

**CITY OF CERES  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
March 20, 2023**

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:** 6:00 p.m.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:**

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairperson Kachel.

**ROLL CALL:**

**PRESENT:** Commissioners: Del Nero, Jammu, Johnson, Otero, Chairperson Kachel

**ABSENT:** None

**ALSO PRESENT:** Director of Community Development Christopher Hoem, Director of Engineering Services, City Engineer Kevin Waugh, Redevelopment and Economic Development Manager Tamra Spade, Senior Planner Teddie Hernandez, City Attorney Christian Smit, Administrative Secretary Ann Montgomery

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION:**

None

**CITIZEN COMMUNICATIONS:**

None

**CONSENT CALENDAR:**

1. Clerk's Report of Posting. The Agenda for the regular meeting of the Planning Commission of March 20, 2023 was posted on March 17, 2023.
2. Approval of Minutes
  - a. March 6, 2023 (all present)
3. General Correspondence – Information only
  - a. Ceres Downtown Revitalization Area (CDRAB) FY2022-23 Quarterly Report – 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter. (Spade)

**ACTION:** It was moved by Commissioner Del Nero; seconded by Commissioner Johnson to approve the Consent Calendar. Motion passed by the following vote:

**AYES:** Commissioners Del Nero, Jammu, Johnson, Otero, Chairperson Kachel  
**NOES:** None  
**ABSENT:** None

**CONSIDERATION OF ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT CALENDAR**

None

**PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

4. Specific Plan Site Plan (SPSP) 23-02; Proposal for a Specific Plan Site Plan to construct a 636 square foot addition on the north side of the existing structure of La Morena’s restaurant located at 2500 Mitchell Road. Diego Zepeda, applicant.

Director of Community Development stated that staff recommends that this item be continued to the Regular Planning Commission Meeting on April 17, 2023.

**The Public Hearing was opened at 6:04 p.m.**

**There being no comments, the Public Hearing was closed at 6:05 p.m.**

**ACTION:** It was moved by Commissioner Johnson; seconded by Commissioner Jammu to continue this item, Specific Plan Site Plan (SPSP) 23-02, to the Planning Commission Meeting of April 17, 2023. Motion passed by the following vote:

**AYES:** Commissioners Del Nero, Jammu, Johnson, Otero, Chairperson Kachel  
**NOES:** None  
**ABSENT:** None

5. Conditional Use Permit (CUP) 23-05; Proposal for a Conditional Use Permit to construct a 19,953 square foot religious facility with classrooms, event gathering hall, and kitchen at 3824 Mitchell Road, Ceres, CA. API – Architecture Plus, Inc., applicant.

Director of Community Development, Christopher Hoem presented the staff report.

**The Public Hearing was opened at 6:12 p.m.**

- Lourdes Perez, Ceres citizen

Ms. Perez stated as a long-standing citizen of Ceres and having been involved with the General Plan Update, she knows that the citizens of Ceres have a high interest in youth-engagement opportunities, knowing that our City Council is currently collaborating with our school district to renovate our Youth Action Commission and really look for those opportunities to again, engage youth in positive ways. This is what this facility will provide. It provides a facility for 10,000 – 15,000 people that gather every weekend, to come

together for faith formation, to come together for positive youth engagement. Ms. Perez expressed her appreciation to the Commission for consideration of the Conditional Use Permit, along with staff's recommendation for approval. She also expressed her gratitude for what the City is doing in terms of economic development and community development. This is a facility that plays a critical role in our community, with the number of people that gather there; it's a significant portion of our population.

- John Warren, Ceres citizen

Mr. Warren stated he has a question, noting he'd listened to Mr. Hoem explain that the front buildings were going to be secondary use. It's his understanding, as he's a parishioner of that church, the front building is in fact, the catholic church where they hold mass every Sunday. So his question is, is this a new church that's being built to hold mass in the building that's going to be constructed or is it going to be continued as it is, with the front of St. Jude's, as it is now with the main church, rather than building a new church. It says "religious facility," and that's a broad term.

Chairperson Kachel remarked that's an excellent question and asked Mr. Hoem to respond.

Director of Community Development, Christopher Hoem explained that the project description describes the front buildings next to Mitchell Road as not being the focus, going forward, but that this new building in the back will be the focus of the religious use. The reason that we use the term "religious facility" is because there are lots of different kinds of religious facilities, such as synagogues, mosques and churches. We try to keep it in somewhat of a sterile term. We use the term "religious facility" just to make it a little bit broader, not to mean necessarily more kinds of gatherings would happen, but the main room in this new building is called an "event gathering hall."

Chairperson Kachel asked if there was someone from the church that could explain what the relationship will be between the new building on a monthly basis or weekly basis. If so, please come forward and tell us how it's going to work, so we all know.

- Sylvia Camarillo, Business Manager, St. Jude's Church

Ms. Camarillo thanked the Commission for the opportunity and wanted to provide a couple of clarifications. In response to Mr. Warren's comments, she asked that the site map be displayed again, and explained that they plan to improve a lot of their buildings, noting that some of them can still be used. What they're trying to do at this precise moment, is build a religious education center, which is the focus of that entire building. We do not have the funds to construct a new parish, where we hold our services, until a future date, so their existing church still has to be used until they get to that point. So right now, because the octagonal building is our current facility where we hold all of the education for our kids, as Lourdes Perez had mentioned; we need to start there because our focus has been the youth, the children, and in that facility, they don't fit anymore. They've been planning things for about 8 years now, and they finally came to this point to have been able to imagine, dream and construct, with the Planning Commission's approval, that facility. It'll go in stages. The first stage will be building the Religious Education Center for the kids, while still using our existing church to hold our religious services. And then, the next step to that is approach the Planning Commission once again, for the new religious service or church, as we call it, and that would go on the corner. That's what we've done on our master plan. Right now, this building is still useful, but what about the future. Ms.

Camarillo further explained that they do have a master plan that they've been working on, but they have to do it in stages because a lot of it has to do with fundraising from their community. She hopes that explains things a little bit more; of course, taking into consideration, every step, that they make sure they comply with the Mitchell Plan that is in place already. They talked a lot with Director of Community Development, Tom Westbrook when he was here, and then Senior Planner, James Michaels and now with Director of Community Development, Christopher Hoem, making sure that we do comply, step by step at every part of this project.

Chairperson Kachel asked Ms. Camarillo if it's fair to say that you'll be having some of these activities in your existing buildings; this is an expansion of what you're doing with the youth in particular; you'll still be using the other building perhaps, but not as intensely because some of the things will be moving.

Ms. Camarillo confirmed that is correct because the existing building that they have now for the kids will no longer be used. It's going to be the new facility. And, although that building is still functional, and we can use it for our own meetings, which we are holding right now in our gazebo. We do hold activities there because we only have one facility to meet in. So, that can temporarily be used for that purpose. But, the focus of the children in the religious education will be in the new facility. It's kind of like moving the kids from the front over to the new building.

Commissioner Johnson asked just to clear it up in his mind, so we have the octagon building, which is the existing church facility where you have mass?

Ms. Camarillo explained that no, the religious service or mass is being held in the left-hand building, facing Don Pedro; that's their church; that's where they hold their services. The other building is where we're currently holding the religious education for the kids, which in the future will no longer be used for that purpose, and transferring over the use to the new building.

Commissioner Johnson stated that he's trying to get a grasp of this for the future; so he's seeing more use and less parking. He questioned if they're going to lose more parking spots. He heard that 10,000 – 15,000 people a week are going to come in and out of this property.

Ms. Camarillo clarified that number is for the church services, and explained that they hold church services on the weekend. The religious education center, their focus is on Monday through Friday, just during the week. It's kind of like a school, except we hold it in the evening for the kids. Monday through Friday, religious education is the focus. Weekend, religious services in the other building is the focus.

Chairperson Kachel thanked Ms. Camarillo very much for answering all the questions.

**The Public Hearing was closed at 6:22 p.m.**

Brief Commission discussion ensued, with Chairperson Kachel noting how nice it was to have such a large audience in support of this project and thanked them for attending this evening.

**ACTION:** It was moved by Commissioner Del Nero; seconded by Commissioner Johnson to adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration prepared for this project per Resolution PC 23-11 and approve 23-05, subject to the findings and conditions contained in Resolution PC 23-12. Motion passed by the following vote:

**AYES:** Commissioners Del Nero, Jammu, Johnson, Otero, Chairperson Kachel  
**NOES:** None  
**ABSENT:** None

**NEW BUSINESS:**

None

**PUBLIC MEETING(S):**

None

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

None

**MATTERS INITIATED BY PLANNING COMMISSION AND STAFF**

None

**REPORTS:**

- Director of Community Development, Christopher Hoem introduced new Senior Planner, Teddie Hernandez and stated how excited we are to have her in the office.
- Senior Planner, Teddie Hernandez provided a brief background, noting that she has several years Planning experience with San Joaquin County and looks forward to working with the Commission.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

The Commission adjourned at 6:26 p.m. to the next regularly scheduled meeting of Monday, April 3, 2023.

APPROVED:

  
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Robert Kachel, Chairperson

ATTEST:

  
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Christopher Hoem, Secretary