



City of Colorado Springs

Regional Development
Center (Hearing Room)
2880 International Circle

Meeting Minutes - Final City Planning Commission

Wednesday, December 10, 2025

9:00 AM

2880 International Cir., 2nd Floor, Hearing Room

- 8.A. [APPL-25-0008](#) An Appeal of the administrative approval for the Colorado Springs Temple Development Plan consisting of 18.6 acres located at the southwest corner of Flying Horse Club Drive and Barossa Valley Road. (Legislative)

Located in Council District 2

Presenter:

Tamara Baxter, Planning Supervisor, City Planning Department
Kevin Walker, Planning Director, City Planning Department

Attachments: [Colorado Springs Temple Appeal Staff Report TPB](#)

[Attachment 1 - Neighborhood Meetings Notes](#)

[Attachment 2 - Public Comments](#)

[Attachment 3 - Applicant Responses to Public Comments](#)

[Attachment 4 - Approved Development Plan](#)

[Attachment 5 - Development Plan Project Statement](#)

[Attachment 6 - Appeal Application](#)

[COS Temple Appeal Presentation TPB](#)

[7.5.415 APPEALS](#)

Chair Casey disclosed his role as the current Vice President of the Flying Horse Homeowners Association Board of Directors. Chair Casey said he has lived there since 2012 and was aware the land was intended for religious use but has purposely avoided developer meetings to remain impartial. Chair Casey said the HOA does not take public positions on developments, and homeowner opinions vary widely. Chair Casey said he does not know the appellant nor the applicant and only recognized two names from the public comments submitted. Chair Casey said the applicant states they met with Flying Horse leadership, and clarified that it was not the HOA, but probably the developer of the neighborhood.

Tamara Baxter, Planning Supervisor, presented the appeal of an administrative decision on November 6th, for the 18.61 acres property located in Flying Horse, currently zoned Mixed-Use Neighborhood Scale

with United States Air Force Academy Overlay, with a proposed land use as a religious institution. City Council approved the Flying Horse Master Plan in October 2003, and the property was originally identified for office and residential use at a density of 10 units per acre. In 2012, part of the site was rezoned to OC, which transitioned to MXN in the 2023 citywide rezoning, and religious institutions became a permitted use in both zoning districts.

Ms. Baxter said although the appellant lives over 1,000 feet from the site, they submitted comments during the review process, qualifying them to appeal. The appellant raised concerns about architectural features exceeding height limits and the lack of visual mitigation conditions. Ms. Baxter said there is a specific exemption for religious structures, allowing spires or towers to exceed height limits if their largest horizontal cross-section is no more than 5% of the primary structure's footprint. In this case, the footprint is 33,000 square feet, permitting a spire up to 1,600 feet. The proposed steeple reaches 140.5 feet, where 45 feet would be allowed, making the steeple 95 feet taller than the standard. Standard notices were sent, and two neighborhood meetings were held in May and August. Public comments focused on traffic, steeple height, compatibility, and landscaping. Agency review was conducted, including USAFA, and their comments were addressed. The proposal is compliant with PlanCOS and met the review criteria.

Vice Chair Hensler asked if the 5% of 33,000 square feet was also meant to be in square feet. Ms. Baxter said they are linear feet.

Appellant's Presentation

Michael Kuhn, Attorney representing the property owner Jennifer Kuhn, said the appeal concerns whether the proposed temple spire complies with UDC which requires spires exceeding height limits to be designed or screened to minimize visibility from nearby residential areas. He said the appellant does not oppose the temple use or disputes the spire's compliance with footprint requirements, but the lack of any condition ensuring the spire's visibility is minimized. Mr. Kuhn said planning staff failed to analyze or apply the relevant UDC section during approval. He said the records show no internal discussion of the visibility requirement, and post-approval justifications, such as lighting direction, future tree

growth, tapered design, and promises of matte finishes, were not part of the original review and are unenforceable.

Mr. Kuhn said the code uses the word “shall” which means a binding requirement, not optional. He said the spire has a reflective gold finish with no conditions imposed to reduce visibility. He said the spire’s height of 140.5 feet, its color, and the 24-hour illumination maximize visibility, directly violating the code’s intent. Mr. Kuhn said the spire’s height can be compared to landmarks like the Statue of Liberty and airport control towers. He said other religious spires in the city are significantly shorter and not adjacent to residential areas. Mr. Kuhn said neutral design standards do not constitute a substantial burden to religion and mentioned a legal case where religious institutions accepted reduced spire heights. He said the interpretation of the 5% footprint rule might refer to horizontal area, not height.

Applicant’s Presentation

Caroline White, representing the applicant, said staff’s approval of the temple project fully complies with city code, and showed the temple’s location relative to major landmarks, including I-25, the Air Force Academy, and the future Powers Boulevard, emphasizing that the spire is positioned on the west side of the building, facing away from nearby homes. She said the site was designated for religious use as early as 2012 and that this will be the fourth temple in Colorado, serving the southern region and reducing travel burdens for church members. Ms. White said the official development plan includes detailed elevations and material specifications, not just the public-facing rendering, opposed to what was suggested by the appellant.

Ms. White said staff’s analysis of the UDC is that the steeple does not exceed the height limits allowed in the applicable table and therefore the design/screening requirement does not apply. She said the code only mandates screening for features that exceed both the zone height limit and the table’s exception criteria, which the temple spire does not. Ms. White said the church voluntarily incorporated design elements to reduce visibility: a smaller building footprint, use of matte materials, including glass fiber reinforced concrete and a matte finish for the steeple, and a tapered spire design, which are documented in the official development plan. She said screening would result in impractical and unattractive architectural

outcomes, and that no precedent exists for requiring such measures on compliant religious structures.

Ms. White said the appeal lacks legal basis, as the modifications requested are not supported by the Unified Development Code (UDC), since the appellant failed to prove any error in the approval. She presented renderings from multiple neighborhood viewpoints, including the appellant's residence, showing the temple's limited visual impact. Ms. White said the approved development plan includes substantial landscaping to further reduce visibility and enhance neighborhood integration. She said the project complies fully with the UDC, reflects thoughtful design, and supports religious expression.

Public Comments

Dave Phillips, Flying Horse resident, said he lives directly across from the temple site. He said it is a beautiful structure; however, most neighbors are not members of the church. He said he is concerned about the temple's impact on the residential character of the area and mitigation measures should be implemented. Mr. Phillips said he suggests increasing evergreen tree coverage to provide year-round screening, as deciduous trees lose leaves for half the year. He said lighting restrictions at night might be needed to preserve the quiet residential atmosphere.

Nathan Wood, Flying Horse resident for over six years, spoke in opposition and said he is also a member of the church. He said, contrary to the appellant's comment that the spire lacks religious purpose, spires symbolically direct attention toward heaven and foster religious contemplation, and represent a symbol of faith, strength and security. He said he volunteers at the Denver Temple, and that the approval of the Colorado Springs temple would greatly improve his and his wife's ability to participate in religious ordinances more frequently and conveniently.

Mike Law, Flying Horse resident for over 12 years, spoke in opposition and said religious spires, such as those at the Air Force Academy and Saint Mary's Cathedral, are similar in height and are inspiring symbols of faith. He said they are important in religious expression and have value of looking toward heaven and a higher power. He said the church has been considerate of neighbors and has responsibly addressed their concerns.

Jon Harvey, ecclesiastical leader, spoke in opposition and said he appreciates the appellant not being opposed to the temple, of which the structure is well-designed, and appropriately scaled, and points them to guide. He said it brings balance, peace and beauty to the community.

Creed Spillane, owner and operator of Quantum Residential Group and real estate broker with long-standing ties to the Flying Horse community, spoke in opposition and said Planning staff have been very professional. He said the temple's announcement has already positively impacted property values and buyer interest. He said, based on similar outcomes in other areas, the temple will be a valuable addition to the community.

Jodi Ellsworth, Flying Horse resident, spoke in opposition and said she wondered what screening the steeple would entail, and she worries it could lead to unattractive or artificial solutions. She said the temple is a beautiful piece.

Ed Ellsworth, Flying Horse resident and commercial real estate developer, spoke in opposition and said the proposed temple spire can be compared to iconic structures like Saint Mary's Cathedral and hotel brands, that show a proportional and recognizable design. He said temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints traditionally include prominent spires and the church has ensured architectural appropriateness. He said the temple will be a beautiful and fitting addition to the community.

Steven Wells, Flying Horse resident, spoke in opposition and said the church spent a lot of time addressing all requirements and he looks forward to having it built in the neighborhood.

Jeff Johnson, Flying Horse resident, spoke in opposition and said he looks forward to having this temple that will provide the members of the church the opportunity to worship. He said it would be useful and appealing to the community.

Kevin Woodward, Flying Horse resident, spoke in opposition and said he serves at the Denver Temple, where there were initial concerns during its approval process decades ago but were resolved, with the temple ultimately benefiting its community. He said the current design of the temple is very appropriate.

Catherine Bullock, Colorado Springs resident, spoke in opposition of the appeal and said the temples have a big spiritual significance in her faith, comparing them to sacred biblical structures. She said she drives an hour weekly to worship in Littleton and was moved to tears when the Colorado Springs temple was announced, which will be just minutes from her home. She said there is a symbolic importance of temple architecture, including spires that point heavenward, and said the temple's height was already reduced to respect neighborhood character. She said temples are peaceful, inclusive spaces that promote moral values and unity. Ms. Bullock said nearby structures like Topgolf have taller, unscreened features. She said the temple shows design integrity and will embrace architectural and religious diversity.

Airrion Willis, Colorado Springs resident, spoke in opposition of the appeal and said the temple is of spiritual importance to his family, especially his children. He said they feel joy and peace when seeing temple spires and are preparing to participate in religious ordinances. He said the temple brings comfort and beauty to the community, regardless of location.

Michael McDowell, Flying Horse resident, spoke in opposition to the appeal and said he lives uphill from the appellant and won't be able to see the temple from his home. He said he is excited about the project that will greatly reduce his and his wife's travel time to worship. He said temples are peaceful, beautifully landscaped spaces open to the community and with a big symbolic value of the steeple to look upward.

Wayne Williams, former Flying Horse representative and City Council member, spoke in opposition to the appeal and said he was part of the body that helped approve the current code and the height screening provision was intended for mechanical equipment like HVAC units, not architectural features like spires. He said the UDC table explicitly allows religious spires to exceed height limits without requiring screening, and doing so would be absurd and contrary to the code's intent. Mr. Williams said staff's approval was correct.

Shelly Edgin, 12-year resident of Flying Horse, spoke in opposition to the appeal and said there is a spiritual and symbolic importance of the temple's steeple, being central to the building's identity and purpose. She said she has attended neighborhood meetings and reviewed the design,

which is of thoughtful architecture and in alignment with religious values. Ms. Edgin said temples are sacred spaces for reflection and covenant-making, not used for regular services, with a positive impact on youth, who gain moral strength and character through temple participation. She said the project has value to families and the broader community.

Appellant's Rebuttal

Mr. Kuhn said he disagrees with the interpretation that design and screening requirements only apply when a spire exceeds the exception limits in the UDC table, as it would be illogical and inconsistent with the code's intent. He said even if the spire meets the table's criteria, its approval without visibility mitigation, given its 140.5-foot height in a residential area, is erroneous. He said he never advocated for boxing in the spire but emphasized that design measures like limiting nighttime illumination or specifying non-reflective finishes could have minimized visibility. Mr. Kuhn said there is a lack of specific conditions in the approval and noted that comparisons to other spires are flawed due to differences in location and regulatory context. He said the spire will be certainly visible from the appellant's property, contrary to what the rendering showed.

Applicant's Rebuttal

Ms. White said the architectural review for the temple was conducted by Classic Homes, the original developer, not the HOA. She said the steeple complies with the UDC height table and does not exceed the allowed maximum, making the design and screening requirements cited in the appeal inapplicable. Ms. White said the code clearly states such requirements only apply when a feature exceeds the height permitted in the table, not the zone's base height. She said, despite this, the church proactively incorporated design elements to reduce visibility, including slender spire architecture and matte materials. She said the Planning Director's approval was consistent with the code and should be upheld.

City Staff Comments

Sara Brewen, City Attorney's Office, said the design and screening requirements in the UDC apply when building features exceed the maximum height allowed in the zone district, not just when they exceed the

table's exceptions. She said interpreting the code otherwise would render the section meaningless; therefore, the steeple should be subject to design or screening to minimize visibility from adjacent residential areas.

Mr. Walker said Planning staff thoroughly reviewed the temple proposal, including the height, location, and design of the steeple. He said the steeple's placement on the western side of the site and its impact on nearby residential areas were carefully considered. Mr. Walker said federal regulations and religious land use protections were considered, and that the review appropriately balanced community impact with religious expression.

Commissioners' Questions

Commissioner Slattery said the Commission's role is evaluating the appeal based on code and facts. Commissioner Slattery said the site is zoned for religious use and has been master planned accordingly for over a decade. Commissioner Slattery said the spire appears to comply with UDC requirements, including the 5% footprint rule, and is designed with setbacks. Commissioner Slattery asked for documentation related to lighting and materials, especially the matte finish of the spire within the development plan and asked about the photometric plan, whether any lighting is proposed above ground level, particularly on the spire itself. Ms. White said the proposed lighting plan for directing lights upwards towards the steeple is significantly reduced compared to how most temples are normally lit. She said that information is not in the photometric plan because the City requires information about lighting escaping from the property.

Commissioner Willoughby asked if the lighting is compliant with the code section that states light can go upward only if it is reflected down by a canopy or similar structure. Daniel Sexton, Planning Manager for the Land Use Review Division, said the development plan includes lighting details starting on sheet 30, showing all proposed site lighting, including fixtures attached to the structure. He said staff evaluated potential glare and shielding requirements and all lighting was reviewed for compliance with UDC parameters.

Commissioner Cecil asked if the applicant would be able to show a

comparison of how the lighting is regularly placed for other temples versus this one. Ms. White said she does not have a comparison but would be able to show how this temple would look at night.

Vice Chair Hensler said a neighboring resident had concerns regarding the lighting schedule and the current plan indicates the spire would be illuminated 24 hours a day. Vice Chair asked whether the applicant had considered adjusting the lighting hours or intensity, particularly after 10:00 PM., providing a compromise with the neighbors' concerns. Ms. White said the image of the temple at night would show that the lighting has already been significantly reduced.

Chair Casey asked about the dimensions of the base of the spire. Ms. White said it tapers down from 18 feet at the bottom to three inches at the slenderest part.

Chair Casey asked if there was a line of sight done from the whole neighborhood or just specific points. Ms. White said just specific points, with the intention to show how it would look like from the closest properties, and the address provided by the appellant. She said there was a comment about the topography locating the temple at a higher ground and making it visible, however, it is the opposite.

Vice Chair Hensler asked if there is any excavation plan or will the temple be built at grade. Ms. White said sheet six of the development plan illustrates that Barossa Drive is located at the east side of the site, with an approximate six-foot drop to the temple site. She said this elevation difference will remain unchanged; however, the site is not leveled from north to south, so some grading and filling will be applied to balance it in that direction. She said the topography continues to slope downward toward the west.

Commissioner Cecil asked if the rendering presented complies with the section mentioned by Commissioner Willoughby. Ms. White said yes.

Ms. White said it is the intention of the applicant to use a matte finish on the steeple, even though it might not be mentioned in the development plan.

Chair Casey asked why no off-site impact analysis was provided regarding the spire. Ms. Baxter said pages eight and nine of the staff report show the

discussion about the height exemption and screening with landscape.

Chair Casey said during the appellant's statement it was mentioned that the development plan was approved without any visibility mitigation conditions; however, the City Attorney's Office has indicated it would be applicable. Ms. Baxter said it would be up to the Planning Commission to determine if they want any modification to the development plan for further visual screening. She said she looked at the application based on the code and determined the development plan met the criteria.

Commissioner Slattery asked if the applicant's statement in a response letter to public comment about using a matte finish would be enough to uphold them to that. Ms. Brewen said the item in question is the appeal and whether it meets the criteria, so any information not formally provided by the City would not be binding.

Chair Casey said staff presented optional motions, one of them being to modify it. Mr. Sexton said the Commission could uphold the approval of the original application and request additional conditions.

Commissioner Slattery said her preference would be to have something in writing about the finish of the steeple and she believes the lighting and material components are compliant. Commissioner Slattery said she would be happy to make a motion with modifications.

Commissioner Robbins said a screening of something of that height is unreasonable. Commissioner Robbins said the lighting scenario is not appropriate for the neighborhood and would be in violation of the code. Commissioner Robbins said faith should come from the heart, not from a man-made building. Commissioner Robbins said some temples that were mentioned as examples are not located in residential areas.

Vice Chair Hensler said if screening was required for this type of structure, their purpose might become ineffective. Vice Chair Hensler said the steeple might seem tall, but it does meet the 5% height exception, not being abnormally large compared to other temples where their spires are around 70% the height of the building. Vice Chair Hensler said she would be in support of the denial of the appeal.

Commissioner Willoughby said the UDC mentions design or screening,

and she thinks the steeple was designed to minimize the impacts, and it is appropriate and architecturally proportionate. Commissioner Willoughby said she would be in support of the motion that captures the finish in the development plan.

Commissioner Cecil said she agrees with Commissioner Willoughby that this has been designed rather than screened, which mitigates a lot of the issues. Commissioner Cecil said she would also like to add a condition about the top tier of the steeple not being lit to prevent intrusion into the neighborhood. Commissioner Cecil said she recommends staff discuss potentially clarifying this section in the code.

Chair Casey said they have heard from different Attorneys and interpretations vary, therefore, he cannot reach the determination that the approval of the application is contrary to the expressed language in the code, as stated by the appellant. Chair Casey said he is in favor of the conditions for the development plan.

Commissioner Gigiano said she agrees with Commissioner Robbins about the lighting being problematic and not compatible with the neighborhood.

Motion by Commissioner Cecil, seconded by Commissioner Slattery, to Deny the Appeal and modify the administrative decision, based upon the finding that the appellant has not substantiated that the appeal satisfies the review criteria outlined in City Code (UDC) Section 7.5.415.A.2, with revisions to the development plan that the facade material of the steeple shall be a non-reflective matte finish and the top tier not be illuminated with the exception of that required from FAA regulations.

The motion passed by a vote of 7-1-0-0.

Aye: 7 - Vice Chair Hensler, Commissioner Cecil, Commissioner Slattery, Commissioner Robbins, Chair Casey, Commissioner Clements and Commissioner Willoughby

No: 1 - Commissioner Gigiano