



STAFF REPORT

9/13/2022

AGENDA ITEM

TO:
**HONORABLE MAYOR
AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

FROM:
**COLLEEN T. DOAN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

SUBJECT:
**PUBLIC HEARING - ZONING ORDINANCE AMENDMENT TO ESTABLISH THE
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES AND AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH ACADEMY (AUHS/AURA) SPECIFIC PLAN TO EXPAND UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND ESTABLISH A PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL AT 1600 E.
HILL STREET**

Summary:

Form of Notice: Notice was published in the Signal Tribune newspaper per Government Code Section 65091 (a)(4) on September 2, 2022; was mailed to property owners and residents within a 300-foot radius of the subject property on or before September 2, 2022; and was posted in accordance with Signal Hill Municipal Code (SHMC) Section 1.08.010 on or before September 2, 2022.

The applicant, Morgan Pickard, on behalf of the property owner, AUHS, is seeking approval of a Zoning Ordinance Amendment to establish a new specific plan for expanded educational programs at AUHS and a new AURA private high school with limited enrollment at 1600 E. Hill Street. The overall expansion includes:

- Establish the Private High School (Freshman class only, Fall 2022)
- Establish the Outpatient Pediatric Clinic (Summer 2023)
- Establish the Pharmacy Clinic (Summer 2023)
- Establish the AUHS School of Medicine (Fall 2024)

Recommendations:

1. Adopt a resolution adopting Negative Declaration (SCH2022070504) for the AUHS/AURA specific plan, entitled:

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SIGNAL HILL, CALIFORNIA, TO ADOPT NEGATIVE DECLARATION (SCH2022070504) FOR THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES/AMERICAN UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ACADEMY (AUHS/AURA) SPECIFIC PLAN

2. Introduce Zoning Ordinance Amendment 22-05, amending Title 20 of the SHMC to include Chapter 20.25, entitled:

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SIGNAL HILL, CALIFORNIA, TO APPROVE ZONING ORDINANCE AMENDMENT 22-05, AMENDING TITLE 20 OF THE SIGNAL HILL MUNICIPAL CODE TO ADD CHAPTER 20.25 ENTITLED "SP-25, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES AND THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ACADEMY (AUHS/AURA) SPECIFIC PLAN", AND AMENDING THE OFFICIAL ZONING MAP TO CHANGE THE ZONING DESIGNATION OF AN APPROXIMATE 3.75-ACRE SITE AT 1600 E. HILL STREET FROM "COMMERCIAL OFFICE (CO)" TO "AUHS/AURA SPECIFIC PLAN (SP-25)" (APN 7215-009-005), CONTINGENT ON THE CITY COUNCIL ADOPTION OF THE NEGATIVE DECLARATION ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

Fiscal Impact:

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended action.

Strategic Plan Objectives:

Goal 3: Promote a strong local economic base.

Objective 3.1.3: Help to retain existing businesses in the City.

Background:

In 1994, AUHS was founded by Dr. Kim Dang and Pastor Gregory Johnson as a Christian-based university offering bachelor's degrees in nursing and doctorate degrees in pharmacology. In 2009, AUHS moved from its original location on Atlantic Boulevard in Long Beach to its existing location at 1600 E. Hill Street in Signal Hill, but only occupied one of the three buildings at the time. Over time, the school expanded to occupy two buildings. Both Dr. Dang and Pastor Johnson continue to run the university today.

In 2018, AUHS informed staff of their vision to expand the educational offerings, including their desire to add a private high school to the campus. City staff began working with AUHS staff to prepare a Master Plan document laying out the vision for future expanded operations, and specifically looking at future enrollment and staffing increases to determine whether existing on-site parking was sufficient. It was determined that a parking study must be prepared and that a specific plan would be the appropriate zoning designation for the unique set of uses desired at the campus and to establish a parking standard.

Between 2019 and 2021, AUHS hired a traffic consultant to prepare a parking and traffic analysis for the future expansion activities. AUHS also began interior remodeling of building three, adjacent to Gaviota Avenue, to prepare for future use by the school.

In December 2021, AUHS submitted their completed parking study for review by the City Engineer.

On February 23, 2022, AUHS informed City staff of their desire to open the private high school by Fall of 2022. At that time, the Master Plan document had not been updated since April 2020, and no application requesting a zoning ordinance amendment (ZOA) to adopt the AUHS/AURA Specific Plan had been submitted. Nevertheless, staff provided guidance for submittal of the application package, and for AUHS outreach efforts to begin the entitlement process.

On March 26, 2022, the applicant began their developer outreach efforts which included distribution of flyers, inviting the public to attend town hall meetings, posting on the university's website, and installing a temporary 12-foot-wide banner at the corner of Walnut Avenue and E. Hill Street. The applicant also expanded the radius for their mailed notices beyond the required 300-foot radius to include 59 property owners on N. Legion Drive, who had previously expressed interest in being informed about any neighborhood activities. According to the applicant, there were no inquiries from the public. The applicant provided a summary letter of their outreach efforts (Attachment A).

On April 12, 2022, to assist with the extremely short timeline to adopt the ZOA by late September 2022, the City conducted an informal bidding process with three on-call planning firms under contract with the City. Only one firm, MIG, Inc., submitted a proposal and later executed a contract to assist with the ZOA and the associated environmental analysis. Consultant costs are paid for out of the applicant's developer deposit account.

On April 19, 2022, the Planning Commission received a presentation regarding the request by AUHS to process a ZOA to allow the expanded educational operations outlined in their Master Plan, including opening the private high school in September 2022. At that time AUHS provided clarification about the total high school enrollment and additional staffing. It became clear to City staff that the traffic and parking studies had only analyzed the first class of high school students which was 20 students, and not the full enrollment, which by the fourth year would be 80 students. On the following day, City staff met with the applicant and AUHS staff to give direction on the revisions needed to the traffic and parking studies.

On May 19, 2022, a duly noticed virtual Neighborhood Meeting was held via video/teleconference with City staff present. The purpose of the Neighborhood Meeting was:

- For staff to explain the planning review process;
- For the applicant to present the proposed project; and
- For the neighbors to have an opportunity to provide comments.

There were no members of the public in attendance.

On May 24, 2022, staff received the corrected parking and traffic analysis, which indicated that due to the amount of off-site learning for the nursing and pharmacy schools, the management of on-site student and staffing capacity for the university, and a parking permit and management plan, the existing parking could accommodate the parking need. In addition, the traffic study verified that the off-site circulation and student drop off activities would not result in significant impacts.

On June 10, 2022, notice for a Planning Commission public workshop regarding the project was

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mailed to property owners and residents within a 300-foot radius of the site, as well as the 59 property owners on N. Legion Drive previously included, was published in the Signal Tribune newspaper, and was posted in accordance with SHMC Section 1.08.010.

On June 14, 2022, staff received one public comment via email, outlining concerns related to traffic and parking impacts to the neighborhood, as well as access to the main parking lot from Gaviota Avenue.

On June 21, 2022, a duly noticed Planning Commission public workshop was held. Staff responded to the comments received at the workshop through discussion of the Parking and Operations Management Plan and emphasized that there will continue to be no access to the main parking lot from Gaviota Avenue. There were no in-person public comments and the Planning Commission directed staff to schedule the project for a public hearing.

On August 5, 2022, notice for a Planning Commission public hearing regarding the project was mailed to property owners and residents within a 300-foot radius of the site, and to the 59 residents on N. Legion Drive, was published in the Signal Tribune newspaper, and was posted in accordance with SHMC Section 1.08.010.

On August 8, 2022, staff received a second public comment via email, outlining concerns related to traffic impacts, parking impacts, site maintenance, and operation of the proposed outpatient pediatric clinic and pharmacy.

On August 16, 2022, a duly noticed Planning Commission public hearing was held (Attachment B). Prior to the public hearing, staff fielded a third public comment via telephone, outlining concerns related to traffic and parking impacts to the neighborhood. At the meeting, the individual who submitted the second comment spoke during the public comment period to outline his concerns. The applicant responded to the concerns by discussing their Parking Management Plan, their Pediatric Clinic and Pharmacy Operations Plan, noting completion of several of the maintenance items, and their plans for ongoing future maintenance. After hearing all public comments, the Planning Commission adopted Resolution No. 864-08-16, recommending City Council adoption of Negative Declaration (SCH2022070504), and adopted Resolution No. 865-08-16, recommending City Council approval of ZOA 22-05.

On August 18, 2022, staff received a public comment email from the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), outlining parking impact considerations for nearby schools including Signal Hill Elementary, Alvarado Elementary, and Nelson Academy. The letter confirmed that given the parking management proposed, impacts to nearby LBUSD schools should be minimal (Attachment C).

On August 18 and 25, 2022, given the public comments and Commission discussion regarding traffic and parking management, City staff met with AUHS representatives to discuss additional options for managing traffic and parking for the multi-year expansion planned by the school. It was agreed that additional management items would be added to the Plan.

On September 2, 2022, notice for a City Council public hearing regarding the project was mailed to property owners and residents within a 300-foot radius of the site, and to the 59 residents on N. Legion Drive, was published in the Signal Tribune newspaper, and was posted in accordance with SHMC Section 1.08.010.

Analysis:

Applicant

The property owner is AUHS. Their authorized agent is Morgan Pickard of Morgan Pickard Architectural Design.

Site Description

The project site is a 3.75-acre rectangular-shaped parcel located on the south side of E. Hill Street and bounded by Walnut Avenue to the west and Gaviota Avenue to the east. It consists of three separate buildings totaling 72,000 square feet (SF) and provides 237 surface parking spaces. Vehicular access to the main parking lot is provided only via existing driveways located along Walnut Avenue. The existing driveways along Gaviota Avenue facing the residential dwellings are closed and will remain closed (except for the parking lot in the northeast corner of the site, which is used by faculty and also will have four designated spaces for the proposed pharmacy and clinic during limited hours on Fridays and Saturdays). A designated pick-up and drop-off area with a large queuing area is located onsite. During pick-up and drop-off times for AURA, the southernmost gate on Walnut Avenue will be open for ingress only.

Direction	Zoning Designation	Existing Land Use
Project Site	Commercial Office (CO)	AUHS campus consisting of three main buildings and a large parking lot
North	Residential Low/Medium – 2 (RLM-2)	Existing residential dwellings
South	Light Industrial (LI)	Vacant lot for future industrial development
East	Residential High Density (RH)	Existing residential dwellings
West	Special Purpose Housing (SP-7) / Light Industrial (LI)	Zinnia workforce housing development and vacant lot for future industrial development

Land Use

The existing underlying zoning at this location is Commercial Office (CO). When AUHS moved to this location in 2009, they were allowed to operate under the equitable land use of a *chiropractic college*. Per SHMC Section 20.20.020, both a *chiropractic college* and a *parochial/private school* are permitted uses in the CO zoning district.

AUHS currently houses the School of Nursing (SON) and the School of Pharmacy (SOP). The university has only one main campus and no branch locations. There is one remote learning site, Valley High School in Santa Ana, California, which AUHS leases for science laboratory practice in Chemistry and Microbiology. AUHS proposes to add additional degree programs and to establish the AURA High School, beginning with a 20 student class of freshmen, Outpatient Pediatrics Clinic, Outpatient Clinic Pharmacy, and the AUHS School of Medicine. All new activities will occur within the existing three buildings, with a major portion of the university activities occurring remotely and at off-

site training facilities. No expansion of building square footage or parking is proposed as part of the Specific Plan.

AUHS Master Plan

Since it began operation, the university has grown significantly, and a comprehensive Master Plan has been developed identifying its current use and outlining future growth (Exhibit B to the ordinance). The Master Plan identifies increases in enrollment, additional programs, and a new high school to be phased in, with 20 students added each year for four years; however, no physical expansion of the site or the existing buildings is proposed. The projected increase in enrollment requires an assessment of total impacts to on-site parking, and to traffic on surrounding streets and residential neighborhoods. In addition, currently, the City does not have a parking standard that could be implemented for the combined uses proposed. As such, a traffic impact assessment as well as a parking demand study were prepared to identify an appropriate parking standard and to consider any potential issues caused by the proposed project.

VICINITY MAP



PROJECT SITE PLAN



Timeline

The timeline for the new high school and expanded programs is as follows:

- **Fall 2022:** AURA High School Freshman Class of 20 students (adding one class of 20 students each year until full enrollment in year four, total 80 students).
- **Summer 2023:** Outpatient Pediatrics Clinic and Outpatient Clinic Pharmacy, with one teaching physician or nurse practitioner and two assistants in the clinic, and one teaching pharmacist and one assistant in the pharmacy.

- **Fall 2024:** AUHS School of Medicine.

AURA High School

AUHS proposes to establish a private high school (AURA) to operate out of building two on the existing campus at 1600 E. Hill Street. Beginning in the fall of 2022, a freshman class of 20 students will attend on-site classes. Each fall thereafter, a new class of 20 students are proposed to be added for four years for a total attendance of 80 on-site students. With full attendance there will be five faculty and two school staff for the high school.

Clinic and Pharmacy Operations

AUHS plans to open a fully licensed pediatric clinic and pharmacy. The pediatric clinic and a pharmacy will be located within building one and staffed by onsite physicians, nurse practitioners, and pharmacists. The planned opening date is summer 2023.

The new clinic will be operated on Fridays and Saturdays, with limited hours and will be open to the public by appointment only. While AUHS has not yet stated the hours of operation, the operating plan prepared by City staff allows the clinic to be open between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. to provide for flexibility. There will be one physician or nurse practitioner at the clinic during hours of operation. Daily client volume will not be more than one patient per half-hour per physician. The parking analysis also considered a total of staff persons serving as assistants to the physician. Students will be completing lab hours by working in the clinic, and their numbers will vary by class size and schedule throughout the day. Patients will enter the clinic from the Gaviota Avenue entrance of building one. Four parking spaces in the small lot adjacent to building one will be dedicated parking spots for patient parking and access will only be allowed off Gaviota Avenue during clinic hours. Other staff and students will use the main parking lot accessed from Walnut Avenue.

The pharmacy will not be a public walk-in pharmacy, but rather a service to the clinic patients. One teaching pharmacist will be in attendance at all times during operating hours, with one additional staff member assisting the pharmacist. The pharmacy's hours will coincide with the clinic hours. A pharmacy counter will provide over-the-counter medicines and first-aid supplies on display. Prescription drugs will be securely stored behind locked doors in the backroom prescription fulfillment area. Students will be completing lab hours by working in the pharmacy, and their numbers will vary by class size and schedule throughout the day.

AUHS has indicated that over time, days that the clinic and pharmacy are open could be extended beyond Fridays and Saturdays if the need is found to exist in the immediate Signal Hill community; however, this current approval does not include operations beyond those described above. Any change would require a formal application to the City via a revised operations plan.

AUHS School of Medicine

The University currently provides bachelor's and master's degree programs for the School of Nursing, as well as Doctorates in the School of Pharmacy. The School of Medicine will add a Doctoral program for physicians. The school will consist of 40 students, of which only 12 will be on-site at any one time. The remainder will be learning online and training at off-site locations. There will be three

faculty and one staff person on-site.

Traffic Analysis

Traffic and circulation studies were conducted to determine whether the increased on-site attendance would generate a significant or impactful amount of traffic. A traffic impact assessment report was completed by Linscott, Law & Greenspan Engineers (LLG) and was reviewed and approved by the City's Traffic Engineer (Attachments D and E).

To summarize, the proposed project is forecasted to generate a net increase of approximately 80 daily trips. As a conservative step, the potential impact of the project has been analyzed using the greater net increase in trips (eight trips during the morning peak hour and nine trips during the afternoon peak hour). This is significantly less than the 110 daily trips threshold for small projects, and as such the project is presumed to have a less than significant impact on Vehicle Miles Traveled, the required methodology for traffic impact analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act. The report took the analysis one step further and also analyzed the Level of Service for key local intersections:

1. Walnut Avenue at E. Hill Street (City of Signal Hill)
2. Cherry Avenue at E. Hill Street (City of Signal Hill)
3. Walnut Avenue at E. 20th Street/Alamitos Avenue (Cities of Signal Hill/Long Beach)

All are forecasted to operate at an acceptable Level of Service of C or above, during peak hours. Access to the site was found to be adequate on Walnut Avenue and will be improved by the addition of the use of the southernmost driveway on Walnut Avenue for AURA drop-off and pick-up times. Finally, the traffic and access for the future industrial park adjacent to the south and on the west side of Walnut Avenue was analyzed and was not expected to have a significant impact on traffic or access. A comparative graphic has been prepared showing the future industrial project and driveways on Walnut Avenue (Attachment F).

Parking Analysis

In addition to the traffic analysis for trips generated and off-site circulation, a Parking Demand Study was prepared LLG, and was reviewed and approved by the City's Traffic Engineer, to determine the appropriate number of parking spaces required for the unique mix of uses proposed (Attachments G and H). The parking study evaluates parking needs based on the future conditions and consideration of the project's operational characteristics, to assess the peak parking demand requirements of the AUHS/AURA campus upon completion of the proposed educational programs expansion. AUHS anticipates that the current enrollment of 180 students (of which 70 are on campus) would be increased to 470 students (of which 231 would be on campus). Because the SHMC does not have a parking standard for either of the proposed uses or the combined uses, staff referred to the Institute of Transportation Engineers Parking Generation Manual and identified an industry standard of one space per every five students. AUHS's parking study took a more conservative approach and presumes one parking space per person and develops a Parking and Operations Management Plan to fully accommodate parking on-site and not to spill over onto the adjoining public streets and impact the surrounding neighborhood.

Parking and Operations Management Plan

AUHS has developed a Parking and Operations Management Plan to ensure that the on-site parking and circulation, schedule of classes and on-site attendance, and clinic and pharmacy operations are all managed to ensure minimal impact to the neighborhood and adjacent elementary school, and that all of the university's parking demand will be fully accommodated on site and will not spill over onto neighboring public streets (Attachment I). In addition, an annual neighborhood meeting is proposed as a proactive outreach measure. Any proposed changes to the Plan will be approved ministerially by the Community Development Director in writing. The Director will have the authority to refer any such proposed future changes to the Planning Commission for consideration and action.

On-site Parking and Circulation

- AUHS/AURA Parking and Operations Management Plan includes use of the southernmost gate on Walnut Avenue as an additional ingress point to allow optimal on-site queuing for the high school drop-off and pick-up; the original site plan showed this gate as permanently closed.
- The City's Traffic Engineer reviewed the revised circulation plan and use of the southerly driveway for ingress and queuing and both he and the applicant's traffic engineer indicated that this change would not affect the conclusions of the traffic study, as described below; however, a few minor edits to correctly describe the new plan were required and have been completed.

Schedule of Classes and On-Site Attendance

In consideration of parking and traffic impacts created by the increased activities at AUHS/AURA, it is important to clarify the difference between enrolled students and students in attendance on campus. For example, within the SON program, nursing students spend 50% of their class time on campus and 50% off campus in clinical/lab studies and internships. Similarly, within the SOP program, students spend 30% of their time on campus and 70% off campus. Given the future of independent study programs and online instruction, it is possible for AUHS to have thousands of enrolled students from all over the world who never physically visit the campus. In fact, the proposed Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) expansion to the SON program of 60 MSN students will have no on-site classes or labs scheduled at all.

In addition to these planned off-site didactic and clinical days, schedules for on-site class days will be done in a way to mitigate traffic congestion in the parking lot as follows:

- Large group classes will be offset to different days or times of day;
- The high school's first and last periods will be scheduled at times which differ from the nearby grade school to reduce morning traffic congestion at Walnut Avenue and E. Hill Street;
- All students (except 60 of the high school students who will not be allowed to bring vehicles to school), faculty, and staff will be issued parking permits. In addition, AUHS staff will monitor neighborhood streets on a regular basis to ensure compliance and issue citations to violators which may result in fines.
- A designated on-site drop-off and pick-up zone will be established for the high school students.

Below is a table identifying the current number of students in each program and the associated staff and faculty. A total of 237 parking spaces currently exist on-site.

CURRENT

Program	Enrollment/ Patient	On-Site Attendance	On-Site Staff	On-Site Faculty	Total On-Site Attendance	*Potential Drivers
SON	155	50% = 78	8	14	100	100
SOP	25	60% = 15	2	3	20	20
Total	180	93	10	17	120	120

FUTURE CAPACITY

Program	Enrollment/ Patient	On-Site Attendance	On-Site Staff	On-Site Faculty	Total On-Site Attendance	*Potential Drivers
SON-BSN	240	50% = 120	10	25	155	155
SON-MSN	60	0	3	4	7	7
SOP	45	30% = 14	2	3	19	19
SOM	40	30% = 12	1	3	16	16
AURA	80	80	2	5	87	27
PHARM/CLINIC	5	5	3	2	10	10
Total	470	231	21	42	294	234

* A total of 20 parking permits will be issued to high school students. Permit preference will go first to seniors and then by birth date if additional spots are available.

The report states that although the chart above indicates a potential parking deficiency under worst case on-site conditions, it does not account for the fact that not everyone will attend in-person every day. As demonstrated in the chart, the maximum number of students, staff and faculty on-campus, with vehicles, at any given time is 234, which is less than the total number of available parking spaces (237). In addition, transit use and carpooling are anticipated to further mitigate impacts.

Clinic and Pharmacy Operations

The Parking and Operations Management Plan notes the proposed days and hours of operation for the pharmacy and clinic are Fridays and Saturdays. Patients can be scheduled between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. and clients to the clinic will be by appointment only. In addition, the pharmacy clients are limited to only those visiting and being treated at the clinic. Safeguards against break-ins are also noted.

Neighborhood Meeting

The AUHS/AURA Parking and Operations Management Plan includes holding a neighborhood meeting within six months of the start of each school year to proactively receive input from neighbors regarding any problems related to school traffic and parking management or operations. The AUHS/AURA Parking and Operations Management Plan includes additional options that if needed, the school will modify the schedule of classes and/or decrease on-site attendance by increasing online options.

Public Comments

As of the date of preparation of this staff report, staff received two comments via email, submitted

during the Planning Commission workshop and public hearing process, regarding parking, traffic and site maintenance concerns (Attachment J), and a letter from the LBUSD (Attachment C), noting their conclusion that impacts to their nearby schools would be minimal.

The two comments received were from residents of Gaviota Avenue and included the following:

- Speed of vehicles traveling on E. Hill Street;
- AUHS/AURA parking in surrounding neighborhoods;
- Traffic impacts and the design of the E. Hill Street and Walnut Avenue intersection;
- AUHS site, building, and landscape maintenance;
- Clinic and pharmacy details; and
- Water conservation.

Regarding public comments about traffic impacts and site maintenance, AUHS revised their Parking and Operations Management Plan to include a maintenance program and a requirement to hold a neighborhood meeting within six months after the start of each school year to assess and adjust for any impacts to the neighborhood. In addition, the development standards of the SP-25 Specific Plan require the site be maintained in accordance with the SHMC and that should there be any changes proposed to the Parking and Operations Management Plan, the plan must be revised and approved by the Community Development Director.

CEQA Determination

An Initial Study (IS) and Negative Declaration (ND) was prepared and submitted to the State Clearinghouse for distribution to appropriate agencies on July 25, 2022. The 20-day review period ended on August 15, 2022. No comment letters were received during that time frame; however, the LBUSD submitted a letter on August 19, 2022, cited above. The IS/ND concluded that the project would not have any significant impacts on the environment, and no mitigation is required.

Upon introduction of the Ordinance, the City Clerk's office will cause to be posted a summary of the Ordinance pursuant to Signal Hill Municipal Code Section 1.08.010 at City Hall, Discover Well Park, Reservoir Park, and the Signal Hill Library on or before September 16, 2022. A summary of the Ordinance will also be published in the Signal Tribune newspaper per Government Code §65091(a) (4) on September 16, 2022. Second reading of the Ordinance will be agendaized for the September 27, 2022, City Council meeting.

Approved:

Joe Hoefgen

Attachments