

**City of Colorado Springs
City Planning Commission
Draft Meeting Minutes – Excerpt
Wednesday, July 9, 2025**

8.A. UVAR-25-0004 – 2 Penrose Blvd Renovation - Use Variance w/ Land Use Statement

A Use Variance to allow the establishment of a Nonprofit Conference and Education Center within the R-E/HS-O/WUI-O (Single-Family - Estate with Hillside and Wildland Urban Interface Overlays) consisting of 3.24 acres located at 2 Penrose Boulevard. Quasi-Judicial)

Presenter:

Tamara Baxter, Planning Supervisor, City Planning Department.

Tamara Baxter, Planning Supervisor, presented the Use Variance to allow the establishment of a Nonprofit Conference and Education Center within the R-E/HS-O/WUI-O (Single-Family – Estate with Hillside and Wildland Urban Interface Overlays) consisting of 3.24 acres located at 2 Penrose Boulevard, in District 3. The proposed land use is a Non-Profit Conference and Education Center using the existing structure. The proposal includes interior and minor exterior modifications, additional parking and landscaping features. Ms. Baxter said there were two options to consider for this project, either rezoning or a use variance, and the second was selected. Based on UDC, if the primary use is not specified as permitted or conditional, the Manager can determine if a specific use for the zone district can be created. Standard Notice was sent out and no comments were received. The applicant conducted a neighborhood meeting on April 7, 2025, where approximately 100 property owners attended. Agency Review was made, comments received were addressed and the project complies with PlanCOS and meets the review criteria.

Applicant's presentation

Chris Lieber, Principal at N.E.S. Inc., introduced his team.

Kyle Hybl, President and CEO for El Pomar Foundation, said it was founded in 1937 by Spencer and Julie Penrose, with the mission to enhance, encourage and promote the wellbeing of the people of Colorado, which is accomplished in three ways. He said the first is grant making as any private foundation, the second is leadership development, where they have a fellowship program for recent graduates and a program for minorities in Colorado Springs and Pueblo and third is community convening where Penrose House hosts different types of community meetings.

Mr. Hybl said in 1944, after Spencer's Penrose passing in 1939, Julie Penrose donated the house to Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, they run, among other things, Penrose hospital. He said in the late 1980's the sisters put up a memory care service on the property but sold it back to El Pomar Foundation in 1992, to run it as a nonprofit conference facility. Mr. Hybl said the sisters used it as a retreat center from 1944 until 1992 and wanted to continue with the memory care facility but not as operators the whole time. He said as owners of the underlying ground, when Common Spirit decided not to continue, El Pomar had the right to purchase the property, and the trustees decided this would be a good opportunity to amplify the community convening efforts, and add a nonprofit office space at Penrose, former Namaste. Mr. Hybl said they are hopeful of getting this project approved, the trustees believe it will benefit nonprofits and the citizens for decades to come. He said they are trying to be good neighbors as demonstrated with the community meeting held on April 7th. He said this is an opportunity to reconnect the property originally owned by El Pomar founders, it will enhance visitors' experience for the Penrose House as an extension of the nonprofit meeting space, add administrative space, provide a climate-controlled area to show their historical pieces, and elevate the standard of care of the grounds on the southern property.

Mr. Lieber said this site is part of the historic residence and described the residential properties to the north and southwest, as well as the townhomes development to the east and south. The Broadmoor hotel has some facilities to the east of the site, the Pauline Chapel, the Pauline School, the golf course, and The Broadmoor hotel are located further to the east. Mr. Lieber said the circulation and the arrival sequence will work not only for the benefit of El Pomar but also for the neighbors. He said access to this site is from Penrose Boulevard to the south of the property, and the main access to El Pomar is through Mesa Avenue. Mr. Lieber said in some ways this project is simple, however when looking at the zoning it got more complicated, and this is one of the reasons why they decided to request a use variance. He said most of the functions are zoned under the Planned Cultural

Resort, and, at the beginning, they considered expanding upon that, however, being a legacy zone, it is no longer listed within the most recent update of the UDC. Mr. Lieber said the surroundings are mainly residential and there is a small piece of PDZ, formerly PUD, that the townhomes were created under, and the Broadmoor is under the MX zoning. He said most of the uses are primarily single-family residential, there are commercial uses as well, and the school to the northeast. He said they have been very specific and strategic about describing their request since the client knows exactly what their mission and vision are. Mr. Lieber said because they have that clarity, the use variance can provide over a new zoning classification that can allow a wide variety of potential uses. Mr. Lieber said Penrose Boulevard is the historic access point to the memory care facility, and they have already made a submittal for the development plan, which is not the application being presented, but will not change the footprint of the building, rather will clean up the exterior, and bring it up to the standards that the rest of the campus has. He said they are strategic about how parking will work, access would be through the front door off Mesa, past the front entrance of El Pomar and be able to utilize the conference center parking. He said the proposed plan does not intend to expand the number of participants, but rather be able to improve upon the offerings, especially from a weather perspective. He said they have also thought about giving pedestrians access and connectivity to all buildings and outdoor spaces. Mr. Lieber said there are two driveways that connect to Penrose Boulevard, one will be only for service delivery and staff access, the other for emergency access, and visitors will continue to use the front door. He said they will have ADA access and visitor drop-off right in front of the door through the parking. He said they will do some landscaping enhancements around the existing pond that provides fantastic views and a wonderful buffer to the neighborhood.

Mr. Lieber said that since the PCR zone is no longer current, it was not applicable to them. He said they explored other commercial or office zones that allowed large gathering spaces but none of those uses fit this specific case or aligned with the desire to be precise. He said they also recognize that area is residential, and the setbacks are already established, so with the use variance the setbacks standards continue. Mr. Lieber said the process would be the same for the zone change or the use variance, they will have to go before City Planning Commission and City Council, and they believe that is important for the community for transparency. He said the code allows in unique situations for applicants to define a more specific use, and they took the time to arrive at “nonprofit conference and educational center” because it encompasses all that El Pomar want to do and accomplish. He said they further defined nonprofit administrative offices, conference rooms, assembly

hall, archive storage, and outdoor gathering space, which would allow up to 45,000 square feet for the proposed use and not expanding beyond that footprint. Mr. Lieber said questions about how circulation and traffic will work came up in the neighborhood meeting. He said guests would continue to arrive off Mesa Avenue, continue past the front door and make their way to the west to the parking spaces. He said they will include additional parking spaces to the south, but guest access would be by the main entrance. He said the entrances from Penrose Boulevard are to be service and emergency access, therefore, are proposed to be gated. He emphasized these changes are not part of this application but of the development plan submitted. Mr. Lieber said they held a public meeting where approximately 100 people were in attendance, they gave a guided tour and walked them around the site, they talked about screening and wildlife among other subjects that they were able to incorporate into the development plan proposal, including the vehicular circulation. He said they talked about the types of events and that it is not intended to be a commercial operation, hence the intentional use of nonprofit conference center. He said they had questions about the lighting which have been addressed. A traffic study was done and the results are available. Mr. Lieber said they looked at the change from memory care to conference center, recognizing that the use is affiliated with El Pomar, however, if they were to consider it as a standalone facility regarding traffic, all intersections would continue to function at service level A, with the exception of the Mesa intersection that would work at level B during peak hours. He said analysis of future traffic conditions indicates that the additional site generated traffic is expected to generate no negative impact on the roadways. Mr. Lieber said they think they meet all the criteria; they do have a unique situation to pursue a use variance. He said they are trying to be very specific for the benefit of the community and for El Pomar, to ensure they can continue to use that existing part of the property and expand those options. Mr. Lieber said regarding the Land Use Statement they clearly defined the proposed land uses; they talked about compatibility with the adjacent developments and their efforts to minimize impacts. He said the pond and the vegetation help the buffer to remain, and the outdoor gathering spaces have been strategically placed against the building at the core of the site. Mr. Lieber said they have been smart about vehicular traffic, and using all kinds of lights making sure they are not spilling any. He said they will need to light the pathways and the parking, but they can keep it to the interior.

Public Comment

None

Commissioners' Comments

Commissioner Hensler asked if the property to the south belongs to the same owner and if there are no additional use variances required for pedestrian or vehicular access and for the fire lane. Mr. Lieber said the use will remain the same because the use variance application is specific for this parcel, however, there is a development submittal for the modifications on different parcels to add parking, pedestrian connections and gates.

Commissioner Robbins said he likes what the team has put together for a much-needed space and he considers it is positive for the city. Commissioner Robbins said he likes what they are proposing for the traffic pattern as Penrose Boulevard can get busy, especially being in a residential area.

Commissioner Hensler said she has been to events in the tent; it will be nice to be in a conference center and the grounds are beautiful. Commissioner Hensler said the preservation is important and she will be voting in favor.

Commissioner Casey said it is a good project, it easily meets the criteria, and he will be voting in favor.

Commissioner Cecil said she has comments for Staff regarding having adequate definitions to meet the popularity of stand-alone conference type venues as uses in the zoning ordinance because so many of the words that appear in the presentation overlap such as the auditorium-stadium definition, nonprofit club lodge service organization but does not have the public aspect of it. Commissioner Cecil said the library museum and cultural facility but is not exactly about the arts and culture end of it. Commissioner Cecil said maybe there is a use that would be better defined here or to get clarification on whether they intend to make general new developments that might be similar to this all PDZ's, because the prior zoning ordinance had the plan cultural resort, that would fit. Commissioner Cecil said she appreciates them wanting to narrow it so that it cannot be abused or reused at some other point in the future and disrupt the neighborhood.

Commissioner Hensler said she agrees with Commissioner Cecil, that may be the unique character of the community, with centers for creative leadership and other conference centers and places that there is no definition for.

Ms. Baxter said the definition is specific for this project, and she is not sure that it fits universally in Colorado Springs. She said this is why they decided to go with the use variance instead of the rezoning, proposing a very specific use category for this location.

Commissioner Cecil said it is not the whole topic of the matter, and it might merit further exploration outside of this item.

Acting Chair Rickett said he concurs, he thinks PCR and SU did not transfer over to the new code, and it may be something to address as changes on the code are being made. Acting Chair Rickett said it is an opportunity to modify the code into something that could continue to be used.

Motion by Commissioner Hensler, seconded by Commissioner Casey, to recommend approval to City Council for the Use Variance to establish the Nonprofit Conference and Education Center based upon the findings that the request complies with the criteria as set forth in City Code Section 7.5.527.

The motion passed by a vote of 8-0-1.

Aye: 8 - Commissioner Hensler, Commissioner Cecil, Commissioner Robbins, Commissioner Sipilovic, Commissioner Casey, Commissioner Gigiano, Commissioner Clements and Commissioner Rickett.

Absent: 1 - Chair Slattery