



Early Connections Antlers Place

Project Statement

January 18th, 2022

Request

RTA Architects on behalf of Early Connections Learning Centers requests approval of the following applications:

1. A Development Plan for a 2-story early childhood education center
2. A non-use variance
3. A Waiver or Replat

Project Description

Existing Conditions

The site is comprised of one lot on the corner of Antlers Place and S Sierra Madre. The site shares a lot line to the north with Antlers Park and is zoned FPZ. The site contains a 7,300 SF early childhood education center built in 1952. The building does not meet the current standards of a licensed childcare facility and has been granted waivers to continue to operate because of the high need for such facilities in the downtown area. The capacity of the current facility also does not meet the current demand and has many ADA accessibility issues. On this site there is also two storage sheds, three fenced playground areas and a gravel/asphalt parking lot.



Existing 1952 building without an accessible entrance.

The trees along the shared Antlers Park lot line are property of the City and are considered historic. In April of 2021 the design team met with Dennis Will, the City Forester to review and assess the existing park trees. Dennis Will referred the design team to Becky Wegner to assess the health of the remaining trees not on City property. The trees within the park boundary are mostly ash and elm trees and are in good condition for their age. The trees along the south edge of the early connection property are elm and have not received the same care. They show signs of a fungus and have not been trimmed up or treated. Becky assisted in selecting the healthiest mature trees to preserve along this edge as shown in the proposed site plan. The trees along the west edge of the property are ash and are in much better condition despite the lack of care. These trees are shown to be preserved on the proposed site plan.



Elm Trees along Antlers Place with a fungus that has blackened the bark of the trees.



Historic Antlers Park trees (right side of chain link fence)

The site has a 30" sanitary sewer line running across the north west corner of the property with no utility easement. The site also provides pedestrian access between Antlers Place and Antlers Park along the east edge of the property shown in the photo below.



The current pedestrian connection between Antlers Place and Antlers Park

Proposed Development

The project proposes to build a new facility to the west of the existing building while maintaining childcare services until construction is completed. Once the new facility is occupied the demolition of the old facility will be completed and the new parking lot constructed. The new 21,800 SF facility will have an early childhood education center on the main level with 5 preschool classrooms, three toddler classrooms and two infant care rooms. The second floor will house an early childhood professional development space with two large conference rooms for in-person and virtual learning. Primary access to the site will be maintained on Antlers Place. No access will be provided from S Sierra Madre.

The preschool and toddler playground spaces are located along the south side of the building for maximum sun in the winter and shade in the summer. The site slopes 10' from east to west so retaining walls have been used to provide an urban edge along the sidewalks while also helping to maintain an at-grade finished floor level throughout the building. This is required for childcare licensing.

MSE type retaining walls will be used to protect the existing tree root system by eliminating a deep footing needed for a traditional retaining wall. A stamped brick pattern on the face of the MSE wall and stained concrete will be used to give the impression of a brick wall similar to the historic day nursery site wall and fence.

The historic trees in Antlers Park have been protected by siting the building outside of the tree's drip line. The ash trees along S Sierra Madre and the two healthy elm trees along Antlers Place

have also been protected by pulling back the MSE wall and playground space outside of the tree's drip line. This created a setback which does not meet the requirements of the Form Based Code but provided an opportunity for a "pocket park" at the corner. This pocket park will have signage, seating and a small walking path that take visitors through the story of Early Connections and its history in Colorado Spring's. This area is the design team's solution to not meeting the FBZ standard pertaining to setbacks (section 2.3.3) and the inconsistent amenities zone that does not meet the FBZ 6' minimum around the site.(section 2.8.4)

The FBZ requirement of 25% glazing along a common lawn (section 2.4.7) is not met due to the nature of a childcare center. Deed restrictions on the property permit only a childcare facility on this site and as such the building is designed for a specific purpose that cannot meet the high-density, mixed-use type building facade that the Form Based Code favors. The south façade of the building is the only façade that does meet the 25% glazing requirement.

Parking has been minimized to include only enough parking for employees at the facility. The connection between Antlers Park and Antlers Place has been maintained and widened to allow for plantings and improved sight lines for pedestrian safety. The design team is hopeful that as future improvements are implemented at Antlers Park, increased foot traffic all around the site will create a safer environment for everyone in the area.

The site is 1.2 acres and during initial meetings with the City it was noted that the site will be required to comply with current stormwater regulations. As the design developed, the disturbed area create by the project was reduced to 0.94 acres due to the setbacks required to maintain existing trees along the north, south and west edges of the property and the setback required at the east edge of the property to maintain and improve the pedestrian connection with Antlers Park.

The historic day nursery building at 104 E Rio Grande St. is the design inspiration for the new facility. This 1928 building is not only a treasure to Colorado Springs but is a symbol of the mission of Early Connections Learning Centers to provide early childcare to working parents in need while providing a beautiful space for the children to spend their days. The design of the new facility reflects the Tudor mansion aesthetic with playful whimsy so the children know it was created just for them. As with the historic day nursery, the playground spaces will be front and center to provide a safe and interesting environment for the children. Vines growing up the walls of the historic day nursery building will also be used at the new facility to soften the edges of the new retaining walls along the parking lot and raised playground spaces.



South façade of the historic day nursery building with playground and brick/iron fencing at sidewalk edge.



West façade of the historic day nursery building

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