

Meadow Heights Elementary School Multi-Purpose Building and Playground Upgrades Project Description and Evidence for Categorical Exemption

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project includes construction of a multi-purpose building and playground upgrades at Meadow Heights Elementary School, which is one of fifteen elementary schools in the San Mateo-Foster City School District (school district). The school is located at 2619 Dolores Street in San Mateo. The improvements are summarized below.

Multi-Purpose Building

The proposed project includes constructing an 8,725 square foot Multi-Purpose Building, located entirely within an existing paved playground area at the elementary school. The new Multi-Purpose Building will include a kitchen, serving area, assembly area/stage, annex, restrooms, and various storage rooms. This new building would displace some play equipment.

Playground Area Upgrades

The project also includes changes to the playground area, which consists of the following:

- Reducing the size of the existing grass field to accommodate relocating the existing play structure on new play tile and ADA improvements;
- Modifying the existing, remaining grass field to synthetic turf including some minor grading, requiring exporting 5,420 cubic yards of soil;
- ADA ramps; and
- One- to two-foot retaining wall on three sides of the synthetic turf field.

Other Improvements

Other improvements consist of a new Emergency Vehicle Access (EVA) at Falda Avenue, and new electrical box just north of the Falda Avenue EVA.

Other than the removal of the grass field, no vegetation will be removed.

CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION AND EVIDENCE

The proposed project qualifies for a categorical exemption under Article 19, Section 15314 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

15314. Minor Additions to Schools: Class 14 consists of minor additions to existing schools within existing school grounds where the addition does not increase original student capacity by more than 25% or ten classrooms, whichever is less. The addition of portable classrooms is included in this exemption.

Evidence and Findings

The project would not create any new standard classrooms that would provide for an increase in student capacity. Therefore, the proposed project would not increase original student capacity. For these reasons, the proposed project is categorically exempt as the Multi-Purpose Building is characterized as a minor addition to an existing school within existing school grounds where the additional does not increase original student capacity by more than 25 percent or ten classrooms.

Exceptions to Categorical Exemptions

Section 15300.2 of the CEQA Guidelines lists exceptions that would prohibit a project from qualifying for a Categorical Exemption, even if the project satisfies the requirements for one or more of the exemption classes. The school district's CEQA consultant, EMC Planning Group, conducted an independent review and evaluation of the proposed project, conducted independent research, and reviewed project plans prepared by the school district's architect. Based on its review, EMC Planning Group concluded that none of the exceptions listed in CEQA Guidelines section 15300.2 (a-f) apply to the proposed project (discussed below). Therefore, a Categorical Exemption is appropriate pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15314.

- a) **Location.** Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located – a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply all instances, except where the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.

Discussion. The project qualifies for a Class 14 exemption and therefore, the location exception does not apply to the project.

- b) **Cumulative Impact.** All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.

Discussion. The school district is not planning successive projects of the same type in the same place. Therefore, there is no cumulative impact that would be significant.

- c) **Significant Effect.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

Discussion. Neither the school district nor the school district's consultants are aware of any unusual circumstances associated with the project such that the project would result in a reasonable possibility of resulting in a significant effect on the environment.

- d) **Scenic Highways.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to 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. This does not apply to improvements which are required as mitigation by an adopted negative declaration or certified EIR.

Discussion. According to the San Mateo County General Plan Scenic Corridors Map, the Caltrans Scenic Highway System Map website, and the City of San Mateo General Plan (Figure C/OS-4 - Scenic Roadways and Pedestrian Trails), the City of San Mateo does not contain any officially designated State of California scenic highways. Therefore, no scenic highways, or scenic resources, would be affected as a result of the project.

- e) **Hazardous Waste Sites.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.

Discussion. The proposed project is not located on a site that is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code. The site is not located on the California Environmental Protection Agency's Cortese List (Health and Safety Code Section 25187.5). The State Water Resources Control Board's GeoTracker (Health and Safety Code Section 25295 and Water Code Sections 13273 and 13301) does not indicate any hazardous sites within the project site. The project site is also not listed on the California Environmental Protection Agency's list of solid waste sites identified by the Water Board with waste constituents above hazardous waste levels outside the waste management unit (Health and Safety Code Section 116395).

- f) **Historical Resources.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.

Discussion. According to the City of San Mateo General Plan (Figure C/OS-5 – Historic Resources), the school site does not contain any historical resources and is not located within or near City-designated Historic Districts (Downtown Historic District and the Glazenwood Historic District). Additionally, the project does not include any changes to existing buildings. Therefore, the proposed project would not cause a change in the significance of a historical resource.