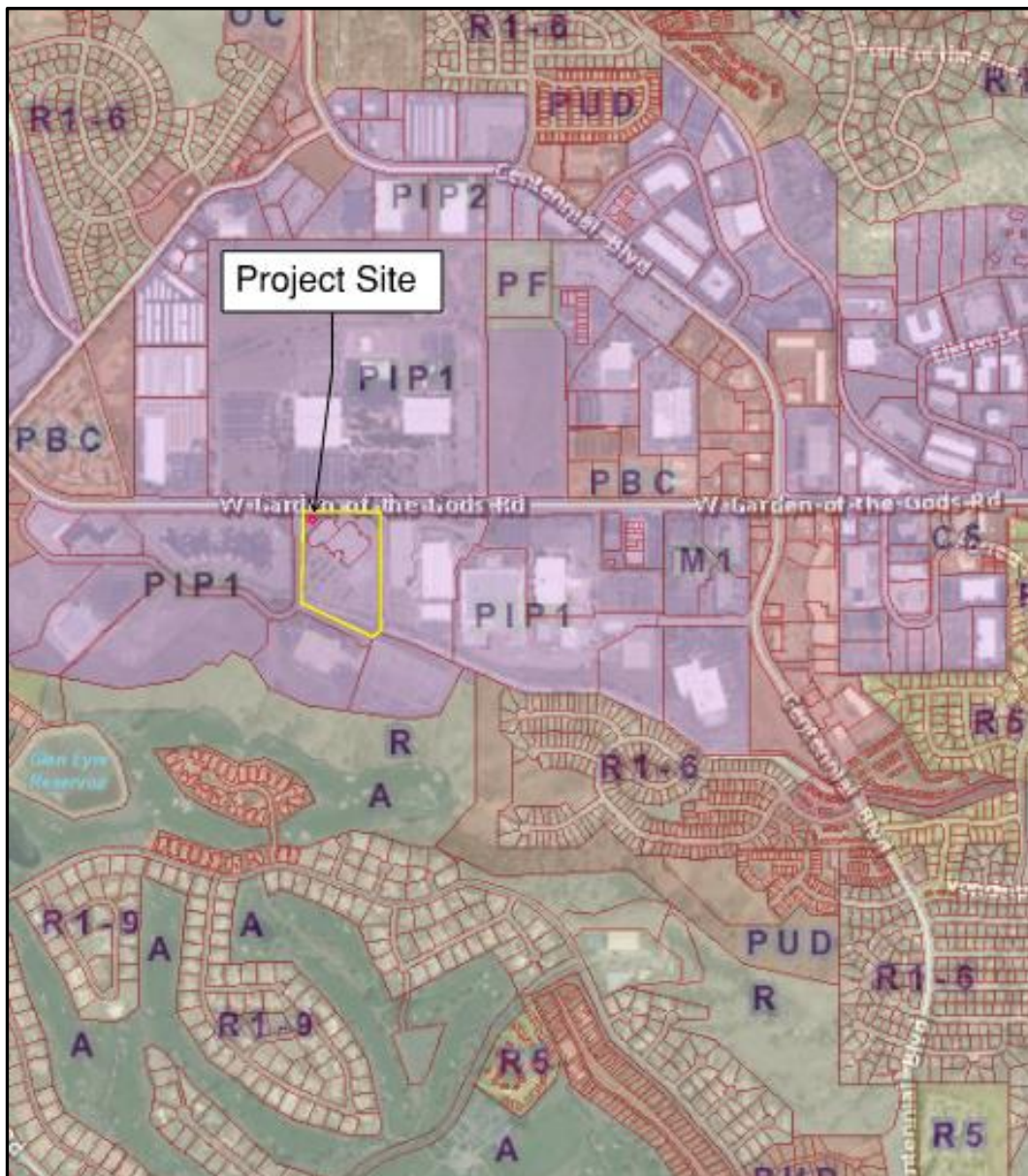


ITY PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA  
February 8, 2023

STAFF: WILLIAM GRAY

FILE NO:  
UVAR-22-0007

PROJECT: SPACE FOUNDATION ELECTRONIC MESSAGE CENTER  
OWNER/DEVELOPER: UNITED STATES SPACE FOUNDATION  
CONSULTANT: SIGN SHOP ILLUMINATED, LLC



## **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

1. **Project Description:** The Space Foundation Electronic Message Center project includes an application for a use variance development plan for the Space Foundation Discovery Center located at 4425 Arrowswest Drive. The project is herein referred to as “Space Foundation EMC Sign”. The use variance development plan will allow an electronic message center sign type with a civic use (**see “Use Variance Development Plan” attachment**).
2. **Applicant’s Project Statement:** (**see “Project Statement” attachment**)
3. **Planning and Development Team’s Recommendation:** City Planning staff recommends approval of the application as proposed.

## **BACKGROUND:**

1. **Site Address:** The property is addressed as 4425 West Garden of the Gods Road.
2. **Existing Zoning/Land Use:** The property is zoned PIP-1 (Planned Industrial Park) and is developed with a three (3) unit, 172,000 square feet, condominium building containing a civic use for cultural services (Space Foundation Discovery and Educational Center) and a religious institution (Cross and Crown Church).
3. **Surrounding Zoning/Land Use:** North: PIP-1 (Planned Industrial Park) and is developed with both commercial and industrial uses.  
South: PIP-1 (Planned Industrial Park) and is developed with an industrial use.  
East: PIP-1 (Planned Industrial Park) and is developed commercially with an administrative services use (El Paso County Community Services Center) and is developed with an industrial use.  
West: PIP-1 (Planned Industrial Park) and is developed with a light industrial use.
4. **PlanCOS Vision:** According to the PlanCOS Vision Map (**see “PlanCOS Vision Map” attachment**), the project site is identified as a Mature/Redeveloping Activity Center.
5. **Annexation:** The property was annexed into the City under the Mesa Addition No. 2 annexation plat (July 27, 1971; Ordinance No. 4275).
6. **Master Plan/Designated Master Plan Land Use:** The project site is not part of a master planned area.
7. **Subdivision:** The property is platted as Lot 1, Block 1, Arrowswest Filing No.1 and condominium Unit 1, 2 and 3, Arrowswest Condominiums.
8. **Zoning Enforcement Action:** None.
9. **Physical Characteristics:** The project site is developed. Improvements include an existing building, asphalt paved parking and drives and landscaping.

## **STAKEHOLDER PROCESS AND INVOLVEMENT:**

The public notification process consisted of providing notice to surrounding homeowners’ associations and adjacent property owners within 1,000 feet of the site, which included the mailing of postcards to 14 property owners on two (2) occasions: during the internal review and prior to the Planning Commission hearing. The site was also posted during the two (2) occasions noted above. City Planning staff did not receive any comments on the project.

Staff input is outlined in the following sections of this report. Staff sent copies of the plan set and supporting documentation to the standard internal and external review agencies for comments. Commenting agencies included Colorado Springs Utilities, City Engineering, City Traffic, and Council of Neighborhood Organizations (CONO). All comments received from the review agencies have been addressed.

**ANALYSIS OF REVIEW CRITERIA/MAJOR ISSUES/COMPREHENSIVE PLAN & MASTER PLAN CONFORMANCE:**

1. Review Criteria / Design & Development Issues:

a. Application Summary:

i. Use Variance Development Plan

The Space Foundation EMC Sign project (see “**Use Variance Development Plan**” **attachment**) is for a 65-square foot electronic message center sign located at the southeast corner of the Garden of the Gods Road and Arrowswest Drive intersection. As proposed, the free-standing electronic message center sign will consist of a fabricated metal launch pad with space shuttle or rocket-like form. The electronic message board element is integrated with that portion of the sign that replicates a rocket or space shuttle shape. City Planning staff notes that according to City Code Section 7.4.405 *Definitions – Electronic Message Center (EMC)*, an EMC is “A sign that is capable of displaying words, symbols, figures or images that can be electronically or mechanically changed by remote or automatic means.” This use variance application is necessary, as City Code Section 7.4.409 *Sign Types and Criteria by Sign Category*, does not permit EMC signs for civic land uses.

City Planning staff notes that similar use variance/warrant applications have been approved by the City Planning Commission and Downtown Review Board for EMC signs in recent years on other properties with civic land uses (i.e. Palmer High School and El Paso County Service Center). When considering whether the proposed sign was permissible, City Planning staff considered the review criteria of multiple sections of City Code, such as City Code Section 7.5.502(E) *Development Plan Review Criteria*, City Code Section 7.4.409(B)(3) *Additional Criteria For Major Sign Types*, and City Code Section 7.5.803(B) *Criteria For Granting A Use Variance*. Specifically, staff finds the request meets the three review criteria for a use variance to be granted:

- **Exceptional or Extraordinary Circumstances or Conditions Applicable to the Property** – The property is located along a developed commercial stretch of West Garden of the Gods Road with limited vehicular access drives and intersections and shares similar characteristics of surrounding commercial uses where EMC signs are allowed by the City’s Sign Code. Further, the proposed sign will help in better identifying the Space Foundation, as it is an important tourist destination, educational facility, and think-tank for fostering a better understanding and awareness as to how space can benefit our world. The proposed placement of the EMC sign will also provide the Space Foundation improved wayfinding and messaging to visitors and residents alike with hours of the museum, programming information and other news and information before entering the property and maneuvering once on-site.
- **Preservation and Enjoyment of the Property** – The proposed EMC sign will enhance experience and relay of information to residents and visitors of the Space Foundation Discovery Center.
- **Public Welfare or Convenience nor Injurious to the Property or Improvements of Other Owners** – The proposed EMC will benefit residents and visitors of the Space Foundation as well as adjacent properties. As designed and developed, the units of Arrowswest Condominiums utilize a shared access drive. The proposed sign will provide improved wayfinding to both the Space Foundation and Cross and Crown Church and helps to elevate the location of the Space Foundation.

The reasoning outlined above reinforce why this project will be good for the functionality of the Space Foundation and other uses that are part of this property and the surrounding area. City Planning staff finds that the proposed plan, as stipulated, is in conformance with

the authorizations for a use variance for a sign that is otherwise not permitted on the civically developed property, as set forth in City Code 7.5.803(A).

City Planning staff finds that the project addresses all the applicable review criteria set forth in City Code.

2. Conformance with the City Comprehensive Plan:

The project application has been evaluated for conformance with the City's current comprehensive plan (herein referred to as "PlanCOS"), adopted in January 2019. According to PlanCOS, the project site is identified within a Mature/Redeveloping Activity Center. **(see "PlanCOS Vision Map" attachment)** The Space Foundation project is consistent with one of the core values of PlanCOS, which reinforces the importance of place-making by encouraging attractive and visible spaces. A "Big Idea" from Chapter 3, entitled "Be a City of Places", has Goal UP-1 that states:

*"Enrich the texture and livability of the city as a tapestry of unique, vibrant, and walkable places."*

A policy for this goal further speaks to "*Locate and design new and repurposed civic facilities to make them highly visible focal points that express quality design, permanence, importance, and community identity.*"

For the reasons provided in this overall staff report, City Planning staff finds that this proposal is in substantially conformance with PlanCOS and its guidance.

3. Conformance with the Area's Master Plan:

The project site is not part of a master planned area. City Planning staff finds that the Space Foundation EMC project to be complimentary and supportive of the surrounding area, which contains several electronic message signs. City Planning staff analyzed the overall impact of the project through consideration of the use variance development plan and the review criteria for authorizing a use variance, as set forth in City Code Section 7.5.803(B)., the overall area impacts of the project were analyzed.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

**UVAR-22-0007 – USE VARIANCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Approve the use variance development plan for the Space Foundation Electronic Message Center, based upon the findings that the request meets the review criteria for establishing a development plan, as set forth in City Code Section 7.5.502(E), the review criteria for granting an Electronic Message Center sign, as set forth in City Code Section 7.4.409(B)(3), and the review criteria for granting a Use Variance, as set forth in City Code Section 7.5.803(B).