



PLANNING BOARD STAFF REPORT

To: Auburn Planning Board

From: Zach Mosher, City Planner

Re: Special Exception and Site Plan Review for Becket Academy to occupy the Auburn Baptist Church at 227 Poland Rd.

Date: December 12 2017

- I. **PROPOSAL** – Mike Gotto, on behalf of Becket Academy Inc., is seeking approval for a Special Exception and Site Plan Review for the Becket Academy of 31 Holbrook St in Auburn, to move and occupy the existing Baptist Church located at 227 Poland Rd for their private special needs school programs, pursuant to Chapter 60, Division 3 Sec. 60-1336 Special Exception and Chapter 60, Division 2 Sec.60-1277 Site Plan Review of the Auburn Code of Ordinances.

The Auburn Baptist Church (Church) parcel includes two lots: PID # 199-012 and PID #199-013 and is a total of 16 acres. The property is in the Suburban Residential District (SR) and the eastern portion of 227 Poland Rd is in the Shoreland Overlay District where Taylor Brook is located. The school use is allowed as a special exception in the SR district where the buildings on this property are located, as per Chapter 60 Sec. 60-255 (b) (1). The Church maintained a membership total of approx. 600, but that has declined over recent years and they no longer find it feasible to operate here on Poland Rd.

Becket Academy plans to renovate the existing church building to support its school programs and needs. They will use the Church to create 7 classrooms, 3 offices, 2 bathrooms and 2 student de-escalation rooms in the basement level; the first floor will be used to create 4 offices, 1 performing arts center, 1 conference room, 3 bathrooms and 2 de-escalation rooms. The Family Assembly Hall / Gymnasium building at the rear of the lot will be used for the Middle and High School programs. The assembly hall building will be renovated to create a full gymnasium for physical education, 6 classrooms, 3 bathrooms, 2 offices, 1 kitchen and 1 de-escalation room. No new utility services will be required and no improvements to the existing parking lot or driveways are being proposed under this application.

Becket Academy currently has a student population of approx. 40 pupils and is licensed by the state for a maximum of 50. They currently do not have plans to increase their student

population, but the proposed site could accommodate that maximum. They have a staff of about 30, for a near one to one ratio of teachers to students. Under the Auburn Zoning Ordinance, per Chapter 60, Sec.60-608, schools require 1 space per classroom at the Elementary level and 4 spaces per classroom at the Middle and High School levels. Becket will require approx. 40 spaces and the site currently has 142 spaces.

THE SITE - The site includes a large parking lot, two entrances, the Church, and the Family Assembly Hall/gymnasium. The Church has a basement and first floor level with a total of 15,372 sq. ft. The gymnasium/assembly hall in the rear of the property has two levels with a total of 22,058 sq. ft. Original approvals included securing approval from MDEP and the Army Corps for the alteration of some of the wetlands associated with the Taylor Book stream present on western and northern parts of the parcel.

When the Church was operational, peak hour traffic exceeded the 100 trips which would now require a Traffic Movement Permit (TMP). Becket Academy's proposed use at the site will decrease peak hour traffic flow, but still exceed the TMP 100 trip threshold. The Church was originally approved in 1985 and the Assembly Hall in 1994. Both of these structures predate traffic movement permit regulations which went into effect in 1997 and therefore a TMP was not issued for the Church despite approval. Since the use of Becket School will be less than the peak hour use by the Church, TMP approvals will not be required for the change in use of this property. The school programs will operate five days per week - 7:30 AM to 3:30 PM. They will not be open during the normal school holidays, but they do operate during school vacations and through the summer months.

II. DEPARTMENT REVIEW

Police Department - No comment.

Fire Department - The Fire Department was satisfied with vehicular access and the parking information the applicant provided.

Water and Sewer District – AWSO requested that an easement be placed on the eastern side of the property line as they have work planned this winter to repair a water main that traverses the property.

Engineering Department – No comment.

Economic & Community Development Department– Planning wanted to know if Becket planned on any signage for this location as well as if any outdoor activity spaces would be designated.



III. PLANNING BOARD ACTION- A school is a Special Exception use in the Suburban Residential district and therefore requires Special Exception & Site Plan Review, pursuant to Chapter 60, Article XVI, Division 2 – Special Exception, Sec. 60-1336 and Chapter 60, Article XVI, Division 3 – Sec. 60-1277 Site Plan Review of the Auburn Code of Ordinances. The Suburban Residential district permits certain special exception uses of the Low Density Rural Residential district where schools are explicitly mentioned as a special exception use. Other than interior renovations, no other disturbance will occur at the site.

A. SPECIAL EXCEPTION - A Special Exception is defined as follows: *“Special exception means a use that would not be appropriate generally or without restriction throughout the district, but which, if controlled as to number, area, location or relation to the neighborhood, would promote the public health, safety, welfare, order, comfort, convenience, appearance, prosperity, or general welfare. Such a use may be permitted in such district as a special exception, if specific provision for such special exception is made in this zoning chapter and reasonable restrictions imposed by the planning board are complied with.”*

The zoning ordinance describes the conditions needed for approval in:

Sec. 60-1336. Conditions-As conditions prerequisite to the granting of any special exceptions, the board shall require evidence of the following:

- (1) That the special exception sought fulfills the specific requirements, if any, set forth in the zoning ordinance relative to such exception. **(The proposal meets the requirements of the Suburban Residential District.)**
- (2) That the special exception sought will neither create nor aggravate a traffic hazard, a fire hazard or any other safety hazard. **(The proposed use will not create or aggravate existing traffic, fire or safety conditions at this property. The proposed school use will reduce traffic trips in and out of the site from the previous use as a Church.)**
- (3) That the special exception sought will not block or hamper the master development plan pattern of highway circulation or of planned major public or semipublic land acquisition. **(The proposal will not block or hamper the master development plan.)**
- (4) That the exception sought will not alter the essential characteristics of the neighborhood and will not tend to depreciate the value of property adjoining and neighboring the property under application. **(The proposed special exception will not alter the character of the neighborhoods; adjacent parcels are either single or multi-family residences or undevelopable due to slope. This project will use the existing buildings for educational use, which is very similar to the teaching of the church. The gymnasium/assembly hall that was constructed by the Church will be used by Becket school for the same purposes: classrooms and physical activity.)**

(5) That reasonable provisions have been made for adequate land space, lot width, lot area, stormwater management in accordance with section 60-1301 (14), green space, driveway layout, road access, off-street parking, landscaping, building separation, sewage disposal, water supply, fire safety, and where applicable, a plan or contract for perpetual maintenance of all the common green space and clustered off-street parking areas to ensure all such areas will be maintained in a satisfactory manner. **(No building improvements are being proposed at this time; Becket Academy will maintain all aspects of the site.)**

(6) That the standards imposed are, in all cases, at least as stringent as those elsewhere imposed by the city building code and by the provisions of this chapter. **(Staff agrees that the standards are at least as stringent as those elsewhere.)**

(7) That essential city services which will be required for the project are presently available or can be made available without disrupting the city's master development plan. **(The City services necessary for this use are available and this site is much closer to the support services from Fire or Police than their current school location.)**

B. SITE PLAN REVIEW- A Site Plan Review is required as part of a Special Exception review. The applicant met the requirements of the Site Plan Law in their application. The Planning Board needs to make its decision based on the Site Plan Law, **Sec. 60-1277. Objective-** “In considering a site plan, the planning board shall make findings that the development has made provisions for:”

(1) Protection of adjacent areas against detrimental or offensive uses on the site by provision of adequate surface water drainage, buffers against artificial and reflected light, sight, sound, dust and vibration; and preservation of light and air; **(The proposal protects adjacent areas in terms of stormwater, light, sight, sound, dust and vibration; the applicant is not proposing any changes to existing site improvements.)**

(2) Convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and in relation to adjacent areas; **(The parking area is currently existing and therefore patterns for both vehicular and pedestrian access have been established.)**

(3) Adequacy of the methods of disposal for wastes; and **(Becket Academy will continue its contract with Pine Tree Waste Disposal for the disposal of wastes.)**

(4) Protection of environment features on the site and in adjacent areas. **(No disturbance of any environmental features is currently being proposed.)**

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION – The staff has reviewed the application and recommends **APPROVAL** for a Special Exception and Site Plan Review for the Becket Academy of 31 Holbrook St in Auburn, to occupy the existing Baptist Church located at 227 Poland Rd for their private special needs school programs, pursuant to Chapter 60, Division 3 Sec. 60-1336 Special Exception and Chapter 60, Division 2 Sec.60-1277 Site Plan Review of the Auburn Code of Ordinances.

Zach Mosher
City Planner