



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL

2175 Cherry Avenue • Signal Hill, California 90755-3799

STAFF REPORT

2/25/2025

AGENDA ITEM

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

**FROM: CARLO TOMAINO
CITY MANAGER**

**BY: CARLOS LUIS
PLANNING MANAGER**

SUBJECT: PUBLIC HEARING TO CONSIDER CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT 23-02 ALLOWING A CHURCH USE ON PROPERTY LOCATED AT 3300 EAST WILLOW STREET WITHIN THE COMMERCIAL INDUSTRIAL (CI) ZONING DISTRICT AND FINDING THAT SAID ACTION IS CATEGORICALLY EXEMPT FROM THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA) PURSUANT TO STATE CEQA GUIDELINES SECTION 15301

Summary:

Form of Notice: The City published the notice in the Signal Tribune newspaper pursuant to Government Code §65091(a)(4) on February 14, 2025, mailed the notice to property owners within a 300-foot radius of the subject site on February 14, 2025, and posted the notice in accordance with Signal Hill Municipal Code Section 1.08.010 at City Hall, Signal Hill Library, Reservoir Park, and Discovery Well Park on or before February 14, 2025.

The applicant, Robert Chavez, is requesting approval of a Conditional Use Permit for a church use on property located at 3300 East Willow Street. The church proposes to offer services Tuesdays through Fridays consisting of bible study, marriage/family support, music/vocal classes, small group meetings, young adult meetings, and substance/anger management Groups. Group service hours begin at 6:00 p.m. The church also offers weekly worship services on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. and Sundays at 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., which the City considers off-peak business hours when the surrounding businesses are closed. The request also includes application of Assembly Bill (AB) 2097, which would allow parking relief from the Signal Hill Municipal Code (SHMC) required off-street standards; the project qualifies because it is located within half mile of public transit as defined by AB 2097. The Planning Commission recently reviewed the application and recommended approval.

Strategic Plan Goal(s):

Goal No. 3: Economic and Downtown Development: Improve the local economy, support local

businesses, and create a vibrant downtown core.

Recommendation:

Adopt a resolution approving Conditional Use Permit 23-02 allowing a church use, entitled:

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SIGNAL HILL, CALIFORNIA, APPROVING CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT 23-02 ALLOWING A CHURCH USE AT 3300 EAST WILLOW STREET WITHIN THE COMMERCIAL INDUSTRIAL (CI) ZONING DISTRICT AND FINDING THAT SAID ACTION IS CATEGORICALLY EXEMPT FROM THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA) PURSUANT TO STATE CEQA GUIDELINES SECTION 15301.

Fiscal Impact:

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended action.

Background:

The City's Code Enforcement Division received a report of a church operating within the existing building located at 3300 East Willow Street. Upon reviewing Planning files and Business License records, the City confirmed the church had not received approval to operate at the location. As a result, the City contacted the property management company and church operators informing them of the need to obtain approval of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) and a business license from the City.

Pastor Robert Chavez contacted the Planning Division to obtain information regarding the necessary requirements to operate a church at its current location. Staff informed Pastor Chavez that an operations plan as well as construction plans for the proposed tenant improvements must be submitted for preliminary review. After the initial discussion with the Pastor, staff met with church representatives to review conceptual plans; staff also explained the CUP application process. The applicant submitted a preliminary set of plans, staff reviewed the plans and provided comments to representatives of the church for further revisions. Subsequently, J2Architects contacted the Community Development Department to inform the City the firm would be the new designers for the project and would assist the church to process its CUP application.

Pastor Chavez submitted a Conditional Use Permit Application approximately ten months from the City's initial contact with the church. According to Pastor Chavez, the lapse in submittal time was due to challenges obtaining property management's notarized signature on the application and hiring J2 Architects. The City informed Pastor Chavez that a Developer Deposit payment and the Operations Plan were required to deem the application complete and process the application. On August 29, 2023, Pastor Chavez submitted payment, and the required Operations Plan approximately two weeks later.

The City provided comments to the applicant requiring revisions or clarifications of the submitted plans. In addition, staff recommended the applicant prepare a Parking Study given the operations plan identified a large assembly component (worship service, group services) taking place in the evening hours and on Sundays. The applicant resubmitted revised plans and a parking study. On April 2, 2024, the applicant submitted a separate deposit to cover the review costs, and the City

initiated review.

Staff met with Pastor Chavez and J2Architects to discuss the parking concerns for the project. Staff informed the firm that, based on parking requirements in the Signal Hill Municipal Code (SHMC), the site was not in compliance with the appropriate number of parking spaces, which is largely determined by the size of the proposed worship area which is 6,806 square feet and would require 170 parking spaces. The City provided Pastor Chavez and J2Architects with options, which included (1) revising plans to reduce the size of the church to comply with the required parking or (2) moving forward with the CUP application in its current floor plan configuration. The City informed Pastor Chavez was informed that proceeding with option 2 may result in an unfavorable recommendation from staff, given the off-street parking requirements.

The City provided the options noted above to the applicant prior to the applicant submitting a request to apply AB 2097 parking standards to the project. AB 2097, effective January 1, 2023, generally provides development projects located within a half mile of public transit with relief from the SHMC parking requirements. After reviewing AB 2097, staff determined the CUP application to allow the proposed church use met the criteria of the statute and could be evaluated using the statutory parking standards.

Analysis:

Site Description

The site is located on the south side of East Willow Street, between Redondo Avenue to the east and North Palm Drive to the west. The site measures approximately 262,231 square feet and is currently developed with five multi-tenant buildings. Businesses occupying the site include light industrial uses (warehousing, assembly) and commercial uses (contractors office, fitness studios, delicatessen, music lessons). The site also has an existing wireless telecommunication facility located along the southeast portion of the property. The existing zoning designations and land uses for the project site and adjacent properties are as follows:

Direction	Zoning Designation	Existing Land Use
Project Site	Commercial Industrial (CI)	Multi-tenant Light Industrial, Commercial, and parking
North	City of Long Beach	East Willow Street
South	General Industrial (GI)	Oil Tank Farm and Industrial Uses
East	Commercial Industrial (CI)	Warehouse and Office
West	Not Applicable	North Palm Drive

VICINITY MAP



Land Use

Pursuant to SHMC Section 20.20.020, Churches are allowed subject to approval of a Conditional Use Permit in the Commercial Industrial (CI) zone.

Church Operations

The church is operated by “Victory Outreach Church” which according to the Operation Plan (Attachment A), serves the community by offering a variety of programs and services aimed at empowering individuals to realize their possibilities in life. The following are the proposed days and times services and programs are offered:

	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
9:00 a.m.						Worship Service
11:00 a.m.						Worship Service
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.	Substance/Anger Management	Worship Service	Music/Vocal Classes	Young Adult Group		

The church’s administrative offices would be open Tuesday through Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

The church serves 75 to 140 people from the community and surrounding area. The sanctuary area has a maximum capacity of 299 attendees, which would include pastors, assistants, congregation attendees, childcare teachers, and children. Based on actual membership attendance, the Pastor indicated the church averages 160 members during worship services. The CUP allows the City to place conditions of approval on a project to ensure these do not create nuisances or issues of

concern within the surrounding area. Condition No. 9 is included requiring the church operations remain consistent with the Operations Plan. Staff would also note the church's Operation Plan refers to the group meetings/ classes by topic, but in order to allow topics to be changed, the conditions of approval refer to the group meetings as "group support meetings or group classes." Condition No. 10 prohibits the church from conducting activities Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., which is typically when surrounding businesses are open; staff included this condition in the proposed approval to avoid overcrowding and parking issues during peak hours.

As part of the review process, staff also desired to ensure the church complied with Building Code and Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Fire Watch requirements while the City processed its entitlement application. The church expressed its desire to remain open for services as several groups and worship services were already scheduled. The Principal Building Inspector determined that if the church provided temporary measures addressing ADA and Fire requirements, the operations would be allowed to continue while the City continued processing the CUP application. The church provided temporary measures addressing ADA and fire concerns to the satisfaction of the Building Inspector. The temporary measures have become permanent and Conditions of Approval 11 and 12; staff recommends including these conditions to ensure the church continues implementing these measures. Since implementing the required measures, the church has offered services consistent with its Operations Plan, including worship services on Wednesday evenings and Sundays with no complaints reported to the City. The City's Code Enforcement also monitors the site regularly and has not observed concerns with the operation of the church on the property.

Floor Plan

The church occupies a tenant space in the building located at the northeast corner of the property. The building measures approximately 17,600 square feet and is developed as a multi-tenant building. The church space measures approximately 12,100 square feet and consists of a sanctuary, offices, a breakroom, restrooms, electrical rooms, and a storage room. The area utilized as the sanctuary measures approximately 6,806 square feet. Seating in the sanctuary is non-fixed seating which allows seats to be reconfigured as needed. The sanctuary is occupied on Wednesdays and Sundays and has an average attendance of 60 worshippers on Wednesdays and 120 worshippers on Sundays.

Two volunteers utilize the office spaces, both of whom are responsible for administrative duties. The church holds group services (marriage/family support, substance/anger management, young adult groups) in the office space. According to the Pastor, group services are by appointment only, typically include 10 people, and are scheduled so these do not conflict with worship services.

Off-Street Parking

SHMC Section 20.70.030 provides a parking standard of one space per five permanent seats or one space per 40 square feet of assembly area whichever results in the greatest number of parking spaces for churches. This Code section also provides a parking standard for offices of one space per 250 square feet of gross floor area. Given the church does not utilize fixed seating, the one parking space per 40 square feet of assembly area formula applies to calculate the parking requirement for the assembly (sanctuary) area. The Code calculates all other areas utilizing the one space per 250 square foot formula. A total of 190 parking spaces would be required for the church, based on the SHMC formulas. When factoring in other existing uses on the site, the total required parking for the comprehensive site is estimated at 428 parking spaces. The site was developed with a total of 273

parking spaces. Based on the parking standards noted here, the site would be under parked by 155 parking spaces.

AB 2097

Pursuant to AB 2097, development projects located within a half mile of public transit are allowed to be processed without imposing or enforcing a minimum number of parking requirements. Under AB 2097, development projects are not limited to new construction but may also apply to existing developments. Public transit is defined as an existing rail or bus rapid transit station, a ferry terminal served by either bus or rail, or the intersection of two or more major bus routes with buses coming at least every 20 minutes or less during the morning and afternoon peak commute periods, or a major transit stop included within the applicable regional transportation plan.

The applicant submitted a request to apply AB 2097 parking standards for its project. Since AB 2097 may apply to existing developments, the CUP application is eligible for AB 2097 parking relief. The applicant identified the intersection of East Willow Street and Redondo Avenue as the intersection of two major bus routes with buses running at least every 20 minutes. Long Beach Transit operates the bus lines which run east and west on East Willow Street and north and south on Redondo Avenue. Staff has included the bus route schedules confirming buses run at least every 20 minutes during peak morning and afternoon hours for the City Council's information (Attachment B).

Although off-street parking requirements are not applicable under AB 2097, the applicant prepared a parking study for the proposed project (Attachment C). The parking study's objective was to determine if adequate off-street parking spaces exist for all uses located on the property, including the church. The applicant's Traffic Engineer prepared the Parking Study by utilizing three methodologies to assess parking needs. One of the methodologies included field survey data collected through observations over three days (Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday). During the three-day observation period, the maximum number of vehicles observed parking in the parking lot was 122 on Sunday, 109 on Wednesday, and 93 on Friday. The study concluded that the existing 273 parking spaces on the site met the needs of the church and other existing uses. Additionally, the hours of operation for the church are typical when other businesses on the property are not in operation. The Parking Study concluded there are sufficient on-site parking stalls available for the church. Staff believes that based on the parking study, there is sufficient parking for all uses on the site, including the church, and there do not appear to be negative impacts associated with applying the parking standards provided under AB 2097 for this project.

Planning Commission Approval

On February 6, 2025, the Planning Commission conducted a duly public hearing to consider the CUP application. During the public hearing the Planning Commission considered testimony from the applicant and communicated the importance of ensuring the building was safe for assembly use. Staff informed the Planning Commission that a site inspection that the City's Building Inspector and the Los Angeles County Fire Department performed inspections. From the inspection, the church was required to implement a "Fire Watch" measures that have since continued and remain active during hours of operation. All measures have been completed permanently to the satisfaction of the Building Inspector and the Fire Department. The City also included conditions of approval requiring submittal of plans to Building and Safety as well as copies of Fire Department Inspection Reports if the church proposes modifications to the floor plan to confirm requirements continue to be met. At the public

hearing, the Planning Commission voted 4-0, with one member absent, recommending approval of the CUP to the City Council.

General Plan Consistency

The proposed project is consistent with the City's General Plan Land Use Element goals and policies. Specifically, Goal 3; Policies 3.9 and 3.10, which are included in the attached Resolution.

CEQA Categorical Exemption

This project is categorically exempt from the requirements CEQA pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 Class 1 (Existing Facility). Class 1 consists of the "operation...permitting, leasing...of existing private structures...involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use." The proposed project qualifies for the Class 1 categorical exemption because the project does not involve expansion of the existing building or require offsite utility improvements and would allow a church use within an existing building located on a lot that is developed with other commercial and industrial buildings/uses, subject to conditions of approval.

Further, none of the exceptions to the exemptions as set forth in State CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply. Specifically, for the proposed Project:

- a. There is no possibility of a cumulative impact of the same type of project in the same place over time. The proposed project involves the use of a church within an existing commercial/industrial building, subject to conditions of approval. Once the Project is completed, the likelihood of a successive project on this site is low and the probability of a cumulative impact is low.
- b. No Significant Effect. No adverse environmental impacts will occur as a result of the proposed Project's continued use of the existing building as a church. The project area is developed and does not contain any environmentally sensitive areas.
- c. Would not damage scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.
- d. Is not located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code because the project is not located on a hazardous site.
- e. Would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource because there are no historical resources near the proposed project such that project impacts would not have any substantial adverse changes in the significance of a historical resource.

If the City Council approves the proposed application, staff would file a Notice of Exemption with the County Clerk's Office and the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation within five business days of the approval.

Conclusion

2/25/2025

The church has operated at the site without any reported issues of concern since the initial report in 2022. Hours of operation for the church are almost exclusively during non-peak business hours, when other businesses are closed, so that there is sufficient parking. Through surveys conducted by the applicant's Traffic Engineer, the site has been observed to have adequate parking for the church and other existing uses. Based on the parking study, staff believes that the parking standard applied under AB 2907 would meet the needs of the center and would not create overflow parking issues. During a duly noticed meeting held on February 6, 2025, the Planning Commission considered testimony on this item, documents and evidence submitted, including but not limited to the staff report, attachments, and materials submitted by the applicant, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of the CUP application to the City Council. With the recommended conditions, the church is expected to continue to operate without nuisances or issues of concern. Staff would monitor the site to ensure compliance with conditions and to note any concerns or violations on a regular basis as is done with all CUPs

Reviewed for Fiscal Impact:

Siamlu Cox

Attachments:

- A. Victory Outreach Operation Plan
- B. AB 2097 Request and Long Beach Transit
- C. Parking Study
- D. Project Plans
- E. Resolution
- F. Exhibit A of Resolution