

**DOWNTOWN REVIEW BOARD AGENDA
SEPTEMBER 6, 2022**

STAFF: RYAN TEFERTILLER

**FILE NO:
CPC DP 22-00015 – QUASI-JUDICIAL**

PROJECT: EARLY CONNECTIONS CENTER

OWNER: CHILD NURSERY CENTERS INC.

CONSULTANT: RTA ARCHITECTS



PROJECT SUMMARY:

1. **Project Description:** The subject application was submitted to allow construction of a new two-story, 21,800 square foot civic building for the Early Childhood Education Center, with 29 off-street parking stalls. The 1.2 acre site is located on the northeast corner of Antlers Place and S. Sierra Madre St., is zoned FBZ-CEN (Form-Based Zone – Central Sector), and is currently developed with a 2-story, 7,279 square foot child care center. The proposed project requires Warrants from

multiple Form-Based Code Standards including: building envelopes, glazing, and amenity zone design. **(FIGURE 1)**

2. Applicant's Project Statement: **(FIGURE 2)**
3. Planning and Development Team's Recommendation: **Approval of the application with conditions of approval and technical modifications.**

BACKGROUND:

1. Site Address: 108 Antlers Place
2. Existing Zoning/Land Use: FBZ-CEN (Form-Based Zone – Central Sector) **(FIGURE 3)**
3. Surrounding Zoning/Land Use:
 - North: PK / Antlers Park
 - South: FBZ-CEN / commercial and office uses
 - East: FBZ- CEN / lodging and office uses
 - West: FBZ- CEN / commercial and office uses
4. PlanCOS Vision: Downtown Activity Center
5. Annexation: Town of Colorado Springs (1872)
6. Master Plan/Designated Master Plan Land Use: Experience Downtown Master Plan (2016) / General Mixed-Use
7. Subdivision: Colorado Springs Addition No. 4 (1882) – A waiver of replat of the property to create one legal lot is currently being reviewed administratively.
8. Zoning Enforcement Action: None
9. Physical Characteristics: The site is developed with an existing childcare center, surface parking lot, and playground. It slopes from east to west, losing approximately 13 feet from the site's southeastern corner to the site's low point at northwestern corner.

STAKEHOLDER PROCESS AND INVOLVEMENT: The public notice for this application included the display of posters on the site and 61 postcards mailed to surrounding property owners when the application was first submitted to the City. These notices included information on how to review the plans and provide comments. Staff received limited input from stakeholders regarding the project; one letter of support was received from the Downtown Partnership and is included as **FIGURE 4**. The site will be posted, and postcards mailed prior to the DRB hearing. Any formal communications received by Staff just prior to the hearing will be made available at the hearing.

The application was reviewed by all standard City agencies including, Public Works, Traffic Engineering, Colorado Springs Utilities, Water Resource Engineering, Parks and Recreation, and others. All reviewers support the project; any remaining technical concerns are included as Technical Modifications at the end of this report.

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

1. Background

The subject property is located on the northeast corner of Antlers Place and S. Sierra Madre St., totals 1.2 acres in size, and is zoned FBZ-CEN (Form-Based Zone – Central Sector). The site abuts Antlers Park to north and the back side of the Antlers Hotel to the east. The property was originally owned by the City of Colorado Springs but was conveyed to the current owner in 1951 with restrictions that the property is only to be used for childcare purposes. The existing building was constructed in 1952 and has provided childcare services over the last 70 years. However, the center no longer meets current childcare standards nor demand for childcare services in the City's core.

The subject property sits in a relatively quiet pocket of Downtown Colorado Springs with minimal visibility for major roads or pedestrian areas. However, the area is primed for a renaissance with significant redevelopment planned just blocks to the south near the United States Olympic and Paralympic Museum, significant improvements to Antlers Park on the near horizon, and potential major reinvestment in the Antlers Hotel property immediately to the east. These are all on top of the recent renovations to the historic depot building just to the west of the site. The proposed

redevelopment of the subject property and the new childcare center will be aligned with other planned improvements in the area.

2. Review Criteria / Design & Development Issues:

a. Project Details

The proposed project includes the construction of a new two-story, 21,800 square foot civic building for the Early Childhood Education Center, with 29 off-street parking stalls. The project also includes public improvements including landscape and hardscape along both public-facing sides of the site. The project will need to be implemented in two phases to allow the existing child care center to operate on the east side of the site while the new building is built on the west side of the site; once the new building is complete, the existing center can be demolished to construct the new center's off-street parking lot.

b. Form-Based Code

The Downtown Colorado Springs Form-Based Code implements physical standards that result in the development of a pedestrian-friendly, high-density, mixed-use area. New buildings are required to be constructed in close proximity to the sidewalk and building facades must include high levels of glazing to maximize pedestrian interest. Parking requirements are reduced (or eliminated) compared to other zone districts but surface lots are required to be located at the rear of the site largely screened from the public realm. While most projects within the Form-Based Zone can be reviewed and approved administratively, any project that needs relief from a required Standard, must have a public hearing in front of the Downtown Review Board for the review of a Warrant. Warrants can be granted for relief from any Standard, but each request must be evaluated by the Board using the five required Warrant criteria (see analysis below).

c. Analysis

The proposed childcare center is located on a wide and shallow rectangular parcel near the western edge of Downtown. The site has limited visibility from W. Colorado Ave. or S. Sierra Madre St., the two nearest higher volume streets in the immediate vicinity. The primary frontage to the site is Antlers Place, a small connecting road with limited vehicular or pedestrian volume. The site backs up to Antlers Park to the north and is largely hidden by the Antlers Hotel to the east and by a small commercial building to the south.

The Form-Based Code requires that new construction meet a number of physical standards to ensure that projects create a high-density, exciting, and walkable urban environment. Due to the unique aspects of the site, the childcare use, and the need for private off-street parking, relief from a number of Form-Based Standards is necessary.

The first, and probably most notable, standard that must be varied is related to Standard 2.3.3. Building Envelopes. The Code requires the proposed Civic Building on a corner lot to have a maximum zero-foot setback along the entirety of both public frontages (Antlers Place and Sierra Madre). However, the proposed building comes only as close as roughly 5 feet from the Antlers Place right-of-way and 12 feet from the Sierra Madre right-of-way. Additionally, large portions of the property frontage are devoid of building in order to utilize space for exterior child play areas and for private off-street parking. While the design of the building does attempt to create a more urban feel than the existing facility, it needs significant relief from the building envelope standard.

The Form-Based Code also requires that the public facing building façade include significant glazing (i.e. windows) so that passing pedestrians have a varied and interesting perspective. Minimum requirements for frontage design are described within Section 2.4.7. of the Form-Based Code. While some portions of the south-facing building façade are well glazed, others fall short of the standard. Minimum glazing percentages are tied to the frontage type used for new buildings. The proposed Civic Building utilizes a "Forecourt" frontage type which is defined by the fact that a portion of the building is set back from the front property line along the frontage. Forecourt frontages are required to have at least 30% glazing for the public-facing building facades. Due in part to the nature of the proposed building (i.e. childcare) the south and west

building facades only provide roughly 15% glazing. Pedestrian interest is provided through other site and building elements including: varied materials, exterior play areas, landscape, and hardscape elements.

The final standard that requires relief is found in Section 2.8 of the Form-Based Code which regulates public space improvements required as part of redevelopment projects. The proposed project includes a public space design that is constrained by existing curb location and the need to maximize the site for building, parking and play area. Where the Code requires an Amenity Zone (the area between the curb and the sidewalk) that is at least 6 feet wide, the proposed project includes an Amenity Zone along Sierra Madre that is only 5 feet and 1 inch wide. The Amenity Zone along the Antlers Place side of the site is only 1 foot, 6 inches wide. While the dimensions and improvements within the Amenity Zone are minimal, the project includes significant landscape improvements behind the sidewalk, particularly on the Sierra Madre side of the project. It also must be noted that the proposed Amenity Zone dimensions largely retain, or actually improve upon, the existing Amenity Zone design at the site.

Any project that requires relief from a Form-Based standard must gain approval of the Warrant by the Downtown Review Board. Warrants are reviewed using the five criteria found in Section 5.4 of the Form-Based Code. The criteria are:

1. Is the requested Warrant consistent with the intent of the Form-Based Code?
2. Is the requested Warrant, as well as the project as a whole, consistent with Section 4 – Design Guidelines of the form-based code?
3. Is the requested Warrant reasonable due to the proposed project's exceptional civic or environmental design?
4. Is the requested Warrant consistent with the Downtown Master Plan?
5. Is the requested Warrant consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan?

As discussed above, the subject property, the limited use of the property, and the unique needs of a childcare center all contribute to the justification for the proposed Warrants. The shallow depth of the site relative to the amount of public frontage makes it extremely impractical to meet the Code's Building Envelope Standards. The use of the building for childcare limits the ability to fully glaze the public facing building facades. And the existing curb location relative to property lines limits the ability to meet the Amenity Zone Standard. So while the number and significance of the Warrant requests are notable, the project as a whole is still consistent with the intent of the Form-Based Code.

The project is also largely compliant with the Code's Design Standards. The building includes appropriate architectural detail, screens necessary service features and parking areas, and provides robust landscape improvements.

The project also represents exceptional civic design in part due to the use itself. This site is restricted to only be used for childcare purposes, and those services provide great value to the City and more specifically to the Downtown work-force. Downtown Colorado Springs is home to roughly 25,000 employees, many of which need childcare options within close proximity. The proposed building will add much needed improvements and capacity to the existing property. The design is intended to marry the unique needs of a childcare center with the urban design principals and standards within the Form-Based Code.

The project is also consistent with the Experience Downtown Master Plan by closely aligning with multiple plan goals. The project addresses Goal 1 – to create a diverse and inclusive place to live, integrated with adjacent neighborhoods, as well as Goal 5 – to create a walkable and bike-friendly center connected through safe and accessible multi-modal networks. The Master Plan emphasizes the value of supporting services that are needed by urban residents and employees alike. Childcare services are an essential need for a successful downtown.

Lastly, the project is consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan, PlanCOS. The Plan emphasizes the need to provide services and destinations within close proximity of residential and mixed-use areas. Downtown is the City's best example of a true mixed-use area and childcare needs to be a service available downtown to serve the area's needs.

Staff finds that the proposed project, as well as the specific Warrant requests, are substantially consistent with the required warrant criteria as well all other Form-Based Code standards and guidelines. While some technical issues remain to be resolved, Staff fully supports the application and recommends that the Downtown Review Board provide their approval.

d. Technical Issues

The development plan for this project has gone through two rounds of City review (initial submittal and one resubmittal). While some technical issues remain, the majority of initial comments have been fully resolved. City Staff is confident that all these issues can be resolved without any major changes to the plan presented to the Downtown Review Board. All required technical modifications that must be addressed prior to final approval are listed below.

3. Conformance with the City Comprehensive Plan:

The proposed project is consistent with a number of provisions within the City's Comprehensive Plan. The new building will increase childcare capacity and provide significantly improved facilities in the City's urban core. The use provides critical services to downtown residents and employees within walking distance from their apartment or place of business. These types of essential services make downtown the best example of a high-density, mixed use, environment that is often described by PlanCOS as a goal to strive toward.

4. Conformance with the Area's Master Plan:

The subject property falls within the 2016 Experience Downtown Master Plan. The proposed use, building and density are all well aligned with the Plan. The project adheres to many of the 8 primary plan goals, including: Goal 1 – Economic and Cultural Heart of the Region; Goal 2 – Diverse and Inclusive Place to Live, Integrated with Adjacent Neighborhoods; Goal 5 – A Walkable and Bike-Friendly Center Connected Through Safe and Accessible Multi-Modal Networks; and Goal 6 – A Leader in Innovative Urban Design and Sustainability.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Item No: CPC DP 22-00015 – EARLY CONNECTIONS CENTER

Approve the Early Connections Center Form-Based Zone development plan with Warrants for building envelopes, frontage design, and public space design, based upon the findings that the application complies with the criteria for granting Warrants, subject to compliance with the following condition of approval and technical plan modifications:

Condition of Approval

1. Gain acceptance of the project's drainage report and ensure that the development plan accurately reflects any necessary stormwater details.

Technical and Informational Modifications to the Form-Based Zone Development Plan:

1. Update the plan data to correctly reflect building type and zoning designation.
2. Update the plan to reflect proposed bike rack and lighting location and details.
3. Provide clarity on sidewalk and amenity zone widths and proposed materials along Sierra Madre and Antlers Place.
4. Clarify if the existing driveway on Sierra Madre is being retained or eliminated and illustrate future parallel parking configuration adjacent to the site.
5. Label the percent glazing for both public-facing frontages; provide the total square footage as well as square footage of glazing to document proposed percentages.
6. Update materials and design related information for the retaining walls along the front of the site.

7. Address EDR comments including labeling the new sidewalk, correcting the street names in general note 11 and adjusting the anglers Place pedestrian ramp location.
8. Clarify the status of existing timber retaining walls located north of the existing building and update all plan sheets accordingly.
9. Update line types at the site's northwestern corner and eastern edge to clarify ownership extent.
10. Correct cover sheet FEMA panel citations and illustrate 500-year floodplain on the plan.
11. Add labels and details to all stormwater infrastructure associated with the project and the required stormwater inspection note to sheet 5.
12. Provide necessary details on the site's connections to Antlers Park per Park Department review comments.
13. Add the required Colorado Springs Utilities note regarding the existing wastewater main to the plan.