
III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

B. OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

SETTING

The proposed project site is located in developed area of the Granada Hills Knollwood Community Plan area of the City of Los Angeles. The Granada Hills-Knollwood Community Plan area is surrounded by the communities of Northridge, Chatsworth, Porter Ranch and Mission Hills. The Granada Hills-Knollwood Community Plan Area, as defined by the City Planning Department for statistical and planning purposes, contains approximately 9,651 acres. The irregularly shaped plan area is generally bounded by Devonshire and Lassen Streets on the south, the Santa Susana Mountains on the north, the Chatsworth-Porter Ranch District on the west and the Golden State Freeway (I-5) and San Diego Freeway (I-405) on the east.

The community's topography is as varied as the underlying geology, ranging from nearly flat to rugged steep-sided canyons and ridges increasing from south to north. The residential pattern of development in the community is also varied. The area north of Rinaldi Street is generally characterized by estate lots with view homes situated along curvilinear streets, and equestrian trails, greenbelt buffers and vast scenic open spaces.

As depicted in the aerial photograph presented in Figure III.B-1 on page 33, the project site is immediately bounded by Rinaldi Street, with the West and East Campuses being bisected by Shoshone Avenue. The area surrounding the project site is comprised of residential and school-related uses. Single family residential homes border the proposed West Campus to the immediate west and north. Single family residential homes also border the East Campus to the immediate north and east. Single-family residential homes and a Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Adult School site are located to the south of the project site, along the south side of Rinaldi Street.

EAST CAMPUS

The Hillcrest Christian Church was founded at its present location in 1965. The school first received approval to operate as a parochial school in 1976. The existing East Campus property is zoned A1-1

Figure III.B-1 Aerial Photograph of the Project Site

and currently operates under a Conditional Use Permit for use as a private school facility (Kindergarten through 12th grade) with a maximum permitted student capacity of 800.¹

The East Campus is comprised of an approximate 4-acre ‘L shaped’ corner lot with a frontage of approximately 670 feet along the northerly side of Rinaldi Street and approximately 680 feet along the east side of Shoshone Avenue. The rear property line of the East Campus abuts an upward sloping hillside with residential properties bordering the school site to the north and east.

The East Campus is currently developed with approximately 60,000 square feet of church and school-related uses including: classrooms, administration offices, a church, gymnasium building and other ancillary facilities. A total of 148 parking spaces are provided in two surface parking lots, one located at the easternmost portion of the campus fronting Rinaldi Street, and another to the north of the church and gymnasium buildings along Shoshone Avenue. In addition, approximately 130 spaces are provided on an as needed basis (i.e. overflow parking during special events) on a grass covered play area north of the surface parking lot on Shoshone Avenue. The school is ornamentally landscaped throughout and well maintained.

Existing Operations

Hillcrest Christian School provides private school instruction for grades kindergarten through high school (K-12) on a year round basis with summer time programs operating at less than full capacity. The school is currently operating at full capacity during the school session with a student enrollment of 800. Full classroom sessions begin in September and end in June each year. During these months, the school’s normal operating hours are from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Afternoon daycare programs begin at 2:30 p.m. Some special events occur after school hours.

As indicated previously, the Hillcrest Christian Church was originally constructed on the subject site in 1965. The Church facility has a maximum seating capacity of 527 persons. At the present time, the Hillcrest congregation is joined with the Fellowship of the Shepherd of the Hills and conducts services at an off-site location at Rinaldi Street and Tampa Avenue. However, Hillcrest maintains conditional use authority for its church related-services and rents their church facility to other religious and community organizations on a routine basis. Hillcrest expects to continue to rent it’s facilities throughout the school year to selected community groups which include church-related services on the weekends.

¹ City of Los Angeles Case No. ZA 96-0054 (CUZ)(ZV), dated April 17, 1996 as amended by Case No. ZA 96-0054 (CUZ)(ZV)(PAD), dated October 22, 1997.

Hillcrest Christian School (HCS) has a variety of events scheduled throughout the school year, which are not only designed for student/faculty and associated family involvement but also for the benefit of the surrounding community. Special events on the Hillcrest campus are generally grouped into three categories: community events, school events (non-sport related), and school events (sport-related).

From August through May (with an occasional event in July), scheduled community events are comprised of a community dinner; community meetings; open houses; a town hall meeting; special community events; and the availability of the site as a designated Red-Cross Emergency Center. While most of these events are scheduled as daytime or evening occurrences, a few events take place during both times of day.

As with the community events, school events are scheduled to begin in August and end in May. Examples of such school events include “meet the teacher” nights; pep rallies; grandparents’ days; special events; a jog-a-thon; and special event banquets. Approximately one-third of these events are scheduled as daytime occurrences; the remaining two-thirds are planned as evening events.

School-related sporting events occur throughout the school year from August through May. Approximately one-third of these events are associated with elementary school sports, and the remaining approximate two-thirds are divided between middle and high school sports. While some of these events occur on the outdoor play area on the existing campus, most of the school-related sporting events take place within the existing gymnasium building. School sporting events are typically scheduled outside of school hours. It is assumed that the average event schedule would occur from when school lets out until dusk. Use of the athletic field after dusk would be precluded as stadium lighting will not be provided for the athletic field.

WEST CAMPUS

The proposed West Campus site is comprised of approximately 5.5-acres and is characterized by an irregular shaped corner lot with a frontage of approximately 440 feet along the northerly side of Rinaldi Street and approximately 680 feet along the west side of Shoshone Avenue. The western and northerly property line is defined by Ridgeway Road, an unimproved curvilinear roadway easement. The proposed West Campus property is zoned A1-1-K and is currently developed with three single-family residential homes, two fronting Shoshone Avenue and one positioned at the corner of Rinaldi Street and Shoshone Avenue. The Hillcrest Christian School and Church owns all of the residential properties on the West Campus site and currently leases these properties to private individuals. An illustrative site plan depicting the placement of the existing structures on the West Campus site is provided in Figure III.A-2 on page 30.

Access to the existing residential properties is provided via driveway easements and curb cuts off of Rinaldi Street and Shoshone Avenue. Two of the northernmost residences on Shoshone have driveway easements off of Shoshone. The third residence, located at the corner of Rinaldi Street, has driveway access provided to a detached garage off of Rinaldi Street, approximately 100 feet west of Shoshone Avenue. Street parking is currently permitted on the west side of Shoshone Avenue.

Topographically, the West Campus is situated at the base of an adjacent hillside. The site slopes towards the southeast with slopes generally on the order of 5:1 or flatter. The topography on the West Campus site ranges from approximately 1180 feet average surface elevation at the higher elevations to approximately 1120 feet at the lowest point. A majority of the site, to the northwest of the residences to Ridgeway Road remains vacant.

Vegetation on the site consists almost entirely of non-native species including mature trees. As depicted in the aerial photograph shown in Figure III.B-1 on page 33, trees on the West Campus project site are unevenly distributed, with dense tree cover appearing in the areas closest to the residential structures. A majority of the site, in the areas adjacent to Rinaldi Street, extending north is vacant with very little tree cover or vegetation. This area is routinely disked and weeded as necessary for fire suppression in the hillside area.