



Los Alamos County  
Community Development Department

**PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

**Public Hearing Date:** November 20, 2024

**Subject:** Case No. REZ-2024-0019

**wners/Applicants:** Los Alamos County Capital Projects and Maintenance Facilities,  
on behalf of Los Alamos County, property owner

**That. Case Manager:** Desirae J. Lujan, Senior Planner

*Professional Background:*

*Associates Architectural & Civil Drafting; 16 years in Planning and Land Use, Local Government, with five years in Case Management of Development Applications.*

**CASE NO. REZ-2024-0019.** The Los Alamos County Capital Projects and Maintenance Facilities, on behalf of Los Alamos County, property owner, is requesting a Minor Zone Map Amendment to change the property, EA3 U, from its current Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District to the Institutional (INS) Zone District. The property is commonly known as the Civilian Women's Dormitory and is addressed as 1725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, within the Eastern Area 3 Subdivision.

*See Attachment A: Application Submittal.*



Image 1: Google Earth Street Image, Nov. 2022 – Women's Dorm Building east elevation facing 17<sup>th</sup> Street

## BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The subject property ("Property") at 1725 17th Street is located within the Eastern Area 3 Subdivision, bounded by N Sage, 17th, Peach, and 18th Streets. This neighborhood lies within the collector streets of Canyon Road (north), 15th Street (east), and Nectar Street (south).

The lot is 50,529 sq. ft. (1.01 acres) and contains a two-story, 5,462 sq. ft. building, historically known as the Women's Army Corp. Building or Civilian Women's Dorm Building ("Women's Dorm Building"). Constructed in 1943 during the Manhattan Project era, this building originally served as a dormitory and is one of only two remaining from that period. Most recently, it was used by the Christian Science Church, which later expressed interest in selling the property. The Los Alamos County Council ("County Council") approved the purchase at a regular meeting on July 30, 2019 (see Exhibit 1). As one of the last Manhattan Project era properties in the area, the council purchased the property for its interpretive value and to consider its use as part of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park

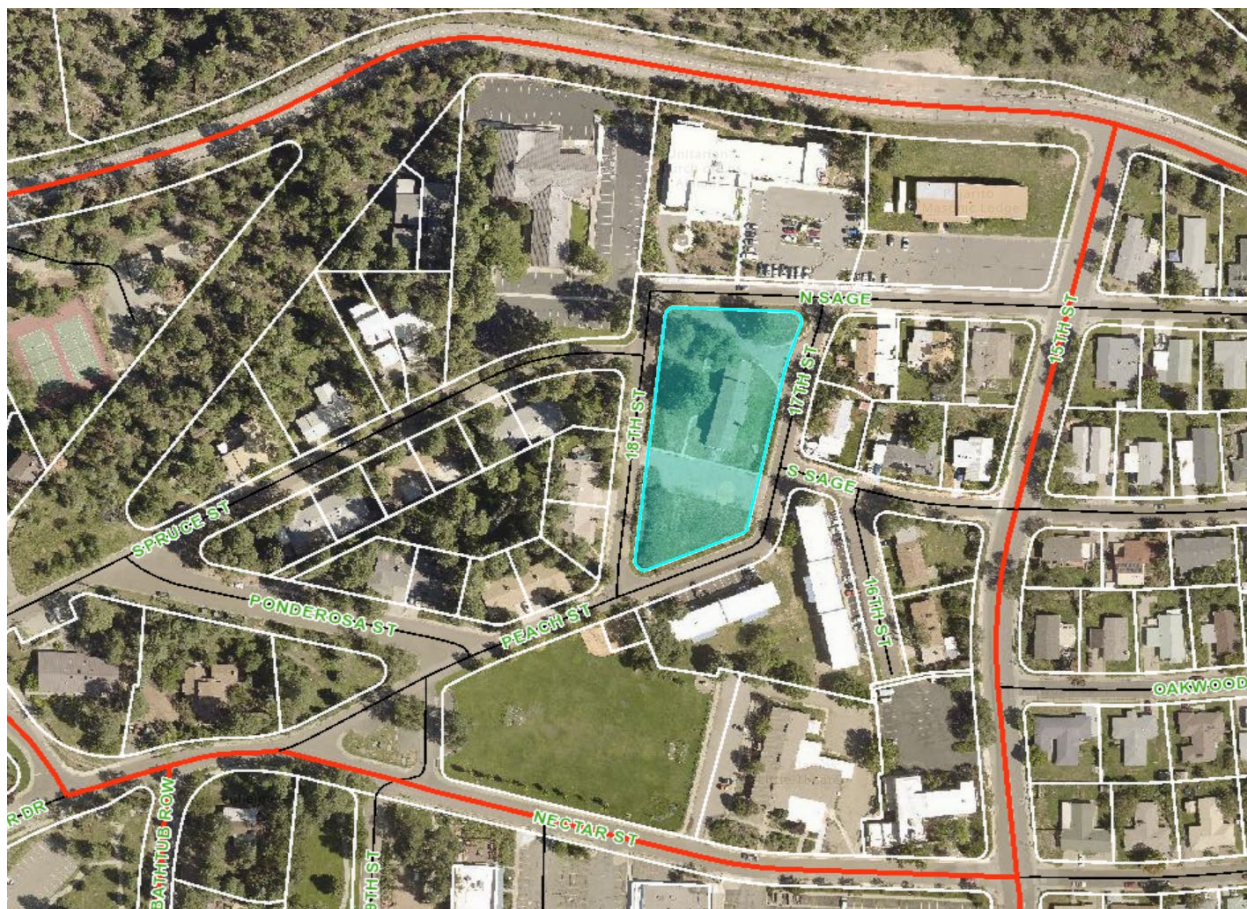


Figure 1: Location Area Map, Collector Streets shown in red

To preserve and occupy the building, the County contracted Mullen-Heller Architecture in 2021 to design and lead public engagement sessions to gather input from residents and stakeholders through public meetings and determine the property's best use. On July 12, 2022, the County Council approved a conceptual design to convert the building into a visitor center with museum exhibits, office space, and a caretaker's unit for the National Park Service (see Exhibit 2).



Under the Los Alamos County Development Code, Exhibit 3, Section 16-14, Permitted Uses, these intended uses are prohibited in the current Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District. Consequently, the property must be rezoned to proceed to the next phase, Major Site Plan Adoption. As directed by the Comprehensive Plan ("Plan"), Exhibit 4, Page 3, applicants should refer to the Plan and the Future Land Use Map ("FLUM") as guiding frameworks when preparing and presenting land use applications. The outcome is an application for designation within the Institutional (INS) Zone District.

## ZONING

The Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District is intended to accommodate single-family dwellings with a variety of lot sizes and dimensions in established neighborhoods to maintain and protect their character. The parcels north, west, and east of the subject property are mostly zoned Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) with Open Space-Public Park (OS-PP), Institutional (INS), and Multi-Family Residential, Medium Density (MFR-M) to the south. Lots adjacent to the west and east contain single-family homes, while the northern lots operate religious institutions, and a fraternity organization.

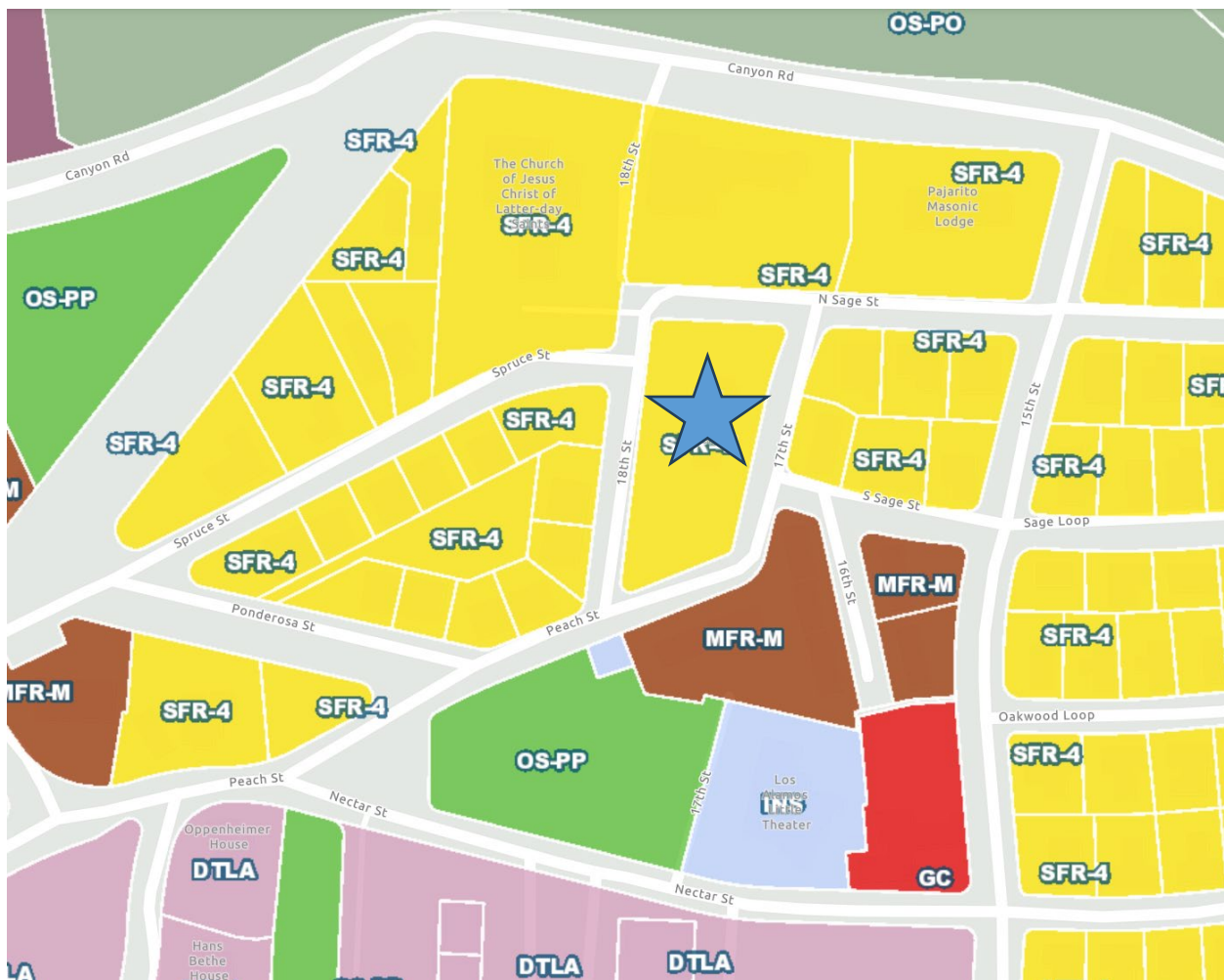


Figure 2: Vicinity Zoning Map

The Institutional (INS) Zone District permits public, civic, and institutional uses, such as government facilities, educational institutions, healthcare, and recreational or cultural facilities. This would include uses like those envisioned by the County Council when the property was

purchased for its potential as an interpretive site within the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. The allowed uses support community-oriented services rather than residential or commercial. Properties zoned INS are typical of publicly owned lands as shown within the Official Zoning Map. **See Exhibit 5.**

If the property is to be used under a lease or contract with a unit of government, an application for a conditional use permit shall be applied for and acted upon by the Planning and Zoning Commission. Under this scenario, the land may be put to any use accessory to the governmental use or to any other uses allowed in the Multi-family High Density, General Commercial, Professional Office, and Industrial zones. Future use of the property would therefore require a Conditional Use Permit review and approval, and would be subject to all appropriate Development Standards, including Neighborhood Protections and compliance with Site Plan procedures and requirements.

### **PRE-APPLICATION AND NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING**

Prior to the submission of a Zone Map Amendment application, the applicant is required, pursuant to Section 16-72(b)(1), to attend a Pre-Application Meeting and to conduct a Neighborhood Meeting.

- *Pre-Application [16-72-(b)(1)]:*  
The applicant attended a pre-application meeting with county staff on **April 1, 2024.**
- *Neighborhood Meeting [16-72-(b)(2)]*
  - Property Owners (300-ft) were mailed notice of a Neighborhood Meeting on **April 28, 2024.**
  - The applicant held a Neighborhood meeting on **May 4, 2024.** A Summary of the meeting and associated documents are included in Attachment A, Application Submittal.

### **AUGUST 1, 2024, INTERDEPARTMENTAL REVIEW COMMITTEE (IDRC) REVIEW**

The Interdepartmental Review Committee (IDRC) reviewed the application for a Minor Zone Map Amendment and did not have concerns with a rezone. A vote of consensus was made to move the application forward to a Planning and Zoning Commission meeting.

*See Attachment B: IDRC Minutes*

### **AUGUST 28, 2024, PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**

The Planning and Zoning Commission was responsible for holding a public hearing and issuing a recommendation to the County Council according to the Minor Zone Map Amendment decision criteria. The hearing took place on August 28, 2024, and allowed the presentation of evidence, testimony, and cross-examination. The vote ended with a 3-2 majority in favor of the amendment. However, per Section 16-72(f)(5)(b)(9), Commission approval requires at least four affirmative votes from the members present. Since this threshold was not met, under Section 16-72(f)(5)(c)(2)(iv) of the Development Code, the application proceeded to County Council on October 29, 2024, without a recommendation.

*See Attachment E: PZ Commission Non-Recommendation*



## OCTOBER 29, 2024, COUNTY COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING

The County Council moved to remand Case No. REZ-2024-0019 back to the Planning and Zoning Commission for public hearing and to make a recommendation.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

The *Los Alamos County Code of Ordinances, Chapter 16 – Development Code, Sec. 16-72(c) Notifications*, sets forth the requirements for proper notice to the public for a public hearing:

- *Published and Posted Notice [16-72(c)(4)]:*
  - Notice published in a newspaper of general circulation within the County at least 14-calendar days before the meeting or hearing. ***Published on October 31, 2024.***
  - The posting of at least one sign on a street abutting the property that is the subject of the application – visible from the street – for at least 14-calendar days before the public meeting or hearing. ***Posted on November 5, 2024.***
- *Mailed Notice [16-72-(c)(5)]:*
  - Mailed notice 14 days prior to the public hearing to all owners of record as identified in the records of the County Tax Assessor or occupants of properties within 300 ft., excluding public rights-of-way, of exterior lot lines of the subject property. ***Mailed Certified on November 1, 2024.***

***The notices specified that the public hearing would be located at 1000 Central Ave, Los Alamos, NM, with an option for the public to provide comment virtually, via Zoom.***

As of the drafting of this report, November 14, 2024, staff has not received any comment or questions from the public regarding resubmittal of this application.

*See Attachment C: Public Notices*

### MINOR ZONE MAP AMENDMENT

Section 16-74(h) of the Los Alamos County Development Code states that an application for a Zone Map Amendment of the Official Zoning Map shall be approved if it meets all the following criteria:

- a. **The proposed Zone Map Amendment is consistent with the health, safety, and welfare of the County as shown by conformance with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and other adopted County plans or policies.**

**Applicant Response:** The proposed Zone Map Amendment conforms with the Comprehensive Plan regarding the health, safety, and welfare of the County:

- 1) Supporting the efforts to market and brand Los Alamos as a scenic destination featuring recreation, science, and history, attract new tourism-related business, and revitalize areas of Los Alamos and White Rock to maximize the use of County owned land. Potential strategy mentioned in the Comprehensive Plan "Partner with the National Park Service and others to promote Los Alamos County as an outdoor recreation destination".
- 2) The Comprehensive Plan describes the Purpose of the Future Land Use Map and states that the Comprehensive Plan intends that rezoning applications for uses that conform to the Future Land Use Map would follow an expedited and less onerous application and review process than those proposals for use that do not conform to uses shown on the Future Land Use Map.

- 3) The Comprehensive Plan goes on to explain how changes to zoning should conform to the Future Land Use Map as is the request in this application.
- 4) Growth:
  - a. Maximize our opportunity with respect to the development of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park.
  - b. Capitalize on Los Alamos County's role as a gateway to three national parks.
  - c. Enhance community pride.
- 5) Redevelopment:
  - a. Often involves updating or replacing old, substandard structures with new, healthier living environments that meet current building codes.
  - b. The Manhattan Project National Historical Park has outgrown its current location in Los Alamos County to the point that staff and exhibits are divided into two separate locations. This project will allow the Manhattan Project National Historical Park to expand their efforts and combine into one central location as a redevelopment project.
  - c. Upgrading the site traffic circulation patterns and parking will improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and the public alike.
  - d. Through code compliance efforts, the project will ensure that the new development meets current safety codes and regulations.

**Staff Response:** In the staff's expert opinion, this criterion has been met because the Future Land Use Map ("FLUM"), adopted by the Comprehensive Plan ("Plan") (Exhibit 4, Page 111), expresses goals and policies that guide future growth and change. The FLUM uses broad categories to depict land use classifications, which illustrate preferred and anticipated uses rather than corresponding directly to zoning. The Women's Dorm property, shown as "Institutional" on

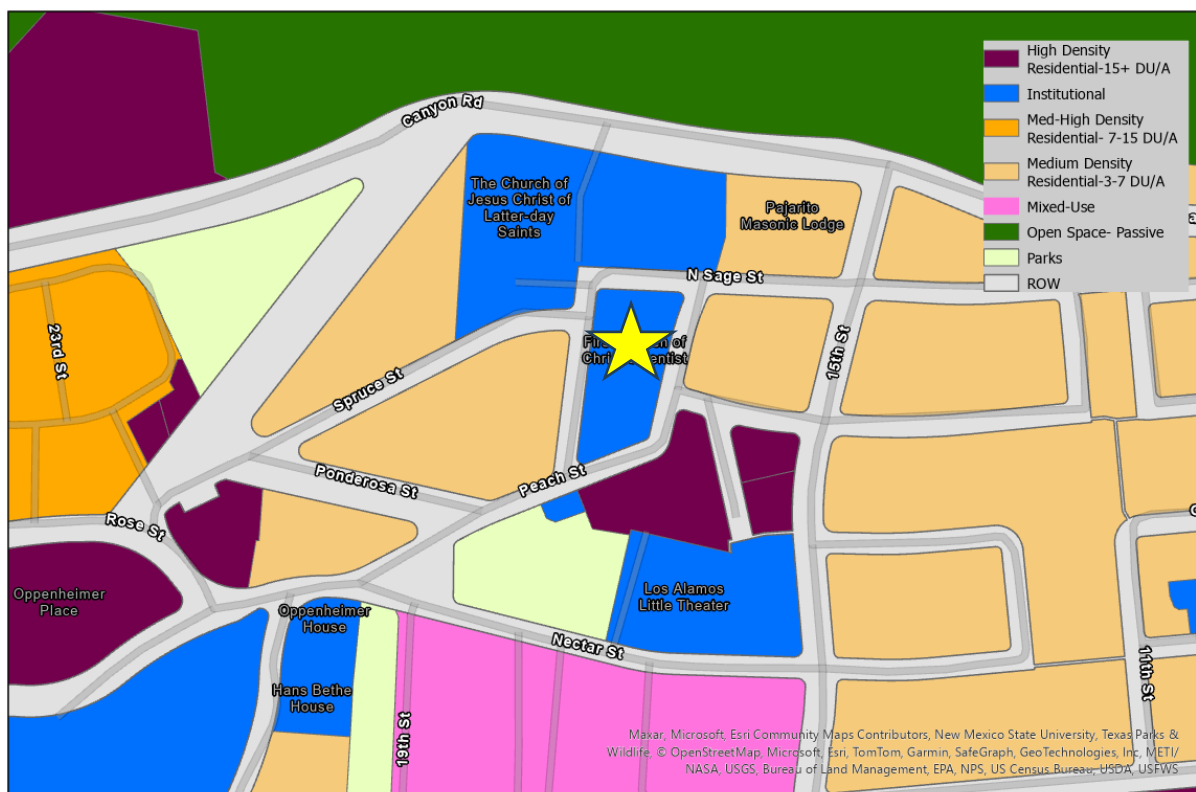


Figure 3: Vicinity Future Land Use Map

Figure 3: Vicinity FLUM, aligns with these classifications. Development goals include policies such as, "Ensure greater certainty in the development review process, especially if the application conforms to the Comprehensive Plan and the Future Land Use Map."

The Plan sets goals and policies to guide and encourage growth within the community, aiming to ensure its success. Key land use policies under the Growth and Development Goals include maximizing the use of County-owned lands (Page 71). Maintaining the property as a Single-Family Residential Zone limits land use to residential purposes, with a density of one dwelling unit per lot. In contrast, the Institutional (INS) Zone District offers greater community value by expanding the potential services that the lot can support, such as a visitor center, museum, and caretaker's unit.

A redevelopment goal for the County focuses on revitalizing vacant, blighted areas and underutilized properties (Page 81). Since the County took ownership, the existing building has remained vacant. Rezoning the property would promote redevelopment of a unique building and site, creating opportunities to attract visitors and boost community pride (Page 70).

The Purpose of the Plan, (Page 3) states: "Developers and individual applicants will use the Plan and the map as a guiding framework when preparing and presenting land use applications," and, "The County Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission will use the policies in the Plan, together with the Future Land Use Map, to guide and inform their decisions on requested policy changes, as well as development proposals."

Additionally, it states, "Members of the community will find assurance in Plan policies and the map ("FLUM") about what to expect by way of change and neighborhood preservation."

**b. The existing zone district designation is shown to be inappropriate for one or more of the following reasons:**

- 1. It was established in error;**
- 2. Changed conditions warrant the rezoning; or**
- 3. A different zone is more advantageous to the community as articulated by conformance with each applicable goal and policy of the Comprehensive Plan, including the future land use map.**

**Applicant Response:** Los Alamos County purchased the former Christian Science Church which was originally constructed as a woman's dormitory during the Manhattan Project era. The underlying zoning at the time of purchase is SFR-4 which does allow for a church of worship but does not specifically allow for a visitor center, museum, or caretakers suite. After careful consideration of multiple designs, and several public meetings to discuss the potential use of the property, the council has given direction to pursue the use as a visitor center and museum under the direction of the National Park Service to house and operate the Manhattan Project National Historic Park.

Based on the direction of Council, a zoning amendment is necessary to pursue the requested use. The future land use map reflects the zoning as INS which is in keeping with the underlying zoning designation of most properties owned by the County.



**Staff Response:** In the staff's expert opinion, this criterion has been met because the change in ownership from private to public is a changed condition that warrants a rezone. The Institutional (INS) Zone District offers greater benefits to the community by repurposing a vacant building as a visitor center and museum with associated office space, and a caretaker's unit. Under previous private ownership, the Single-Family Residential Zone District (SFR-4) supported uses such as dormitories and religious institutions. However, to maximize the site's potential and implement the county's approved plans, a zoning change is necessary. As outlined in Criterion A and shown in Figure 3: Vicinity FLUM, the proposed INS Zone District aligns with the Future Land Use Map.

**c. The proposed zoning will not designate a zone district different from surrounding zone districts to one small area, i.e. create a spot zone, unless one or more of the following criteria are met:**

- 1. Granting such zoning accomplishes the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan;**
- 2. Unique characteristics specific to the site exist; or**
- 3. The zoning serves as an appropriate transition between land uses of higher and lower intensity.**
- 4. The County's existing and proposed infrastructure and public improvements including, but not limited to utilities, streets, sidewalks, or trails have adequate capacity to serve the development made possible by the Zone Map Amendment.**

**Applicant Response:** The granting of an INS zoning designation for the property located at 172517th Street is in keeping with the future land use map and is necessary to pursue the Council request to create a visitor center, museum, and caretaker's unit. The INS zone accomplishes the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan regarding:

- Supporting the efforts to market and brand Los Alamos as a scenic destination featuring recreation, science, and history, attract new tourism-related business, and revitalize and eliminate blight in the area.
- Maximizing our opportunity with respect to the development of the Manhattan Project Historical Park. Currently, the Manhattan Project Historical Park has outgrown its current location. By completing this project of refurbishing the existing woman's dormitory building, this will allow the National Park Service to support the efforts to market and brand Los Alamos as a scenic destination, and to capitalize on Los Alamos County's role as a gateway to three national parks
- Public services and facilities required to serve the proposed development have adequate capacity and would conform with the requirements of the County's construction standards. A Pre-application meeting with relevant County departments occurred on April 4, 2024. Utilities are both available and existing, and currently on-site, and have adequate capacity to serve the project. Improvements will be made to improve upon some of the existing infrastructure for fire suppression, water, sewer, and irrigation. The existing sidewalk system will involve the construction of new sidewalks and/or the improvement of the existing sidewalks. All improvements will be made in accordance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.
- The tie into the Urban Trail will be looked at in depth to determine if the proper right of way is in existence to create a trail system incorporating this property within its system.

**Staff Response:** In the staff's expert opinion, this criterion has been met and is not considered spot zoning because the change aligns with the Comprehensive Plan, and as established in Criterion A and B, the Institutional (INS) Zone District accomplishes the goals and policies of the Plan providing a long-term, community-wide interest. Approving the Minor Zone Map Amendment is consistent with the FLUM which envisions institutional uses in this area. Additionally, the change would not benefit a single property owner, but rather it is a broader strategy to provide a community amenity and preserve a building of historic significance. Lastly, IDRC has evaluated the existing and proposed infrastructure and improvements and has determined that they are adequate to serve an INS Zone District and the planned use of the site.

**d. The establishment, maintenance, or operation of uses made possible by the Zone Map Amendment will not be detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of persons residing or working adjacent to or within the proximity of the subject property.**

**Applicant Response:** Public services and facilities required to serve the proposed development have adequate capacity and would conform with the requirements of the County's construction standards. A Pre-application meeting with relevant County departments occurred on April 4, 2024. Utilities are both available and existing, and currently on-site, and have adequate capacity to serve the project. Improvements will be made to improve upon some of the existing infrastructure for fire suppression, water, sewer, and irrigation. The existing sidewalk system will involve the construction of new sidewalks and/or the improvement of the existing sidewalks. All improvements will be made in accordance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

The tie into the Urban Trail will be looked at in depth to determine if the proper right of way is in existence to create a trail system incorporating this property within its system.

**Staff Response:** In the staff's expert opinion, this criterion has been met because current institutional uses operate nearby, setting a precedent for comparable activities on the property. The INS Zone District aligns with the neighborhood make-up, which integrates Multi-Family and Institutional uses among Single-family properties. This combination of uses has demonstrated a safe and harmonious coexistence. While the INS Zone permits some commercial uses, any major alterations to the function, appearance, or use of the property may require further standards, regulations, or public hearing process to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the neighborhood.

## **DRAFT MOTION**

### **Motion Option 1:**

I move to recommend that the County Council **approve** Case No. **REZ-2024-0019**, a request by Los Alamos County Capital Projects and Maintenance Facilities, on behalf of Los Alamos County, property owner. Approval would amend the zone district of the Property, EA3 U, from its current Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District to the Institutional (INS) Zone District. The Property is commonly known as the Women's Dorm Building and is addressed as 1725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, within the Eastern Area 3 Subdivision.

Approval is based on the Findings of Facts established at the hearing and conclusion that the Applicant has met the decision criteria for a Minor Zone Map Amendment pursuant to Section 16-74(h)(3) of the Los Alamos County Development Code and that the Commission is acting under the authority granted by Section 16-69-(b)(1) of the Development Code.

I further move to authorize the Chair to sign a Final Order approving the application and Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law for this case, based on this decision to be prepared by county staff.

**Motion Option 2:**

I move to recommend that the County Council **deny** Case No. **REZ-2024-0019**, a request by Los Alamos County Capital Projects and Maintenance Facilities, on behalf of Los Alamos County, property owner. The application proposes amending the zone district of the Property, EA3 U, from its current Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District to the Institutional (INS) Zone District. The Property is commonly known as the Women's Dorm Building and is addressed as 1725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, within the Eastern Area 3 Subdivision.

Denial is based on the Applicant failing to demonstrate that the application meets the Minor Zone Map Amendment decision criteria within Section 16-74-(h)(3) of the Los Alamos County Development Code, and that the Commission is acting under the authority granted by Section 16-69(b)(1) of the Development Code.

I further move to authorize the Chair to sign a Final Order approving the application and Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law for this case, based on this decision to be prepared by county staff.

**EXHIBITS:**

- 1 – Los Alamos County Council Regular Meeting July 30, 2019, Consideration of Acquisition of Real Property at 1725 17th Street; Los Alamos, NM:  
[https://losalamos.granicus.com/player/clip/1774?view\\_id=2&redirect=true](https://losalamos.granicus.com/player/clip/1774?view_id=2&redirect=true)
- 2 – Los Alamos County Council Meeting July 12, 2022, Consideration and Selection of a Conceptual Design Option for the Women's Army Corp (WAC) Building:  
[https://losalamos.granicus.com/player/clip/2963?view\\_id=2&redirect=true](https://losalamos.granicus.com/player/clip/2963?view_id=2&redirect=true)
- 3 – Los Alamos County, Chapter 16, Development Code: <https://lacnm.com/MunicipalCode>
- 4 – Comprehensive Plan: <https://lacnm.com/ComprehensivePlan2016>
- 5 – Official Zoning Maps







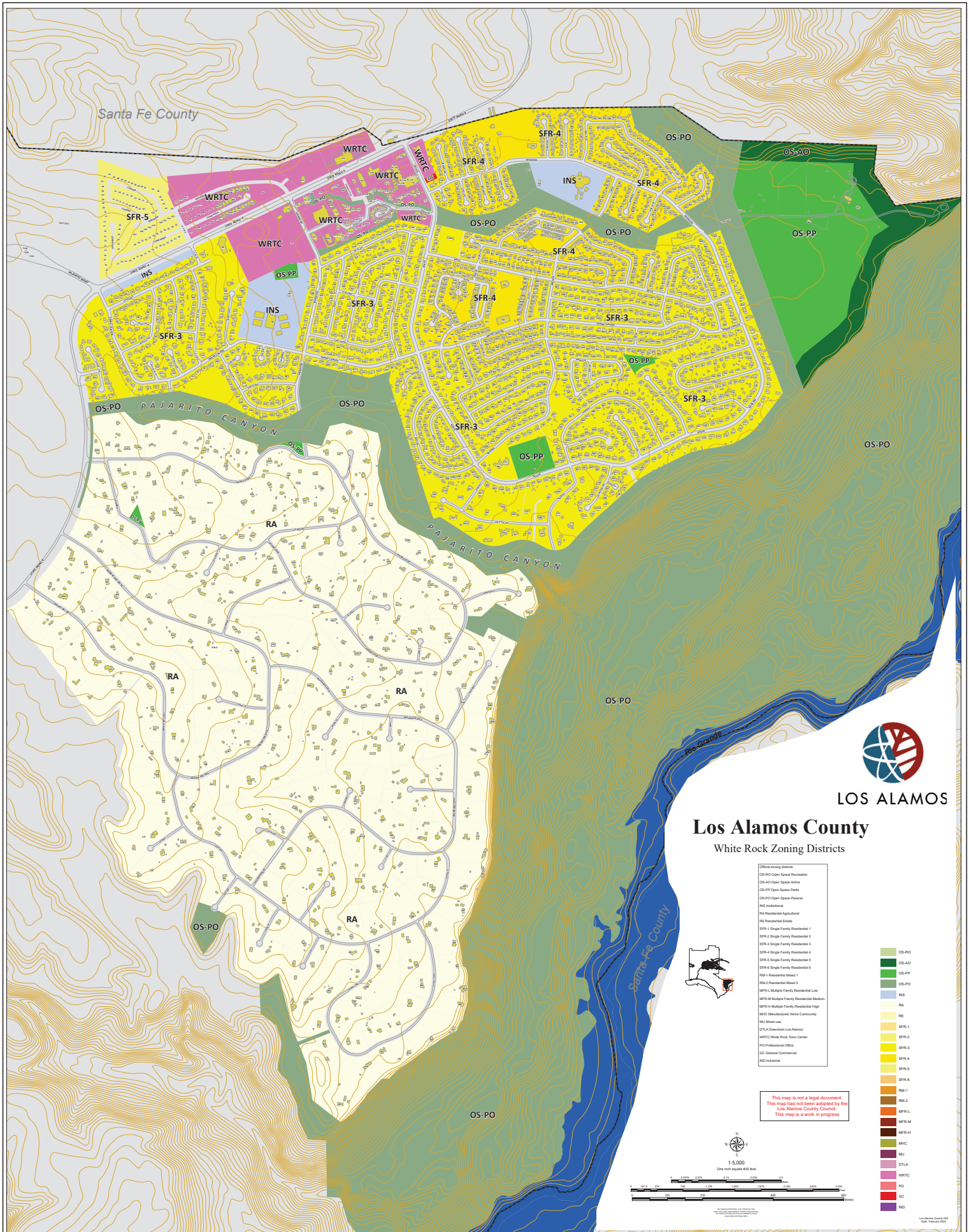


EXHIBIT 5