DATE	2024.09.05
PROJECT NAME	The Girls' Middle School Renovation & New Gymnasium
PROJECT ADDRESS	3950 FABIAN WAY, PALO ALTO
SUBJECT	Conditional Use Permit Application
PREPARED BY	Mousam Adcock, Sang Lee at CAW Architects.

The Girls' Middle School in Palo Alto

The Girls' Middle School was founded in 1998. The Girls' Middle School is a progressive school with an emphasis on hands-on and project-based learning. The integrated curriculum and supportive community nurture the intellectual, emotional, and physical growth of girls during a crucial time in their lives.

The founding faculty and staff first taught classes in September 1998 in their original location in Mountain View, California, with a sixth grade class of 35 girls. In 2011, GMS moved to their current home in Palo Alto. Today the school enrolls approximately 200 girls from more than 45 elementary schools around the San Francisco Bay Area.

The school is now in a purchase agreement with the current owners of 3950 Fabian Way to move to a location specifically designed/renovated to fit their program.

Existing condition in the proposed school site.

The proposed school site is situated in GM zoning with a 0.5:1 FAR and a 35' maximum height. The existing core and shell of the building with Tilt-Up concrete walls were constructed according to architectural drawings stamped by B.H.Bocook, and Structural drawings stamped by Ireland Engineering, dated between 1990 and 1992. The building was based on Uniform Building Code 1988, under Construction Type V-N (Currently updated to V-B). It is a two story office building; 32,500 SF. The existing building is fully sprinklered. The record drawings show bathrooms, lunch kitchen, and elevator were built around 1993.

The proposed school use will be compatible with its surroundings: the north neighbor is a private high school, the south neighbor consists of office buildings, and across Fabian way to the east is the OFJCC Fitness Center, low-income senior housing, and a future 4-5-story housing site. There are three single-family houses adjacent to the west property lines, approximately 100 feet from the edge of the existing building.

The site surrounding the existing building is mostly used for parking spaces, which will remain, except for areas that will be redesigned as outdoor lunch, classroom spill out and physical education spaces.

The building is in good condition and suitable for renovation to be used as a school. The majority of the existing building exterior will remain as is and the interior will be fully renovated to include classrooms, staff offices and support spaces. An addition is planned on the north side to provide a middle school size gymnasium. The north portion of the building will be demolished in order to fit the addition within the FAR limit of the site. The existing structure will be upgraded for both gravity and seismic load requirements to meet current code.

Project Description and Scope

The conceptual design responds to the program, the site and the existing building by strategically modifying the building to create meaningful spaces and clear organization. A student's day at school starts with drop-off: the campus is organized with a single entrance during drop-off and a wrap-around drive, with students safely exiting cars at the north end of the site just before parents/guardians exit the campus.

While the outdoor space around the building will remain mostly as parking spaces and vehicular circulation, the west side of the site will be redesigned as a large outdoor lunch/play/activity area connecting to the first-floor classrooms. The first floor will house

administration and specialty classrooms at the perimeter so they can open to the outdoors, maximizing outdoor spaces for indoor-outdoor learning. This connection enhances lunch and afterschool program function as well.

An outdoor PE space near the gymnasium is designed with a skateboard half pipe in the northwest corner of the building for extended student movement and exercise. Internal security fencing will be installed around the outdoor play area, separating it from the parking and vehicular circulation. This fencing, especially on the west side near the residential neighbors, will help reduce sound transmission towards the houses.

The existing building's FAR already approaches the maximum allowed by the zoning requirements (existing designed area is 32,500 SF and maximum allowed based on site area is 32,919. However, the school needs an indoor gymnasium for its very active academic programs. To fulfill this need, the northmost one bay of structure will be demolished (approximately 2000SF x 2 floors) and replaced with an approximately 4000 SF single floor gymnasium. This approach maintains compliance with the City's FAR and 35' maximum height zoning requirements while providing the school with a properly sized double-story high gymnasium.

Within the existing exterior shell on the rest of the building, classrooms and other academic program spaces are planned around a simple circulation path on both floors with a connective tissue of gathering spaces of various scales. Nooks off the circulation create small gathering options, individual study zones and some larger group work and student center. The existing elevator cab and shaft size meet the current code, and will remain.

The two floors are interconnected in several ways - prominent open circulation at the entry leading students from the drop-off area, a new open stair near the existing elevator, and a linear lightwell slot on the second floor adjacent to the science classrooms linking the two floors with views and natural light.

The design concept creates a middle school building that not only accommodates the program but also creates a home for the school that is ideal for middle school students' academic growth, provides dedicated spaces for their innovation, and offers a warm and welcoming environment for the holistic growth of young women.