

EARLY CONNECTIONS LEARNING CENTER FENCE – FBZ WARRANT Downtown Review Board - May 6, 2025

Staff Report by Case Planner: Johnny Malpica, AICP



Quick Facts

Applicant

Christine Costa – RTA Architects

Property Owner

Early Connections Learning Center

Developer

N/A

Address / Location

415 Sahwatch St

TSN

6418315017

Zoning and Overlays

Current: FBZ-CEN

Site Area

28,620 sq. ft.

Proposed Land Use

Early Childhood Education Center

Applicable Code

Form-Based Code

Project Summary

This application proposes the conversion of a 17,000 sq. ft. building that previously served as the Colorado Springs Conservatory into an early childhood education center. This conversion involves significant interior renovations as well as exterior modifications, including landscaping, parking lot striping, and multiple fenced-in outdoor play areas. One of the play areas fronts along Costilla St. and includes a 5' aluminum fence. This building has a Common Lawn frontage typology and as such, section 2.4.1 of the Form-Based Code requires that Common Lawn frontages remain unfenced and visually contiguous with adjacent yards. As such, Early Connections Learning Center is requesting an FBZ Warrant with an associated Minor Improvement Plan to allow for construction of this 5' fence along Costilla St.

File Number	Application Type	Decision Type
FBZN-25-0001	Form-Based Zone Warrant	Quasi-Judicial

Background

Prior Land-Use History and Applicable Actions

<i>Action</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Date</i>
Annexation	Town of Colorado Springs	1872
Subdivision	Rectors Subdivision	1985
Master Plan	Experience Downtown Master Plan	2016
Prior Enforcement Action	N/A	N/A

Site History

- This building was constructed in 1984 to serve as an office building.
- In 2006 it was remodeled to serve as the Colorado Public Defenders Office.
- This site was rezoned to FBZ-CEN (Form-Based Zone Central Sector) with the adoption of the Form-Based Code in 2009.
- In 2018 the building's interior was remodeled through a Change of Occupancy building permit for the Colorado Springs Conservatory.

Applicable Code

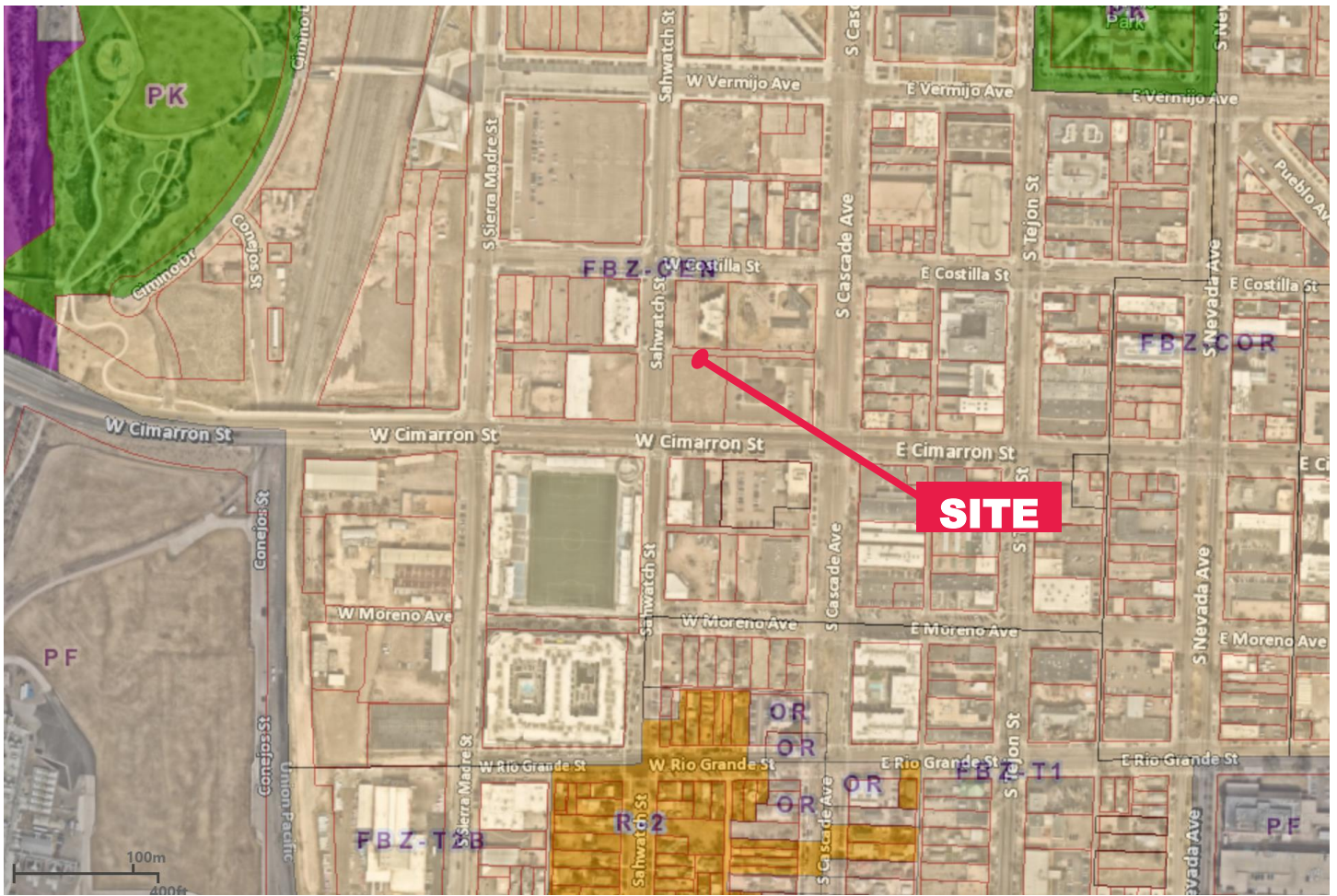
The subject application is within the boundaries of the Form-Based Zone which requires zoning action within these boundaries to be reviewed under the Form-Based Code. All subsequent references within this report that are made to "the Code" and related sections are referenced to the Form-Based Code.

Surrounding Zoning and Land Use

Adjacent Property Existing Conditions

	<i>Zoning</i>	<i>Existing Use</i>	<i>Special Conditions</i>
North	FBZ-CEN	Warehouse/Storage, Residential	Site approved for One Vela Mixed Use Building
West	FBZ-CEN	Office	None that are applicable
South	FBZ-CEN CU	Vacant Commercial Lots	Site approved for 12-story office building
East	FBZ-CEN	Office, Bank	None that are applicable

Zoning Map



Stakeholder Involvement

Public Notice

Public Notice Occurrences (Poster / Postcards)	2 - Internal Review/Prior to Downtown Review Board Public Hearing
Postcard Mailing Radius	1000'
Number of Postcards Mailed	65
Number of Comments Received	None

Public Engagement

No public comments were received for this application.

Timeline of Review

Initial Submittal Date	01/23/2025
Number of Review Cycles	2
Item(s) Ready for Agenda	05/06/2025

Agency Review

Traffic Impact Study

No comments received.

School District

No comments received.

Parks

No comments received.

SWENT

Technical comments were received but have been addressed in subsequent resubmittals.

Colorado Springs Utilities

Technical comments were received that have now been addressed in subsequent resubmittals.

Fire

Technical comments were received that have been addressed in subsequent resubmittals.

Engineering Development Review

Comments remain unaddressed requiring the installation of a 4' sidewalk along Sahwatch St. The installation of a sidewalk with a substandard width requires a variance application through Engineering Development Review. This is being requested to reduce the impact that the sidewalk would have on the existing street trees.

Form-Based Zone Minor Improvement Plan and Warrant

Summary of Application

The Colorado Springs' Form-based Code (FBC) regulates development so as to obtain a specific urban form. In doing so, significant emphasis is placed on the physical form rather than on land use, so as to obtain a public realm that is pedestrian friendly comprised of various land uses that are complimentary. For this condition to be attained, the FBC provides regulations surrounding building typology, building envelope standards, and building frontage typologies, among others. These standards ensure that the intentions of the FBC are realized.

The Early Connections Learning Center Minor Improvement Plan embraces the adaptive reuse of an existing office and educational building for use as an early childhood education center. The renovations include thoughtful attention to preserving the site's many shade trees, building architecture, and site layout (Figure 1). The subject site is a corner lot fronting along Sahwatch Street to the west and Costilla Street to the north. It consists of a 17,000 sq. ft. two-story building that is positioned towards the eastern side of the property, so as to make way for the large 36-space surface parking lot to the west. The northern and southern sides of the building are adorned by large shade trees and irrigated turf grass. While the adaptive reuse of the building represents many benefits including reduced environmental impact and cost savings, the building and site lacks the necessary outdoor amenities and facilities that support the proposed use of an early childhood education center. Considering the location of the building and the existing large surface parking area, the only feasible location to accommodate the outdoor amenities that support a childhood education center

are within the northern and southern turfed areas of the property, where the applicant is proposing two thoughtfully designed outdoor play areas that are surrounded by a 5' fence. In accord with section 2.4.1, the Common Lawn frontage properties are landscaped, and the building's façade is setback from the property line, meeting both minimum and maximum setbacks. Additionally, the front yard is required to remain unfenced and visually contiguous with the adjacent yards, so as to support a common landscape. The proposed application is not consistent with the above standard along the Costilla Street frontage, and as such Early Connections is required to submit a Minor Improvement Plan with an associated Form-Based Code Warrant application.

Application Review Criteria

This application is subject to the review criteria set forth in Section 5.4 of the Form-Based Zone.

Form-Based Code Section 5.4

Section 5.4.1 establishes The Downtown Review Board is the primary entity with the authority to approve or disapprove a request for a warrant pursuant to regulations established within this Section.

Warrant requests shall be reviewed for substantial compliance with the following criteria:

- A. 5.4.3.1 Is the requested warrant consistent with the intent of the form-based code?
- B. 5.4.3.2 Is the requested warrant, as well as the project as a whole, consistent with Section 4 – Design Guidelines of the form-based code?
- C. 5.4.3.3 Is the requested warrant reasonable due to the proposed project's exceptional civic or environmental design?
- D. 5.4.3.4 Is the requested warrant consistent with the Downtown Master Plan?
- E. 5.4.3.5 Is the requested warrant consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan?

The applicant's proposal includes the construction of a 5' fence that encloses the play area located along Costilla Street. This is necessary so as to ensure a safe place for children to play and enjoy the outdoors. Considering the existing site layout, and that it is a corner lot with a common lawn frontage typology, alternative locations for the fenced in play area are not available. Despite this, the outdoor programming of the site includes careful attention to preserving existing shade trees and will include the addition of a sidewalk along Sahwatch St that is installed in a way that reduces its impact on the existing street trees (Figure 2). It should be noted that the included site plan (Figure 1) does not yet show the location of the proposed sidewalk, as its exact placement is still being negotiated and will be determined administratively. Furthermore, the outdoor play area, while fenced in, includes landscaping and vegetation outside of the fence that will further enhance the pedestrian realm. Finally, the fence itself consists of black panels with a flat top and bottom that are non-opaque, which allows for visual contiguity into and between sites. As such, the requested warrant is consistent with the intent of the Form Based Code and with the Design Guidelines prescribed in Section 4.

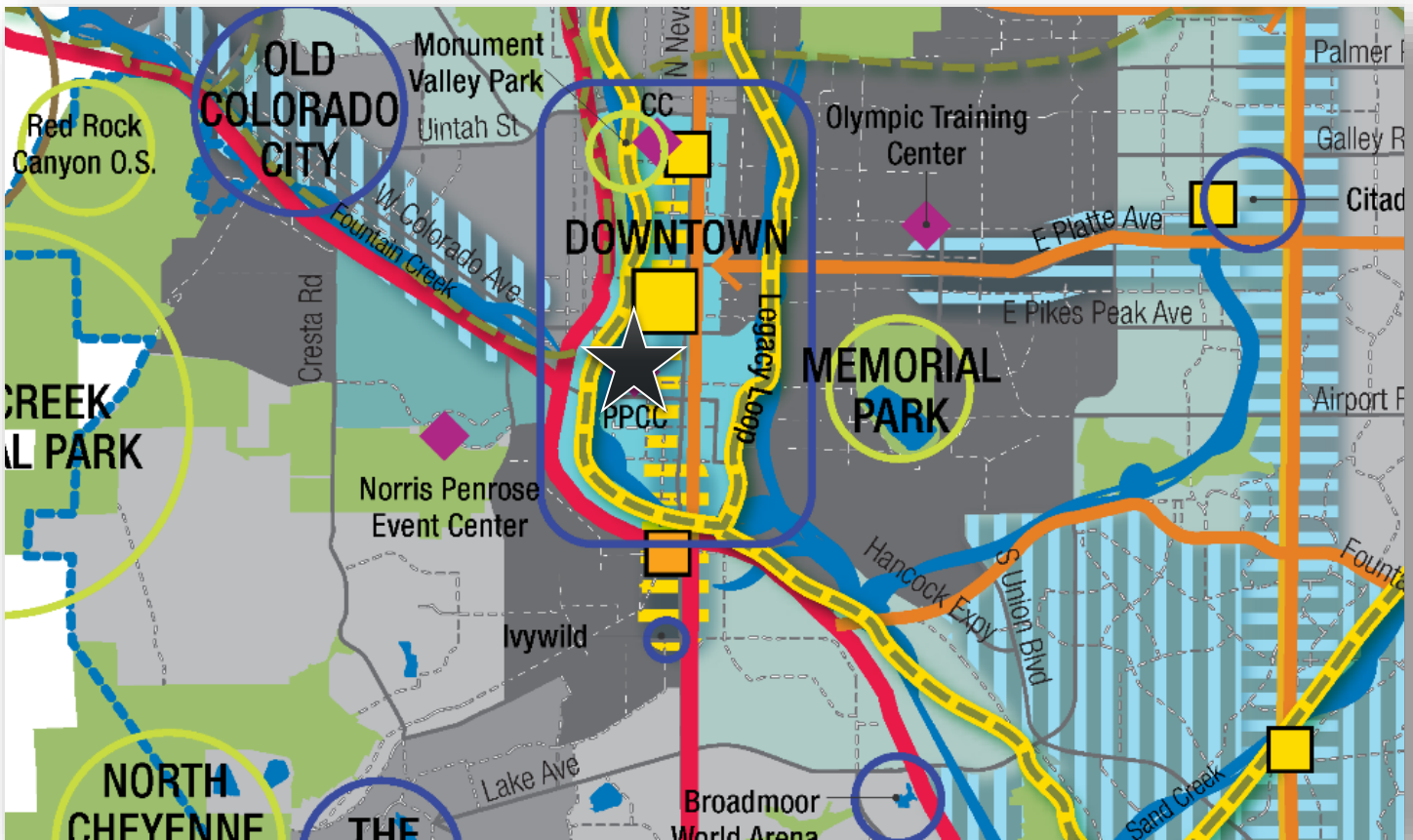
With consideration to the criteria above, it should be noted that the proposed use as an early childhood education center is important for a growing downtown environment that has seen a significant increase in residential units in the last decade. Considering the thoughtful adaptive reuse of the building that includes enhanced façade treatments, and landscaping that improves the visual appearance of the site for pedestrians, the warrant is reasonable and includes exceptional civic and environmental design. Finally, wholistically, the proposal is consistent with both the Experience Downtown Master Plan and the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Compliance with the Experience Downtown Master Plan.

The Experience Downtown Master Plan establishes eight goals that were developed in collaboration with community and business leaders, Downtown neighbors, and other stakeholders. Each goal contains "tactical, specific" action steps that allow for the goal to be achieved and/or implemented. Goal two ensures that housing and the necessary amenities are available to people of all cultures, ages and incomes. Action steps include incentivizing construction of at least 2,000 residential units by 2025 and supporting and incentivizing the development of publicly accessible residential-serving amenities. This proposal aids in the achievement of goal two as an early education center is an important resident-serving amenity, and in doing so helps to make downtown a vibrant neighborhood for people of all backgrounds. Although the common lawn frontage typology's requirement of an unfenced and

visually contiguous yard is being varied, the proposal more broadly minimizes the impact through use of non-opaque fencing materials as well as landscaping that enhances the pedestrian realm.

PlanCOS Vision



Site Location

- Majestic Landscapes**
- Parks & Open Space
 - Complete Creeks
 - Primary Trail Network
 - Legacy Loop & Ring the Springs

- Thriving Economy**

- Renowned Culture**

- Activity Centers**
- Mature/Redeveloping
 - New/Developing
 - Reinvestment Area & Community Hub

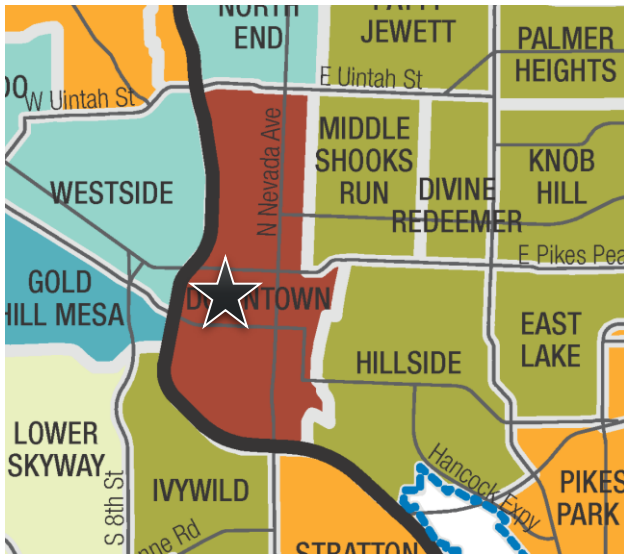
Strong Connections

- Intercity Corridors
- City Priority Corridors
- Smart Corridor
- Bike Network
- Park-N-Ride
- Transit Hub

Vibrant Neighborhoods

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

Note: This map depicts a unified city boundary, including enclaves of land that have not yet been annexed.



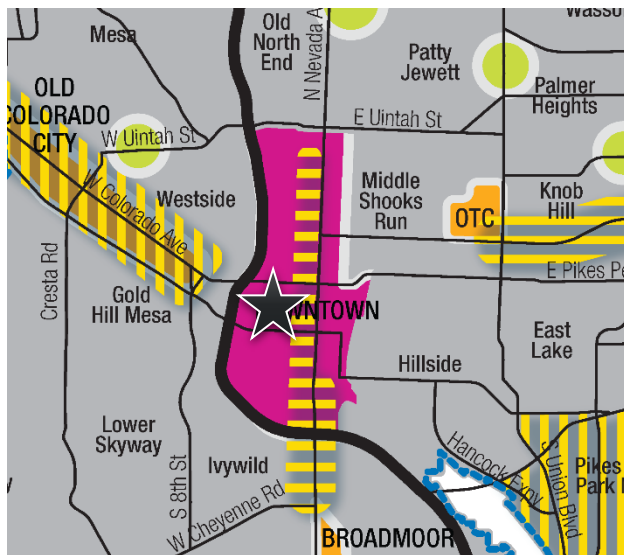
Predominant Typology

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

Vibrant Neighborhoods

This project site is located within the City's Downtown, which is considered a downtown typology.

- Strategy VN-3.B-3: Encourage walkable civic, retail, and community gathering places as design elements within neighborhood centers.



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

This project site falls within the Downtown predominant typology.

- Strategy UP-1.A-5: Design urban activity centers to encourage walkability.
- Strategy UP-1.C-1: Locate and design public spaces and civic facilities at key locations throughout the city that set an example for quality design and integrate with surrounding private development.

Based on the above stated strategies, staff finds the proposal to be inconsistent with the City's comprehensive plan, PlanCOS.

Statement of Compliance

FBZN-25-0001

Staff finds that the application complies with the standards of the Form-Based Zone as well as the criteria for relief through the Warrant process. This finding is premised on the forthcoming installation of a sidewalk along Sahwatch Street that complies with Engineering Development Review Criteria.