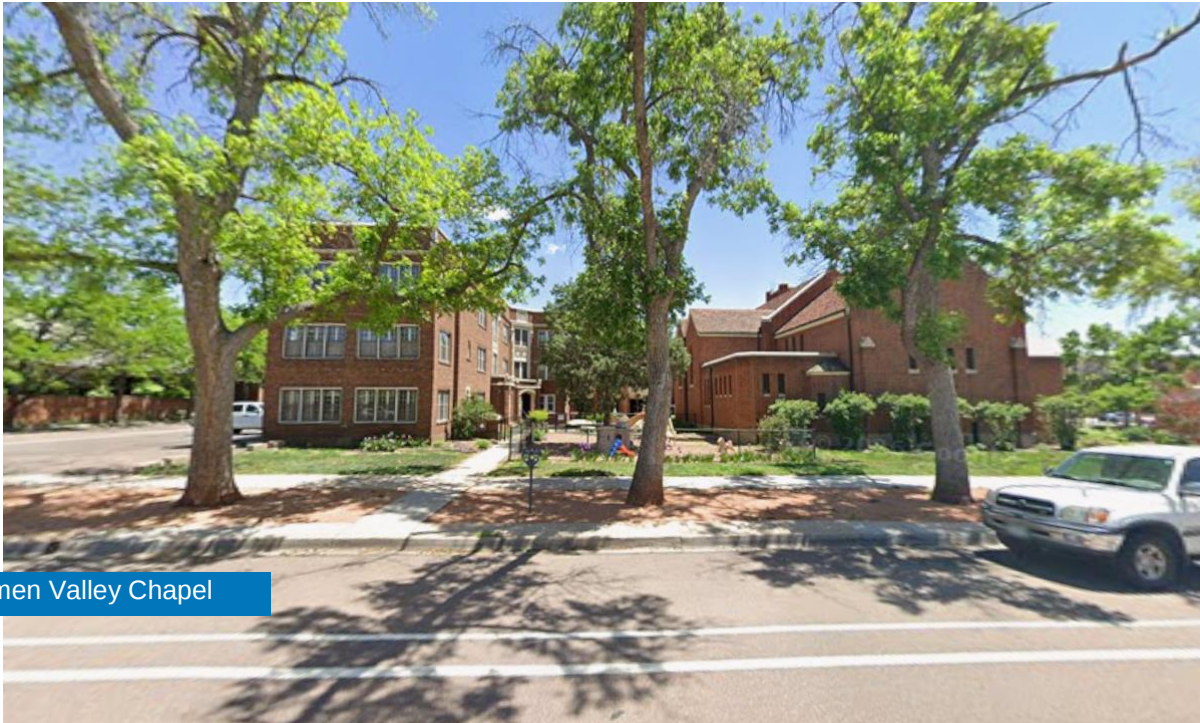


WOODMEN VALLEY CHAPEL COFFEE SHOP

Planning Commission August 12, 2026

Staff Report by Case Planner: Ethan Shafer



Woodmen Valley Chapel

Quick Facts

Applicant

Brad Nichols, YOW Architects

Property Owner

Mike Malan, Woodmen Valley Chapel

Address / Location

16 E Platte Avenue

TSN(s)

6418202002

Zoning and Overlays

Current: R-5 (Multi-Family High)

Site Area

0.91 acres

Proposed Land Use

Religious Institution and Restaurant

Applicable Code

Unified Development Code

Council District

3

Project Summary

The applicant requests approval of a Use Variance to allow a coffee shop as a second principal use within the existing Woodmen Valley Chapel building at 16 East Platte Avenue. The property is zoned R-5 (Multi-Family High), where religious institutions are permitted by-right but standalone restaurant uses are prohibited. The proposed coffee shop would occupy approximately 1,600 square feet of the building's northwest ground-floor wing and would establish a public-facing storefront along Cascade Avenue.

File Number	Application Type	Decision Type
UVAR-26-0004	Use Variance	Quasi-Judicial

Background

Prior Land-Use History and Applicable Actions

Action	Name	Date
Annexation	Town of Colorado Springs	1872
Subdivision	Town of Colorado Springs	1871
Master Plan	Elevate Downtown Master Plan (updated)	2026
Prior Enforcement Action	N/A	N/A

Site History

The property is located within the original Town of Colorado Springs and contains a long-established institutional use at the corner of Platte Avenue and North Cascade Avenue. The main church structure was constructed in 1935 as the First Christian Church, followed by several additions including a gymnasium constructed in 1969 connecting the church to the Alden Manor apartments to the north. Alden Manor was converted to classrooms in 1953. In 2024, Woodmen Valley Chapel purchased and renovated the building to establish their permanent downtown campus, continuing the property’s longstanding role as a community-serving landmark.

The surrounding area has transitioned significantly into a mixed-use downtown environment. Adjacent parcels to the east and south have been rezoned into the Form Based Zone (FBZ-T2A, FBZ-T1, and FBZ-COR) while many of the properties to the west have been zoned Office Residential (OR). Although the subject site remains zoned R-5, the block is no longer strictly residential in character. Instead, it is defined by commercial, institutional, and mixed-use development patterns consistent with the adjacent form-based districts. This creates a unique zoning condition where the underlying residential designation does not reflect the existing downtown character. The proposed Use Variance allows preservation and activation of the historic church building while authorizing a low-intensity commercial use compatible with the evolving downtown context.

Applicable Code

The subject application is to be reviewed under the Unified Development Code. All references to “the Code” within this report refer to the Unified Development Code.

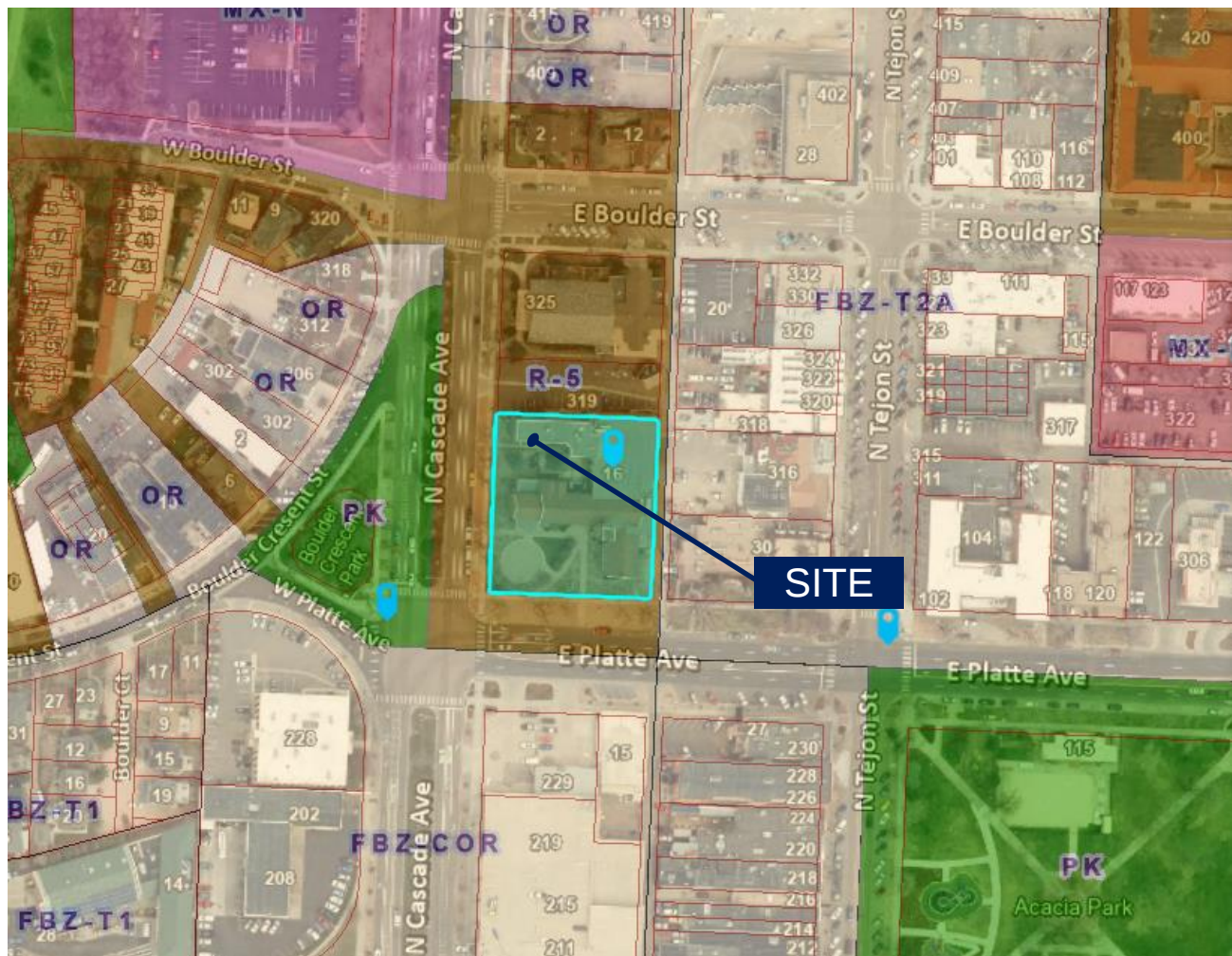
Surrounding Zoning and Land Use

Adjacent Property Existing Conditions

	Zoning	Existing Use	Special Conditions
North	R-5 (Multi-Family High)	Religious Institution	N/A

West	PK (Public Park)	Public Park	N/A
	OR (Office Residential)	Multi-Family & Single Family Residential, Offices	
	R-5 (Multi-Family High)	Multi-Family Residential	
South	FBZ-COR (Form Based Zone – Corridor Sector)	Automobile and Light Vehicle Repair	N/A
		Club, Lodge, and Service Organization	
East	FBZ-T2A (Form Based Zone – Transition Sector 2 – A)	Club, Lodge, and Service Organization	N/A
		Restaurant	
		Multi-Family Residential	
		Retail Sales	

Zoning Map



Stakeholder Involvement

Public Notice

Public Notice Occurrences (Poster / Postcards)	Initial application and City Planning Commission public hearing
Postcard Mailing Radius	1,000 feet for each notification
Number of Postcards Mailed	189 postcards were sent with each public notice occurrence
Number of Comments Received	No public comment was received.
Public Engagement	No public comment was received.

Timeline of Review

Initial Submittal Date	05/05/2026
Number of Review Cycles	Two (2)
Item(s) Ready for Agenda	7/20/2026

Agency Review

Traffic

No comments received.

City Engineering

No comments received.

Fire

No comments received.

Planning Landscape

Landscape and parking lot screening to be reviewed administratively with future development plan.

Use Variance

Summary of Application

The applicant seeks a Use Variance to allow a coffee shop (restaurant) as a second principal use within the existing Woodmen Valley Chapel building. The proposed coffee shop would occupy approximately 1,600 square feet and include a new, dedicated street-facing entry, storefront system, accessible ramp, and small patio along the west façade facing Cascade Avenue (see Attachment 1 – Site Plan). As described in the project statement, the coffee shop is intended to function both as an ancillary gathering space supporting the church's ministry activities and as a neighborhood-serving sit-down commercial use open to the general public (Attachment 2 – Project Statement)

Exterior improvements are limited and will be reviewed administratively through a future development plan. Parking for the combined uses is provided through existing on-site spaces, supplemented by Woodmen Valley Chapel's shared-parking agreement with Young Life for Sunday services (Attachment 3 – Parking Agreement). The combined parking demand remains below the 15% threshold in UDC Section 7.4.1002.A.3, and no additional parking is required.

Use Variance vs. Zoning Map Amendment (Rezoning)

As part of pre-application discussions with City Planning staff, the applicant evaluated two possible regulatory pathways: a Zoning Map Amendment to rezone the property to a form-based or commercial district, or the current request for a Use Variance to allow a specific commercial use while retaining the underlying R-5 zoning.

The applicant ultimately pursued a Use Variance for several reasons consistent with staff direction and the church's long-term stewardship of the property. First, during the recent UDC zoning map update, staff considered and ultimately declined to rezone this parcel into the Form-Based Zone district. The determination at that time emphasized the value of preserving the existing historic church structure and its institutional character, rather than introducing zoning that could enable future redevelopment out of scale with the surrounding historic context. A rezoning to a more permissive commercial or form-based district could unintentionally open the door to redevelopment scenarios inconsistent with the desire to maintain the building as a cultural and architectural anchor.

Second, the R-5 zoning remains appropriate for the property's primary religious institution use, and the applicant wishes to maintain that institutional identity. The coffee shop is intended as a low-intensity complementary use that is consistent with other Woodmen Valley Chapel campuses, rather than a shift toward a more intensive commercial development pattern. A Use Variance provides a narrowly tailored mechanism to authorize this specific use without altering the broader zoning framework or changing the entitlement expectations for the site.

Third, the surrounding context is already characterized by higher-intensity commercial, institutional, and mixed-use land uses typical of Downtown Colorado Springs and the adjacent Form-Based Zone districts. Allowing a low-intensity, pedestrian-oriented commercial use through a Use Variance is compatible with the established downtown development pattern.

Together, these factors demonstrate that a Use Variance, rather than rezoning, is the most context-sensitive approach, allowing a single additional use while preserving the historic building and maintaining the institutional character of the site. This approach aligns closely with the City's use variance intent, which is to address unique site-specific conditions without enabling broader land-use changes that may conflict with long-term planning goals.

Role of the Coffee Shop in the Downtown Campus

Woodmen Valley Chapel notes that coffee shops play an integral role in their campus model, serving as accessible community gathering spaces that facilitate connection, hospitality, and outreach. Establishing a public-facing storefront at the downtown location supports this mission, provides a welcoming presence along Cascade Avenue, and activates the pedestrian environment consistent with the Downtown context. The coffee shop would operate as a low-intensity use with activity levels generally lower than those associated with peak church services, and its hours and programming are expected to minimize overlap with high-demand church events (see Attachment 2 – Project Statement).

Overall, the Use Variance allows the church to reasonably expand its downtown presence in a way that maintains compatibility with surrounding land uses, preserves the historic building's role, and advances Downtown planning goals while avoiding unintended impacts associated with a broader zone change.

Application Review Criteria

UDC Code Section 7.5.527

City Code requires that a development standards adjustment may only be approved if the following criteria are met:

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;*
 - The subject property's zoning is uniquely inconsistent with its downtown surroundings. While zoned R-5, the block is developed with commercial, institutional, and mixed-use buildings typical of the adjacent form-based districts. The R-5 designation imposes more restrictive use limitations than surrounding properties. Strict application of the use table would prohibit an otherwise compatible low-intensity commercial use, resulting in an undue limitation on the property compared to similarly situated parcels.
2. *That the Use Variance is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a property right, and if not approved, the property or structure cannot yield any beneficial use;*
 - Woodmen Valley Chapel has successfully integrated coffee shops into its other campuses as central gathering spaces that support their mission. The requested variance enables the church to utilize its downtown facility in a manner consistent with its established ministry model, supporting both congregation needs and neighborhood-serving activity. Without approval, the church could not operate a full-service coffee shop open to the public, limiting reasonable activation of the space and restricting the church's ability to provide the community-serving use consistent with its mission.
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;*
 - The proposed coffee shop is a low-intensity, sit-down use without drive-through or high-turnover components. It is expected to generate less activity, parking demand, and overall intensity than existing church operations. The use is compatible with downtown land-use patterns and offers a positive amenity for congregants, Colorado College students, nearby residents, and the general public. No adverse impacts to traffic, noise, or neighboring properties are foreseen by staff.
4. *That the hardship is not the result of the applicant's own actions;*
 - The applicant did not create the zoning condition that restricts commercial uses on the site. The church purchased an existing institutional building within an area that transitioned around it over time. The hardship arises from zoning limitations that do not reflect the established urban character of the block, not from any action taken by the property owner.
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; and*
 - Prohibiting the coffee shop would constrain the church's ability to operate its downtown campus consistent with contemporary ministry practices, which rely heavily on accessible gathering spaces. Coffee shops serve as low-barrier points of connection for new and existing visitors. Restricting the use to an internal, non-public accessory function would impede the church's ability to fully utilize its downtown location and contribute to street-level vibrancy.
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.*
 - The applicant is not seeking to avoid otherwise applicable development standards. The request is narrowly focused on the ability to establish a second principal use. All code requirements for development will be met through administrative review.

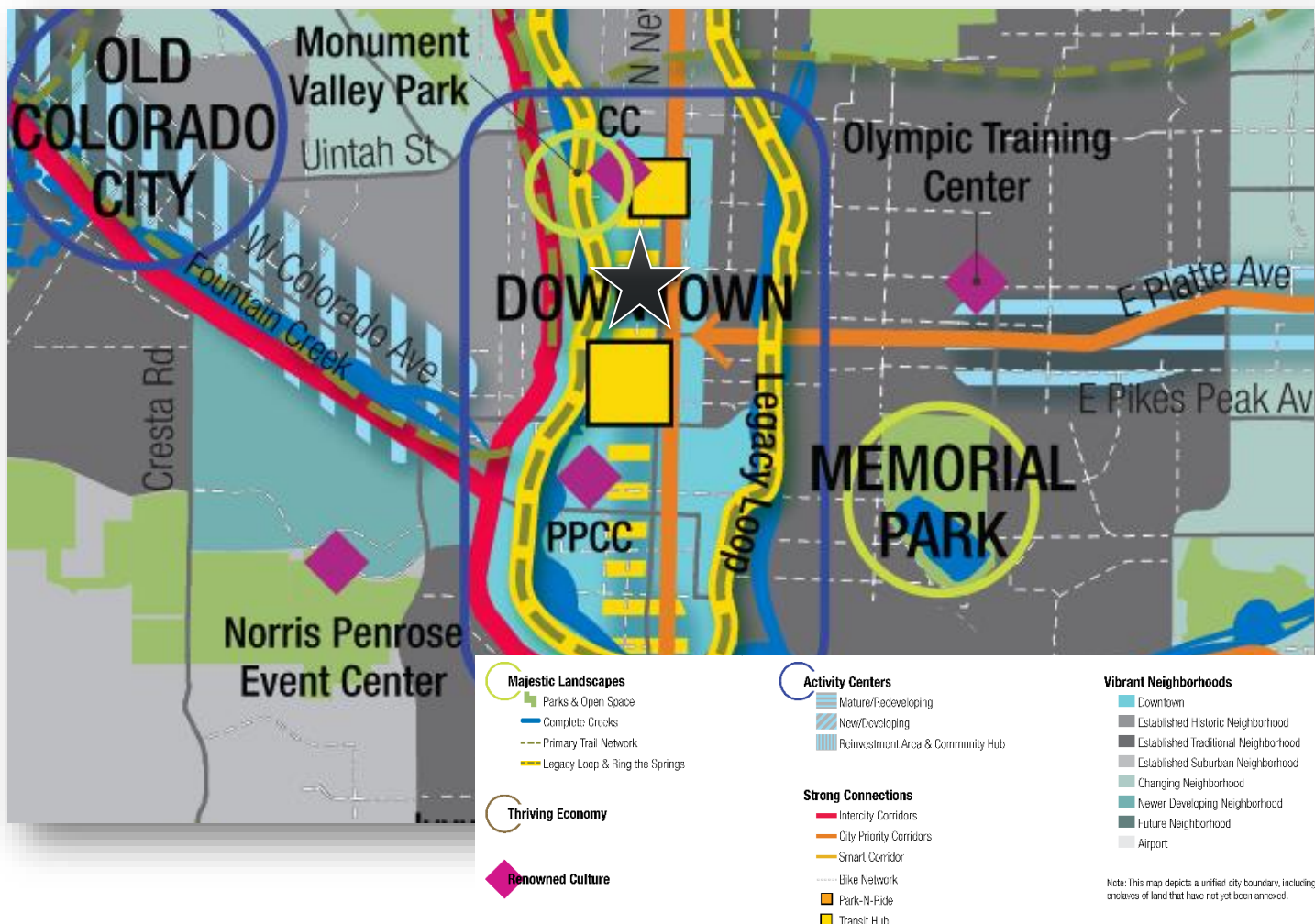
Compliance with Relevant Guiding Plans and Overlays

The Elevate Downtown Plan emphasizes walkability, activation of ground-floor uses, creation of public-facing amenities, and support for local businesses within the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) boundary. The subject site lies within this boundary and is identified within the downtown urban fabric where pedestrian-oriented uses and neighborhood-serving retail are encouraged (see Attachment 4 – Elevate Downtown Master Plan).

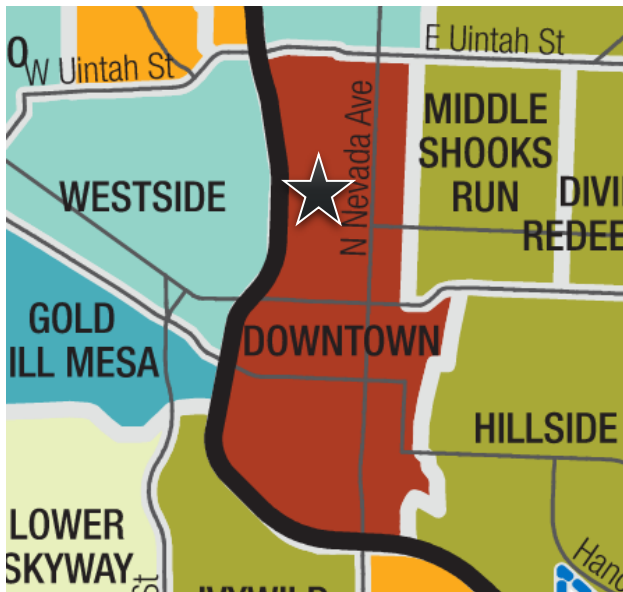
The proposed coffee shop supports several Elevate Downtown goals:

- Peak Urban Life: Adds a welcoming public amenity and supports daily activation near key pedestrian corridors.
- The Heart of the Pikes Peak Region: Reinforces downtown as a destination for dining, gathering, and community interaction.
- Culture Powered by Creativity and Sport: Provides additional opportunities for social engagement near nearby cultural and educational anchors including Colorado College and Acacia Park.
- Urban Design Shaped for Humans: Establishes an active ground-floor use with improved street-level accessibility and pedestrian-oriented design.

The small-scale commercial use aligns with the plan's emphasis on walkable destinations, local entrepreneurship, public-facing storefronts, and expanded neighborhood amenities within the urban core.



The PlanCOS Vision Map identifies Downtown Colorado Springs as one of the city's most significant activity centers and Unique Places, characterized by a walkable urban environment, a mix of civic and commercial destinations, and activated ground-floor uses. The subject site lies within this established downtown fabric, where reinvestment, adaptive reuse, and small-scale neighborhood-serving amenities are strongly encouraged. The proposed coffee shop supports these expectations by introducing a pedestrian-oriented use within an existing institutional building, reinforcing downtown's mixed-use character, and contributing to the vibrancy, walkability, and community-serving functions envisioned for this area.



Predominant Typology

Downtown	Established Traditional Neighborhood
Newer Developing Neighborhood	Established Suburban Neighborhood
Changing Neighborhood	Airport
Established Historic Neighborhood	Future Neighborhood

Vibrant Neighborhoods

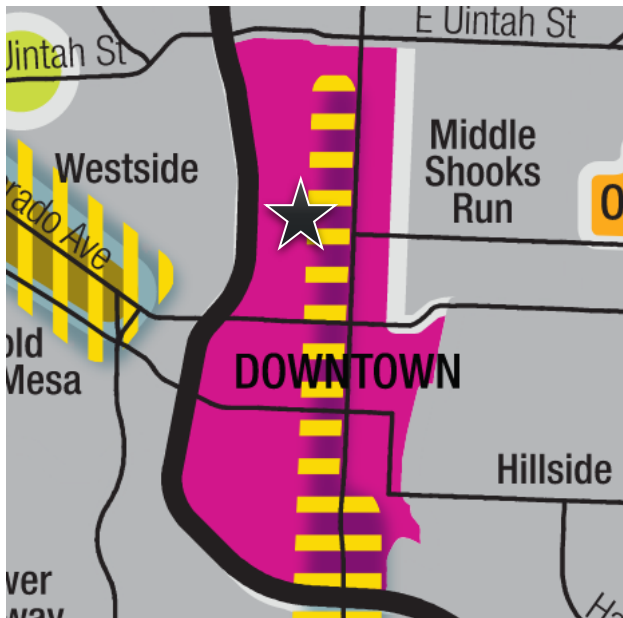
Downtown functions as an increasingly mixed-use neighborhood where everyday amenities and pedestrian-oriented uses are supported.

Policy VN-1.A – Celebrate and strengthen neighborhood identity.

Activating the corner of Platte Avenue and Cascade Avenue with a public-facing use supports Downtown's neighborhood identity and its role as an inclusive community space.

Policy VN-3.C – Promote neighborhood-level shopping and service options.

The coffee shop provides a local, accessible gathering space that enhances walkability and serves both residents and visitors.



Predominant Typology

Neighborhood Centers	Mature/Redeveloping Corridors
Community Activity Centers	New/Developing Corridors
Entertainment and Commercial Centers	Reinvestment Area and Community Hub
Regional Employment and Activity Centers	
Downtown	

Unique Places

The PlanCOS Vision Map identifies Downtown as a key activity center where walkable destinations and activated ground floors are encouraged. The proposed coffee shop introduces a small-scale, public-facing use that reinforces Downtown's role as a vibrant urban place.

Policy UP-2.A – Support infill and land-use investment in mature areas.

Reusing space within the existing church building represents appropriate infill that strengthens Downtown's walkable, mixed-use fabric.

Policy UP-3.B – Encourage activated, pedestrian-friendly destinations in key activity centers.

The addition of a public-facing storefront, accessible ramp, and improved pedestrian entry directly advances the goal of creating activated and human-scaled street edges within Downtown. The coffee shop fosters informal gathering, walkability, and everyday activity consistent with this PlanCOS policy direction.

Statement of Compliance

UVAR-26-0004 – Woodmen Valley Chapel Coffee Shop - Use Variance

After evaluation of the Use Variance, the application meets the review criteria.