



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL

2175 Cherry Avenue • Signal Hill, California 90755-3799

STAFF REPORT

8/16/2022

AGENDA ITEM

**TO: HONORABLE CHAIR
AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

**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 August 5, 2022; was mailed to property owners and residents within a 300-foot radius of the subject property on or before August 5, 2022; and was posted in accordance with Signal Hill Municipal Code (SHMC) Section 1.08.010 on or before August 5, 2022.

The applicant, Morgan Pickard, on behalf of the property owner, the American University of Health Sciences (AUHS), is requesting a public hearing to consider a Zoning Ordinance Amendment to establish a new specific plan for expanded educational programs at AUHS and a new American University Research Academy (AURA) private high school at 1600 E. Hill Street. The overall expansion includes:

- Establish the Private High School (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 recommending City Council adoption of a Negative Declaration for the American University of Health Sciences/American University Research Academy (AUHS/AURA) specific plan, entitled:

Attachment B

A RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF SIGNAL HILL, CALIFORNIA, RECOMMENDING CITY COUNCIL ADOPTION OF NEGATIVE DECLARATION 07/25/22(1) FOR THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES/AMERICAN UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ACADEMY (AUHS/AURA) SPECIFIC PLAN

2. Adopt a resolution recommending City Council approval of Zoning Ordinance Amendment 22-05, amending Title 20 of the Signal Hill Municipal Code and amending the Official Zoning Map, entitled:

A RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF SIGNAL HILL, CALIFORNIA, RECOMMENDING CITY COUNCIL APPROVAL OF 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 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

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 building two. 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 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 began interior remodeling of building number three to accommodate a pharmacy school and working pharmacy. AUHS also hired a traffic consultant to prepare a parking and traffic analysis for the future expansion activities.

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 a private high school by Fall 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 beyond the required 300-foot radius to include 59 property owners on 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, and not the full enrollment beginning the fourth year which would be 80. 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 the Zoom teleconference platform 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
- To provide the neighbors with the 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 mailed to property owners and residents within a 300-foot radius of the site, as well as the 59 property owners on Legion Drive previously included, was published in the Signal Tribune newspaper, and was posted in accordance with SHMC Section 1.08.010. Staff received one comment from the public inquiring about traffic, parking, and whether the school parking would be accessed off of Gaviota Avenue. Staff responded to these comments at the workshop and emphasized that there will continue to be no access to the larger parking area from Gaviota Avenue. The Planning Commission discussed the item and directed staff to schedule it for a public hearing.

On July 25, 2022, a Notice of Intent to Adopt a Negative Declaration regarding the project was mailed

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

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 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

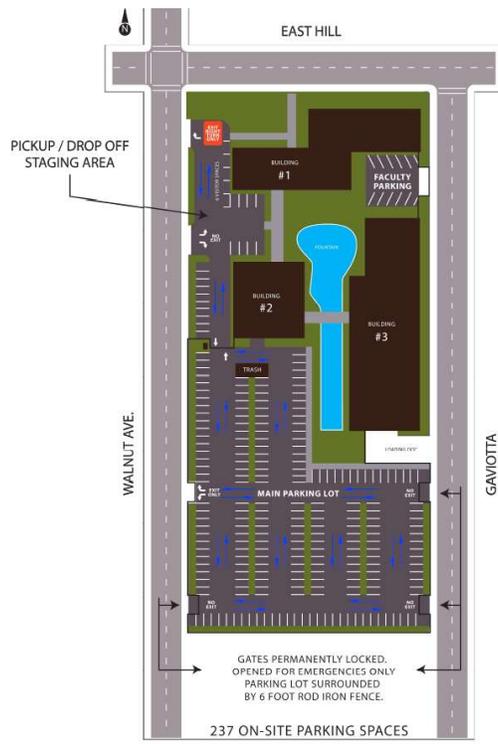
The project site is a 3.75 acre rectangular-shaped parcel located on the south side of E. Hill Street and bounded by Walnut Avenue to the west and Gaviota Avenue to the east. It consists of three separate buildings totaling 72,000 square feet (SF) and provides 237 surface parking spaces. Vehicular access 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 faculty parking lot in the north-east corner of the site). A proposed drop-off area is located in the north-west corner of the site along Walnut Avenue.

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

VICINITY MAP



PROJECT SITE PLAN



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, CA, 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, 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.

Expansion

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 (Attachment B). The Master Plan identifies increases in enrollment and additional programs; 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. 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 any potential issues caused by the proposed project.

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, five patients per day; and
- **Fall 2024:** AUHS School of Medicine.

Clinic and Pharmacy Operations

AUHS plans to open a fully licensed, open to the public, pediatric clinic and pharmacy. The pediatric clinic and a pharmacy will be within existing Building 1 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 by appointment

only. No more than one patient per onsite physician will be scheduled at one time per ½-hour segment. One teaching physician will be in attendance at all times during operating hours. Two additional staff members will serve as assistants to the physician. Students will complete 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 Street entrance of Building 1. Four parking spaces will be dedicated parking spots for patient parking.

The pharmacy will not be a walk-in public 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 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 back-room prescription fulfillment area. Students will also complete lab hours by working in the pharmacy, and their numbers will vary by class size and schedule throughout the day.

AUHS management will be required to file a clinic and pharmacy operations plan with the Community Development Department indicating, at a minimum, planned days and hours of operation, expected number of daily clients, limitations on clients to those visiting and being treated at the clinic, and safeguards against break-ins. Any proposed changes to the operations plan will be approved ministerially by the Community Development Director in writing. The Director will have the authority to refer any such proposed changes to the Planning Commission for consideration and action.

Traffic Analysis

A traffic and circulation study were conducted to determine whether the increased 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 C and D).

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 AM peak hour and nine trips during the PM peak hour). This is 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 VMT. The report also analyzed key 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, C or above, during peak hours. Finally, access to the site is adequate on Walnut Avenue.

Parking Analysis

In addition to traffic, a Parking Demand Study was prepared by 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 E and F). 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 campus upon completion of the Project. 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 (ITE) 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 Management Plan to fully accommodate parking on-site and not to spill over onto the adjoining public streets and impact the surrounding neighborhood.

Schedule of Classes

As this information relates to parking and traffic generated around the university, it is important to clarify the difference between enrolled students and students in attendance. Within the SON program, nursing students spend 50% of their class time on campus and 50% off campus in clinical/lab studies and internships. 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 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; and
- A designated on-site drop-off 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. There is a total of 237 parking spaces provided on site.

CURRENT

Program	Enrollment/ **Patient	On-Site Attendance	On-Site Staff	On-Site Faculty	Total On-Site Attendance	*Potential Drivers
SON	155	50% = 58	8	14	80	80
SOP	25	60% = 12	2	3	15	15
Total	180	70	10	17	97	97

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% = 13	2	3	18	18
SOM	40	30% = 12	1	3	16	16
AURA	80	80	2	5	87	27
PHARM/CLINIC	5	5	3	2	10	8
Total	470	230	21	42	293	231

* 80 Students who attend the high school will only be allowed a total of 20 parking permits.
Permit preference will go first to seniors and then by birth date if additional spots are available.

The report further evaluates the parking demand based on daily use and demonstrates that Wednesdays will have the highest demand, requiring 204 parking spaces at peak time. Given that the onsite parking provided is 237, this will provide a parking surplus of 33 spaces.

AUHS Parking Management Plan

In addition to managing the class schedules, AUHS has developed a parking management plan to ensure that all of the university's parking demand will be fully accommodated on site and will not spill over onto neighboring public streets. Pursuant to the Parking Management Plan, all students (except 60 of the high school students), 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 (Attachment G).

Based on the studies provided, staff agrees that access to the site is adequate and that the 237 on-site parking spaces can support the proposed uses and conform to the City's parking standards/dimension requirements.

Public Comments

As of the date of publication of this staff report, staff received two public comments from residents (Attachment H). Items of concern included:

- The speed of vehicles traveling on E. Hill Street;
- AUHS parking in surrounding neighborhoods;
- Traffic impacts and the designs of the intersections of E. Hill Street and Walnut Avenue, and E. Hill Street and Gaviota Avenue;
- AUHS site, building, and landscape maintenance;

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- Clinic and Pharmacy details; and
- Water conservation.

Staff has shared the comments with AUHS and are working with them to address maintenance details. The development standards of the SP-25 specific plan require the site be maintained in accordance with the SHMC, and standards for parking management are also included. Clinic and pharmacy activities are included above and will be reviewed during the staff presentation.

CEQA Determination

An Initial Study (IS) and Negative Declaration (ND) has been prepared. IS/ND 07/25/22(1) was submitted to the Los Angeles County Recorder's Office and the State Clearinghouse for distribution to appropriate agencies on July 25, 2022. The 20-day review period ended on August 16, 2022.

Approved:

Colleen T. Doan

Attachments