

Batch Plant Site Parking Lot Development
Updated Project Description October 2022

Application: This is an application for modification of the ESOS study requirements for a proposed surface parking lot project at 385 Morris Street. The proposed project is a 236-space, valet-operated parking lot to support uses at the Barlow, including a proposed hotel project.

Although the Barlow has an excess of parking spaces as calculated under the Zoning Ordinance, the City has expressed concern about adequacy of parking resources; in addition, proposed new development will create additional parking demand. The valet-operated parking lot responds to these concerns with an efficient parking layout, and a site plan that is highly sensitive to the Laguna context.

As the City is aware, the applicant considered several alternative parking lot concepts, including a standard 156-space surface parking lot, and a 230-space two-level parking structure. Based on Preliminary Review of the parking structure proposal by City staff and the Planning Commission, the application has been revised to the current proposal.

Zoning: The site is zone M, Industrial, and ESOS, Environmental and Scenic Open Space. The ESOS designation imposes special review requirements and development restrictions.

Site: While vacant and unutilized at this time, most of the site has been previously developed. It was used for industrial purposes (concrete batch plant) for decades. As a relic of previous use, over 25,000 square feet of the site is paved. The project concept includes parking lot development only within the footprint of previously-disturbed/developed areas, leaving the rear (east) area undeveloped.

The last long-term use of the site was by Sebastopol Ready Mix, an intense industrial concrete batch plant use. A large portion of the property where the parking lot would be developed appears to have been paved with concrete from the former operation. The Ready Mix business has been out of operation for many years.

In the time since the Barlow acquired the property, the site has occasionally been used for City-approved short-term parking purposes, supporting events at the Barlow, and also serving as a temporary parking area for a film production company.

The easternmost area of the developed site slopes off sharply, with concrete rubble presumably deposited by the former Ready Mix plant protruding from the slope. The eastern area, while likely at some point previously disturbed, appears more natural in character, and includes a seasonal shallow pond area that may have served as a catchment area for prior industrial uses.

The Laguna Preserve's AmeriCorps Trail slices across a portion of the back of the property. Another informal Laguna Preserve trail parallels the north property line just

north of the property and emerges at the Morris Street sidewalk. An industrial use is on the property to the south. Concrete block walls line the Morris Street frontage and the north property line. Both of these walls are proposed for removal.

The site is below the 100-year flood elevation, which together with adjacency to the Laguna Preserve and the ESOS regulations, makes development a challenge.

In general, the site presents a poor appearance, weedy and dusty, disused, and detracting from the Morris Street area.

Proposed project: The proposed project is a 236-space surface parking lot to support uses at the Barlow. The site is zoned for development. A wide range of industrial and commercial uses are conditionally permitted at the site, however a parking lot is one of the least intensive uses allowed under the Zoning Ordinance.

In addition, as the project is in the flood plain, another advantage of the project is that a parking lot presents relatively low flood risk for property damage or risk to persons by not having any occupied structures built on the site. In the event of a potential flood alert, vehicles can readily be moved off-site, and other improvements will either be impervious to flood damage or designed to mitigate potential effects.

Given flood concerns at the site, early in our consultations with the City, Planning staff suggested otherwise-required electric vehicle charging stations instead be located at the main Barlow development. This request can be reviewed in the formal Use Permit application.

Parking areas would be surfaced with permeable road base gravel. For durability, drive aisles would be asphalt.

The concrete block walls would be removed for a major aesthetic enhancement, and safety lighting (minimized to address night sky and biotic impacts) would be provided. Light poles would be relatively short and sited in conjunction with tall-growing trees to further reduce night sky impacts.

Extensive landscaping would be provided within bioswales, serving the dual purposes of providing parking lot landscaping as well as providing drainage/percolation of stormwater. The bioswales would be extensively landscaped, focused on native plants and trees. In prior comments, City staff had raised concerns with 'maples' however the two maple species listed (Big Leaf Maple and Vine Maple) are Laguna natives and have been used in a number of restoration plantings by the City and other organizations.

Pedestrian pathways would be provided at several locations, including an overlook trail at the back of the proposed development footprint.

The easternmost portion of the property would be undeveloped. The applicant has had some discussions with City staff about providing an open space easement to the City to

ensure that this more natural area remains as open space, and to also grant an easement to the City for the portion of the AmeriCorps Trail that traverses the property. We remain open to this discussion.

Request: The current proposal was developed in response to the Planning Commission's Preliminary Review comments and actions. Commissioners appeared to favor a surface parking lot over a parking structure. As we understand the Commission's action, it exempted the previous development area from ESOS study requirements and left open a determination of an appropriate setback from resources of concern.

The current proposal provides a 50' setback from wetland resources of concern, which is consistent with allowances in the ESOS regulations, if approved by the Planning Commission. With its native landscaping, swales, concrete block wall removals, pathways, and sensitive site plan, the project is a significant improvement from existing conditions. We believe that the 50' setback is more than adequate to provide appropriate protection to wetland resources, especially when considering the poor state of the property at present.

Zoning issues: The ESOS District is a combining district that imposes additional review requirements and development standards and requires that virtually any development otherwise permitted by the underlying M Industrial zoning be subject to a Use Permit.

There are extensive study and related procedural requirements for proposed development projects within the ESOS district, however the ESOS regulations also include exemptions for development on already paved land. As we understand it, the Planning Commission acknowledged the current state of the property and exempted the previously developed area from ESOS study requirements.

Section 17.46.090 of the Zoning Ordinance provides for Planning Commission modification of setback requirements. The applicant requests that a reduced setback of 50' be authorized.

- As noted, the area of the site within the proposed development footprint was previously developed for intense industrial purposes and provides no natural features, includes no special status plants and has no natural habitat.
- Large portions of the development footprint are paved, meeting one element of a site that otherwise would be fully exempt from the study requirements.
- Extensive native landscaping and drainage swales are provided, along with lighting that will minimize night sky impacts.
- The eastern area of the site would not be developed. This area, while likely also previously disturbed many decades ago, did not appear to be utilized by the most recent industrial use, has a natural appearance, and includes native plants and trees and other resources as well as a portion of the City's AmeriCorps Trail.

- After discussions with City staff, the applicant commissioned a biotic study of the site by WRA Environmental Consultants (previously submitted). This detailed study found no resources of concern within the proposed development footprint; however the preliminary findings recommended several modifications to the project design to better achieve compliance with ESOS regulations and environmental concerns in the transition area from the parking lot development to the undeveloped area to the east, which the applicant performed. The report determined that the revised design complied with ESOS concerns and qualified for reduced study requirements and reduction of the required 100' setback from resources of concern, to 50'. The project footprint has been so revised.
- It is the applicant's understanding that the Commission previously granted a similar modification of ESOS requirements for the Davis Townhome project.

We understand that an ESOS study of project effects on the more 'natural' areas of the property is required. We hope that our previously study in combination with our revised proposal will facilitate the expeditious completion of necessary studies.