



Los Alamos County

Community Development Department

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Public Hearing Date: August 28, 2024
Subject: Case No. SIT-2024-0069
Applicant/Owner: Anthony Strain, and Russell Naranjo, Project Managers with Los Alamos County Capital Improvements and Facilities Division, on behalf of Los County, Property Owner
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. SIT-2024-0069: Los Alamos County Capital Improvements and Facilities Division, on behalf of Los Alamos County, property owner, is requesting Site Plan approval to renovate the existing 2-story building commonly known as the Women’s Dorm Building, to serve as a visitor center with historical and educational exhibits, related office space, and a Caretaker Unit; and construction of a 560 Sq. Ft. detached restroom facility with picnic pavilion. The property, EA3 U, is addressed as 1725 17th Street and is within the Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) zone district.

See Attachment A: Application Submittal.



Image 1: Google Earth Street Image, Dec. 2022 – Women’s Dorm Building west elevation facing 18th Street

BACKGROUND

The subject property ("Property"), addressed as 1725 17th Street, is located within the Eastern Area 3 Subdivision and is bounded by streets on all sides: N Sage, 17th Street, Peach Street, and 18th Street. The neighborhood is contained within the collector streets of Canyon Road (north), 15th Street (east) and Nectar Street (south). The lot is 50,529 Sq. Ft. and is occupied by a two-story, 5,462 Sq. Ft. building known as the Women's Army Corp. Building, or Civilian Women's Dorm Building ("Women's Dorm Building"). In 1943 the Women's Dorm Building was constructed during the Manhattan Project Era and operated as a dormitory, and most recently as a religious institute. In 2019 the Christian Science Church approached the county about their desire to sell the property. Shortly after, the Los Alamos County approved the purchase and closed on the sale (2020).

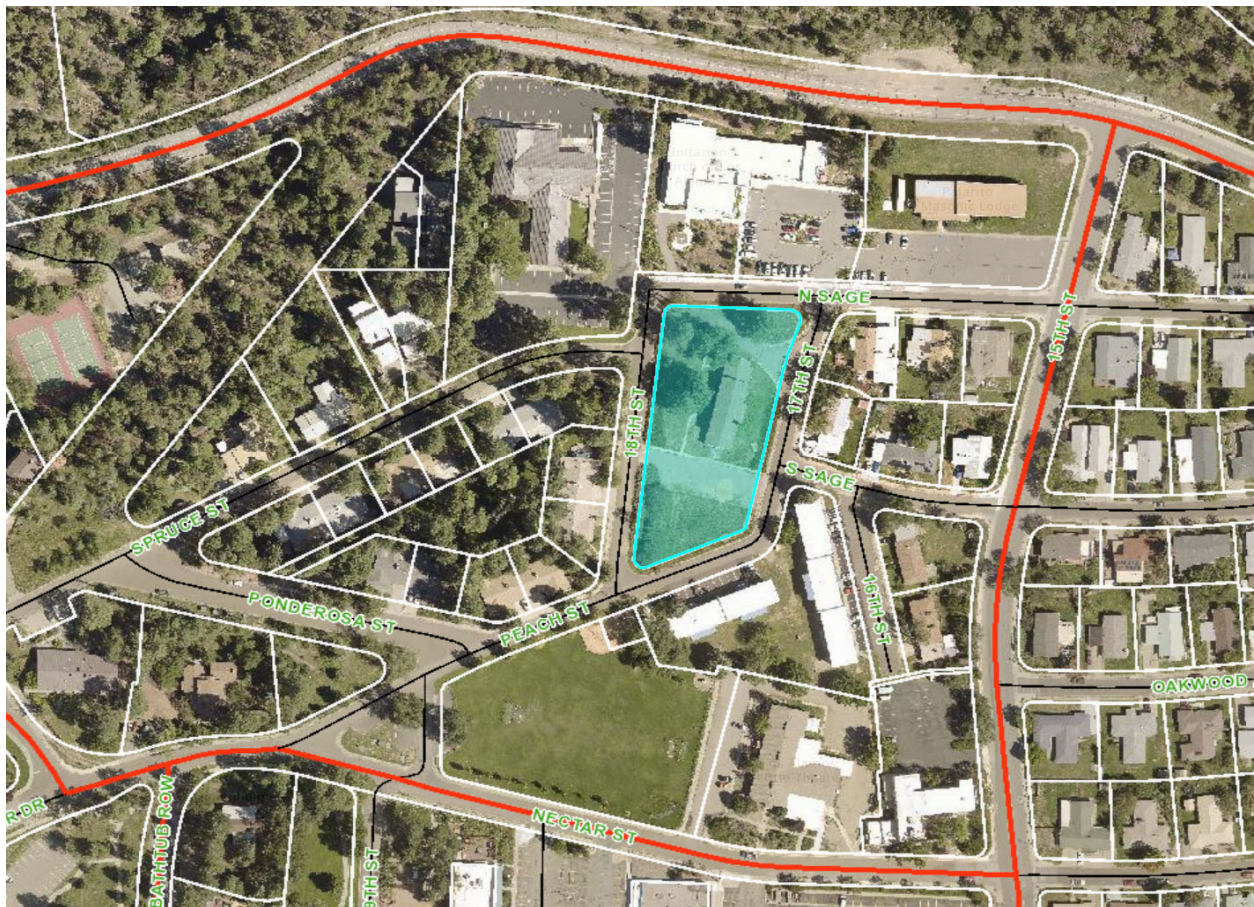


Figure 1: Location Area Map, Collector Streets shown in red

SUMMARY

The County contracted Mullen-Heller Architecture (2021) to design and conduct public engagement to gather input from the public and stakeholders through a series of public meetings to determine best use for the property. Based on the public input, conceptual designs were presented to the County Council (2022) who approved a design to renovate the building into a visitor center, with museum and educational exhibits, and associated office space and caretaker's unit for the National Park Service. The Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District does not allow for the uses proposed; therefore, a Minor Zone Map Amendment has been submitted to be reviewed concurrently with this application. The site has been designed in anticipation of an approved rezone and in accordance with the Institutional (INS) Zone District Standards.

The site will have significant improvements; all existing curbs, gutters, and sidewalks will be removed and replaced. The north side is designed to have a one-way driveway for bus drop-off and refuse and recycle pick-up that will enter from 17th Street and exit onto 18th Street. The parking lot is designed south of the building with ingress/egress from 17th Street and 18th Street. The area includes a bike rack, restroom facility with picnic pavilion (560 Sq. Ft.), and a circular concrete bench sitting area.

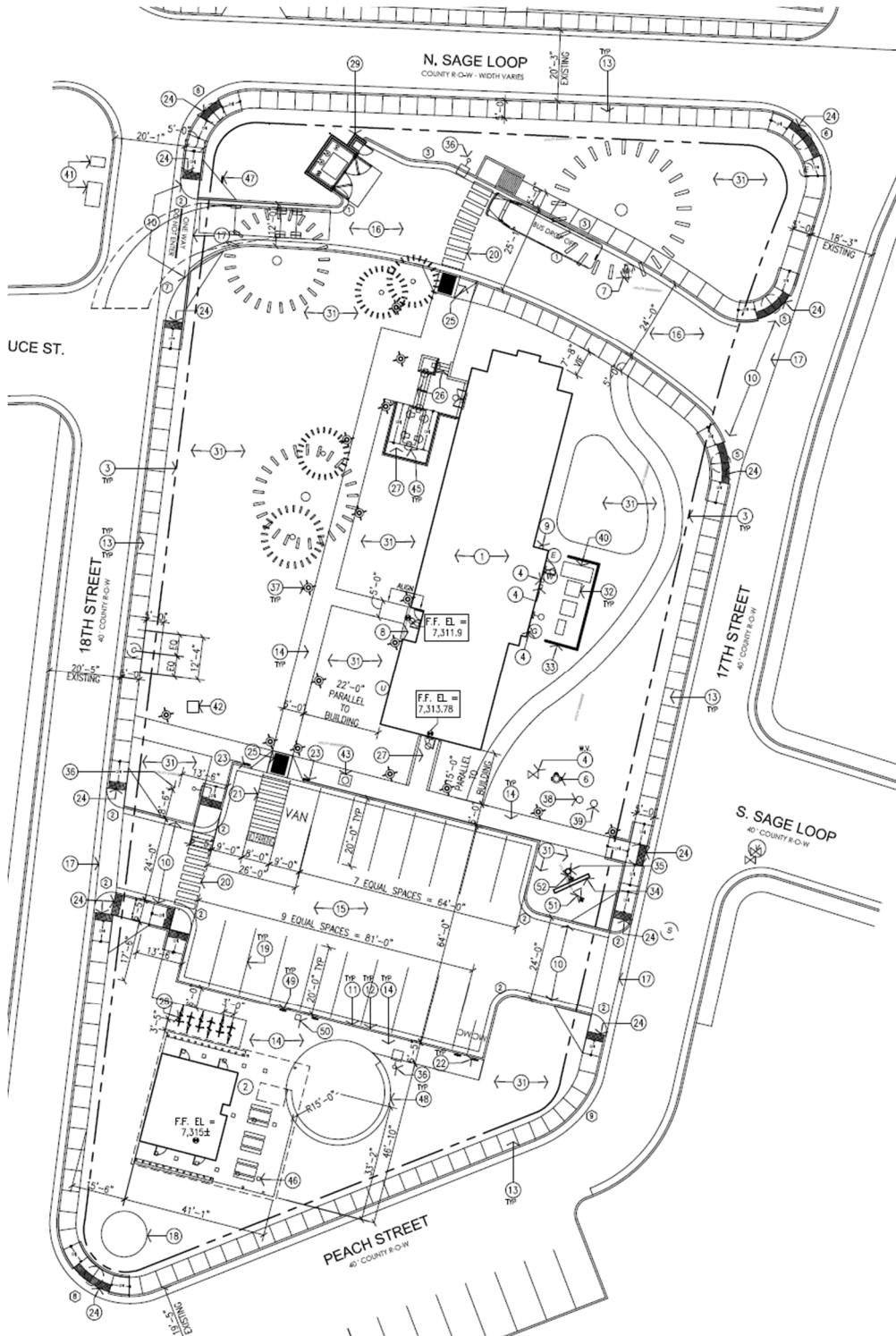


Figure 2: Site Plan

The exterior siding of the building will be repaired as needed and repainted to match historical photographs; existing asphalt shingle roof will be replaced with a new synthetic composite shake roofing – aesthetics will match historical photographs as possible. Doors, windows and associated frames will remain and be repaired as necessary. The first floor contains 3,390 Gross Sq. Ft. and will be renovated to be the National Park Services visitor center with related office space. The second floor, 2,073 Gross Sq. Ft., will contain a museum with exhibit space and a caretaker's unit for a National Park Services employee. Before the National Park Services occupies the site, a Conditional Use Permit will be required pursuant to the Institutional Zone District Standards within Section 16-7(d)(1)-b.

Lastly, the County recognizes the building's historical significance, so an application has been submitted to obtain National Register of Historic Places status and is waiting for approval.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL REVIEW COMMITTEE (IDRC) REVIEW

The Interdepartmental Review Committee (IDRC) met to review the site plan documents and application request on August 1, 2024. Armando Gabaldon, Environmental Services Manager, shared that the enclosure area is not large enough for both refuse and recycle. The Applicant can address design standards for enclosures to ensure size at the building permit phase. The Department of Public Utilities foresees no burdens to the utility system but stated that three-phase power will be needed for the operation of an elevator in the structure. The Public Works Department, County Engineer, noted that a traffic analysis is not necessary, but he would like the Applicant to present possible trips based on the National Park Services trending numbers for tourism.

See Attachment B: IDRC Minutes and Memorandums

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 August 8, 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 August 12, 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 August 8, 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.

See Attachment C: Public Notices

SITE PLAN ADOPTION DECISION CRITERIA

Section 16-74(i) of the Los Alamos County Development Code states that a Site Plan shall be approved if it meets all of the following criteria:

a. The Site Plan substantially conforms to the intent and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and other adopted County policies and plans.

Applicant Response: The proposed site plan substantially conforms to the Comprehensive Plan:

- 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 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: The Comprehensive Plan adopts goals and policies to direct and promote growth within the community and ensure its success. Economic Vitality and Financial Stability are strategic focus areas identified on Page 34 to be of extreme importance. This project supports at least one (1) goal in each of these areas:

ECONOMIC VITALITY:

- Market and brand Los Alamos as a scenic destination featuring recreation, science and

- history
- Maximize the utilization of County-owned land

FINANCIAL STABILITY:

- Attract new tourism-related businesses

The Comprehensive Plan has three (3) core themes; Growth is one of the sub-themes. It recognizes that growth is a function of expansion in sectors beyond housing. The Manhattan Project National Historic Park is expected to bring a significant growth in tourism, and, with it, a corresponding increase in economic development. Renovating the vacant building and site to accommodate the National Park Services efforts supports Growth Goals to, “Maximize our opportunity with respect to development of the Manhattan Project National Historic Park”.

Supported Land Use Policies within Page 71, 77, and 81 of the Comprehensive Plan include:

GROWTH:

- Maximize the utilization of County-owned land

DEVELOPMENT:

- Maximize the utilization of County-owned land

REDEVELOPMENT:

- Address abandoned or blighted properties

b. If the subject property is within an approved Master Plan, the Site Plan is in conformance with any relevant standards in the Master Plan.

Applicant Response: The property is not located within an approved Master Plan, the Site Plan is in conformance with any relevant standards in the Master Plan.

Staff Response: It is the staff’s expert opinion that this criterion has been met because the property is not within an approved Master Plan.

c. If the subject property is within an approved PD zone district, the Site Plan is consistent with any applicable terms and conditions in any previously approved PD zoning covering the subject property and any related development agreements and/or regulations.

Applicant Response: Not applicable.

Staff Response: It is the staff’s expert opinion that this criterion has been met because the property is not within an approved PD Zone District.

d. The Site Plan is in conformance with all applicable provisions of this Code and other adopted County regulations.

Applicant Response: The proposed site plan follows Chapter 16 of the Los Alamos Development Code for the INS (Institutional) zoning designation. The existing structure properly sets back at the ground level providing for proper sidewalk dimensions and landscaped areas per the development code.

- 1) Zoning: the zoning for the property is currently SFR-4 indicating a residential zone however previously operated as a church. Changed conditions warrant a zoning amendment to INS as the property has been purchased by Los Alamos County.
- 2) Site design: The setbacks within the INS zone are -0-, the maximum lot coverage is 70%, the maximum building height is 50' and the parking is called out in the site plan. This application fully complies with all site design criteria for the zone district.
- 3) Landscape: the existing site contains many mature trees and established landscape. Efforts will be made to preserve these established areas to the greatest extent possible. Improvements will be made to enhance existing mature landscaped areas and create new areas in accordance with the requirements set forth in the code near and around the perimeter of both the existing structure and proposed pavilion and restroom facility. The requirements set forth in the code require a minimum of 10% net site area. This application fully complies with the landscape criteria for the district.
- 4) Lighting: Outdoor lighting will be designed in compliance with the Dark Skies and Los Alamos County outdoor nighttime lighting standards. Outdoor lighting on the site is limited to that which is useful, targeted, and not brighter than necessary. Parking lot lighting shall be equipped with motion sensors that dim the entire luminaire after a 15-minute period when no motion is detected. The proposed correlated color temperature shall not exceed 2700 K. The proposed fixtures will be fully fielded and possess a U) rating.
- 5) Parking: the required parking for the site is provided with on-site surface parking. Standard and accessible parking stalls are sized per the development code.
- 6) Signage: The monument sign is depicted on the site plan as a location on the SE portion of the site plan. The actual sign has not yet been designed however, will comply fully with the parameters set forth in the code.

Staff Response: It is the staff's expert opinion that this criterion has been met because each of the following elements of the Development Code have been satisfied by the proposal:

ZONING & USE: Subject to the property being rezoned to be within the Institutional (INS) Zone District, the proposed use of the property as a Visitor Center (Institutional/Civic Building), museum, and a caretaker unit, would meet the intention of the Zone District as outlined within Section 16-7-(d) of the Los Alamos County Development Code, Exhibit B. Section 16-14, Table 26: Permitted Use Table lists Institutional Uses and identifies "Art Gallery, Museum, or Library", and "Institutional and Civic Buildings" as permitted within the INS Zone District. Also, Table 26, lists a "Caretakers Unit" as an Accessory Use within the INS Zone District and is limited by Use-Specific Standards, Section 16-18-(c), to one per lot.

DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS: The proposed site plan meets the dimensional standards for the INS Zone District including setbacks (0'), lot coverage (70%), and building height (50').

ACCESS & CONNECTIVITY: Article IV, Division 2. Access and Connectivity applies to all developments. The site design was reviewed by the County Engineer and Fire Marshal's Office and access was agreed to be sufficient for the intended use. All existing curbs, gutters, and sidewalks will be removed and replaced according to the County Public Works standards, and the site is designed with pedestrian walkways and crosswalks for safe connectivity throughout.

Landscaping and signage will not interfere with the Clear Sight Triangle because signs, walls, trees and shrubbery 3-ft and above are noted to not be within the area.

PARKING STANDARDS: Article IV, Division 3. Off-Street Parking, Loading, and Queuing, provides for adequate, convenient, and safe off-street parking and loading areas. Parking design, dimensions, and location comply with Development Standards. Off-Street Parking calculations are based on the gross floor area of each subject use and rounded to the nearest whole number. Attachment A, Sheet A001, Architectural Site Plan, demonstrates that off-street parking requirements have been met.

Parking Type	Required	Provided
Off-Street Spaces (Total)	17	18
ADA (Total)	1	2
ADA Van Accessible	1	2
Motorcycle Spaces	0	2
Bicycle Spaces	6	6

LANDSCAPING & SCREENING: Article IV, Division 4. Landscaping and Screening requirements do not apply to this application because it is not new construction, and the construction of the restroom and picnic pavilion does not expand the site more than 25% of the existing building floor area. However, a Landscaping Plan has been submitted to enhance the appearance of the site and illustrate that the Ponderosa Pines in the northwest area will remain; the total landscaping meets the minimum 10% net site area requirements. Also, mechanical and electrical equipment east of the building will be screened by an 8-ft wood fence and refuse containers will be enclosed and are subject to county standards at the building permit phase.

NEIGHBORHOOD PROTECTION STANDARDS:

Article IV, Division 5. Neighborhood Protection Standards apply to non-residential uses abutting or adjacent to protected lots, such as the following zone districts: RA, RE, SFR, and RM. As the Property is adjacent to protected lots (SFR) protection standards are required as applicable:

Building Height. Any portion of a primary building within 75-ft of any lot line that is adjacent to a protected lot shall step down to a maximum of 35-ft. As shown in Attachment A, Sheet A401, Exterior Elevations, existing building is 25'-11", not including the chimney which is excluded from building height, and it is not being increased.

Landscape Buffer. A landscape buffer is required along the shared property lines of abutting developments. As the Property is bounded on all sides by a county street, this regulation does not apply.

OUTDOOR LIGHTING: Article IV, Division 6. Outdoor Lighting applies because a new use is being proposed for the property. Attachment A, Sheet E001, Lighting Plan, shows lighting fixtures with a correlated color temperature at 2700K. Fixtures are proposed to be fully shielded and possess a U0 rating for zero upright. Subject to rezone approval, the property will be classified within Lighting Zone 2 (LZ2), Ambient Lighting. Lighting shall be dimmed by 50% by 10:00 p.m., or one (1) hour after badness close (whichever comes first).

WALLS, FENCES AND GATES: A new 8' wood fence is planned and shown on Attachment A, Sheet A401, Exterior Elevations, to screen mechanical equipment on the east side of the building. The proposal meets the Development Standards of Article IV, Division 7. Walls, Fences, and Gates.

SIGNAGE: A monument sign location is proposed north of the 17th Street parking lot access and demonstrates a clear sight triangle. Prior to placement, a Sign Permit will be required to ensure Sign Development Standards.

- e. The County's existing public infrastructure and services, including but not limited to water, sanitary sewer, electricity, gas, storm sewer, streets, trails and sidewalks have adequate capacity to serve the proposed development, and any burdens on those systems have been mitigated in compliance with the County's construction standards to the maximum extent practicable.**

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 the existing sidewalk system which may involve the construction of new sidewalks and improvement of the existing sidewalks. All improvements will be made in accordance with Americans with Disability Act (ADA) standards.

Staff Response: It is the staff's expert opinion that this criterion has been met because the Department of Public Utilities has communicated that proposed utilities will adequately serve the proposed development (water, sanitary sewer, electricity, gas). Specific details on hydrant tie-in and electrical phase services will be needed when building permits are submitted. The drainage patterns will not be significantly altered and are satisfactory to the County Engineer. The County Engineer did not require a Traffic Impact Analysis but suggests that the project consider evaluating potential bus trips based on the National Park Services trending numbers for tourism.

- f. The Site Plan mitigates any significant adverse impacts to properties within the vicinity to the maximum extent practicable.**

Applicant Response: Several public meetings were held in 2022 with an additional neighborhood meeting as part of the "Zoning Amendment" application process was held on May 2, 2024. The renovations to the property will be typical of a construction site. Staff have assured neighbors that the code will be followed to enforce the hours of construction operation activity and noise levels.

The site plan mitigates any significant adverse impacts on adjacent properties through a combination of screening and shielding of light fixtures, mechanical equipment, and parking. Due to the building seeking NHL status, the development criteria specific to the building will be stringent in how the refurbishment is conducted and the process and materials used. The added pavilion and restroom facility will be constructed in a manner that will be in keeping with the existing architectural style of the existing structure. The parking lot will be designed to meet the landscape and buffering requirements in the Development Code as well as the required amount of parking for the proposed use.

Outdoor mechanical equipment and service areas such as the dumpster will be screened from view using landscape plantings and a refuse enclosure. All light fixtures will be appropriately shielded to prevent light trespassing to adjacent properties to the maximum extent feasible.

Staff Response: It is the staff's expert opinion that this criterion has been met to the maximum extent practical because the site was designed to locate the new structure (restroom and picnic

pavilion) and parking lot on the south-end of the property, closer to the more intensified Zone Districts of Multi-Family. Efforts have been made to shield the neighbors from lighting, and screen where appropriate. Mature landscaping will be preserved, and new landscaping will be installed to enhance the look, feel, and buffering of the site. The County Engineer did not have concerns for drainage, and a Traffic Impact Analysis was not required. The neighborhood is mostly zoned residential, but existing conditions integrate similar-scaled institutional uses to the north.

- g. Provisions shall be made to serve the development with tot lots and/or neighborhood parks in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan. A fee may be paid as approved by County Council to accomplish the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan in lieu of the development of tot lots or neighborhood parks.**

Applicant Response: Not applicable.

Staff Response: Not applicable.

DRAFT MOTION

Motion Option 1:

I move to **conditionally approve** Case No. SIT-2024-0069, a request for Site Plan approval to renovate the existing 2-story building commonly known as the Women's Dorm Building, to serve as a visitor center with historical and educational exhibits, related office space, and a Caretaker Unit, and to construct of a 560 Sq. Ft. detached restroom facility with picnic pavilion. The property, EA3 U, is addressed as 1725 17th Street and is within the Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) zone district.

Approval is conditioned on the Property being rezoned to the Institutional (INS) Zone District and is based on the Findings of Facts established at the hearing and conclusion that the Applicant has met the decision criteria for Site Plan adoption within Section 16-74(i)(4) of the Los Alamos County Development Code and that the Commission is acting under the authority granted by Section 16-69-(b)(2) 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 **deny** Case No. SIT-2024-0069, a request for Site Plan approval to renovate the existing 2-story building commonly known as the Women's Dorm Building, to serve as a visitor center with historical and educational exhibits, related office space, and a Caretaker Unit, and to construct of a 560 Sq. Ft. detached restroom facility with picnic pavilion. The property, EA3 U, is addressed as 1725 17th Street and is within the Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) zone district.

Denial is based on the Applicant failing to demonstrate that the application meets the Site Plan adoption decision criteria within Section 16-74(i)(4) of the Los Alamos County Development Code, and that the Commission is acting under the authority granted by Section 16-69(b)(2) 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:

A – Comprehensive Plan: <https://lacnm.com/ComprehensivePlan2016>

B – Los Alamos County, Chapter 16, Development Code: <https://lacnm.com/MunicipalCode>