

VERDE VALLEY SCHOOL

Conditional Use Permit

Letter of Intent

Jan 7, 2022

Applicant/Property Owner:

Verde Valley School
6511 Verde Valley School Road
Sedona, AZ 85336
Paul Amadio, Director

Architect:

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Design Group Architects
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Sedona, AZ 86336

Submitted to:

Yavapai County Development Services Dept.
10 South 6th. Street
Cottonwood, AZ 86326

Background:

In 2007, Verde Valley School (VVS) applied for and was granted two different CUPs for different portions of an approximately 150-acre site owned by the school at 3511 Verde Valley School Road in Yavapai County. One CUP was for the existing school and its proposed expansion on the west portion of the VVS property. A second CUP was issued for Camp Soaring Eagle (CSE), a private non-profit summer camp for terminally ill children, on an eastern portion of the VVS property.

Due to financial problems, CSE went bankrupt after beginning construction on a small portion of their master plan. Three retreat “cabins” were left with dried-in shells, and most of the main entry roadway was rough graded in place. These pieces of infrastructure have sat unfinished since construction was abandoned in 2011. There is no expectation that implementation of the CSE vision will ever occur, and their agreement with VVS is now null and void.

VVS has potential funding to finish these buildings, and would like to use them for needed multi-purpose classrooms and meeting/studio spaces. In 2019 the School began preparing a request for an amendment to the existing VVS CUP that would have adjusted the boundaries between the two previous CUP areas, to allow the three unfinished buildings to become part of the School area. The existing CSE CUP was considered defunct at the time. In 2019, it was the School's intent to enter into a long-range planning process over the next year or two, and come up with a new and separate CUP request for the remaining portion of the CSE portion of the properties. A preliminary Code Review Meeting was held Feb. 25, 2020 for a proposed new configuration of the School campus portion of the properties, including the three CSE partially completed buildings only.

After that meeting circumstances changed due to the challenges that Covid created for VVS, and the CUP amendment request was placed on hold while the School figured out how to adapt and survive for the remaining and next school years. However, during that period the long-range planning committee was also able to continue working, to the point where VVS now has a long-term vision for the entire School property that has been approved by the Board of Directors. Thus, it now makes sense for VVS to apply for a new, revised CUP that incorporates the long-range development vision for the entire property. The campus portion of this plan has not changed substantially from that previously considered in the 2020 Preliminary Code Review; the main differences are the inclusion now of the remaining property, and the sale of an additional 6.615 acres of School property to the Warren House LLC, which will be excluded from the CUP request.

A second Preliminary Code Review for the proposed revised CUP was held by Yavapai County August 11, 2021. The following Issues and Narrative have been slightly modified based on feedback from that meeting and the results of the required Public Participation Process (see attached Public Participation Report dated Dec. 2021).

Issues to be addressed and resolved by this CUP request:

- Refinement of the future campus expansion site plan, all within the existing 2007 CUP total approved square footage, based on a more current

understanding of needs, and including development of the unfinished CSE buildings. VVS is not asking for any increase to its future expansion projection at this point. The 2007 CUP was based on an assumed maximum student population of 150 students, and an additional 16 staff over current staffing levels. 11 of these new positions were assumed to reside on-site. The revised site plan still anticipates the same staffing and student levels. The composition of uses for the future buildings does represent a change, but not in total quantity, nor in general location. The fine-tuning of use categories and future footprints reflects a more realistic assessment of probable needs and a better understanding of campus programming.

- Exclusion of the Warren House/Founder's Home property from the amended CUP boundaries, along with an additional 6.615 acres currently under escrow. The original parcel was split off and sold to the founder's family in 2012 (AP# 408-30-010G). The total exclusion will now be 12.615 acres.
- Combination of (2) VVS properties straddled by the existing campus (AP #s 408-30-010H and 405-26-001), making a new parcel size of 116.155 acres.
- Inclusion of a new master plan for the remaining portion of the former CSE portion, based on complementary educational and community uses that will also provide some income for the school.
- Provision of secondary egress/ingress per Fire Department requests, and improved internal campus circulation/access.
- Inclusion of appropriate waivers of parking and screening requirements.
- Exemption from the "same roadway" exclusion for signage

Project Site:

This CUP application covers (3) separate properties or portions thereof, all owned by the Verde Valley School:

AP # 405-26-001 – 30.6 acres, zoned RCU-2A

AP # 408-30-101H – 92.17 acres, zoned R1L-70 (minus 6.615 acres currently in the process of being sold to the Warren House LLC - AP # 408-30-010G)

AP # 408-30-010E – 24.94 acres, zoned R1L-70

Total: 141.095 acres

The underlying zoning will remain. It is the intent of VVS to combine the first two parcels (which the current campus straddles) under a new parcel number. The portion of the second parcel sold to the Warren House LLC will be combined with the current Warren House parcel and then re-configured under two new parcel numbers, and will not be a part of this request. The third parcel (24.94 acres) will remain separate, but is included in the CUP per the attached conceptual site plan.

The overall site is bounded on the north and east by Verde Valley School Road (with residential subdivisions across the road), and on the south, west, and northwest by Coconino National Forest. The Warren House LLC parcel (private residence, zoned R1L-70) is essentially an inholding in the School parcel, with one west boundary to the Coconino National Forest. Residential properties across Verde Valley School Road to the east and northeast are zoned R1L- 35 and R1L-70.

Approximately 1/3 of the property is currently developed with the School Campus, and the remaining portion is either natural or disturbed (prior agricultural or recreational uses) open space. A significant natural drainage wash flows in a northwesterly direction through the upper portion of the undeveloped property. Current School access is direct from Verde Valley School Road on the north side of campus, which is new since the time of the 2007 CUP. The original access road from the southeast corner of the property has been abandoned, and a new, partially graded road alignment along the south exists as a relic of the failed Camp Soaring Eagle development. It is the School's intent to complete this road as a functioning secondary access per the Sedona Fire District's requirements in the 2020 Pre-Code Meeting.

Zoning History:

As previously mentioned, the School site is currently zoned RCU-2A and R1L-70. Originally, at the time of the School's founding and ongoing growth and development, private educational facilities were permitted uses in those residential zones. At some point prior to the 2007 CUP, the Yavapai County Zoning Ordinance was amended requiring private schools to

operate under Conditional Use Permits, making VVS a legal non-conforming use. The School expansion projected by the 2007 master plan required that the School apply for the CUP that was subsequently approved at that time. At the time of the 2019 application, it was assumed that amending the existing 2007 CUP made the most sense, but subsequent developments have made it evident that the School would be better served by a new comprehensive CUP for the entire property.

Description of the Proposal:

Verde Valley School has, for many years, operated a private boarding school for grades 9 through 12 at this location. The primary directive of this CUP proposal is to continue to support and enhance VVS's educational capabilities and International Baccalaureate Program. Future plans for the campus are similar to those approved in the original 2007 CUP; a maximum of 150 students along with the staff and facilities required to support them. As mentioned previously, the mix of building types has changed to more accurately reflect current understanding of future infrastructure needs, and the total future square footage has been slightly reduced (from 93,294 sf to a maximum of 87,000 sf). These quantities can be compared to those allowed in the previous CUP in the attached spreadsheet.

In addition, VVS intends develop the former CSE parcel in such a way as to create an additional sustainable income source to support the School's primary function. This will be done in a way that is complementary with the School's educational purpose and philosophical mission, and that demonstrates environmental sustainability, connection to place, and local community. The primary complementary function will be adult education. The School intends to finish the three existing CSE structures as learning facilities for both students and the public in conjunction with a new community center building. In addition, VVS will expand the existing gardens and orchard to further demonstrate Permaculture principles, and add new desert botanical garden areas to educate about the native plants and environment. To support these functions, an orientation center and a maximum of 7 bungalows and 15 "dry" and fire-free campsites will be added to demonstrate "green" building techniques. They will be reserved

for alumni and adult education program clients during times when those events and programs are scheduled, and will be open to the public at all other times.

The impact to the community will be substantially less with this proposal as compared to development consistent with the previously approved CUP for Camp Soaring Eagle. The number of structures is significantly reduced (from 121,678 sf to a maximum of 49,000 sf), and is replaced with more agricultural development and fewer but more versatile and useful structures to serve the School's mission. The space will be dedicated to the protection of the original vision for the use of the land to be a place to experience, an example of sustainable practices and farming, a place for learning about local and native fauna and plants, nature, equestrian, and mountain biking trails, an outdoor plaza for skateboarding and rock climbing (using existing concrete wall space), and a center for intergenerational programs in arts, health, wellness, and sustainability. All new buildings and infrastructure will adhere to "dark sky" guidelines as they pertain to exterior lighting, and any existing lighting that can be seen off-site from the current campus will be brought into compliance.

Site Design:

A site plan is included as part of the Use Permit application. The site plan details the intended new school additions as well as a detailed development plan for facilities and outdoor spaces on the former CSE parcel that will be open to the public at certain times of the year.

As part of the property development, the School intends to finish the roadway at the southeastern edge to provide additional ingress and egress to the property and to satisfy the Sedona Fire Department's need for a safe secondary access to the entire property.

Beyond those shown in the existing campus area, additional educational facility buildings will consist of the 3 former CSE dormitory buildings and a new Community Building. The 3 CSE "shells" will be finished out as classroom and meeting room spaces. These are located along the southeastern edge of the existing school campus, directly east of the existing gardens. The proposed new Community Building will be to the

north of the 3 CSE buildings, in a key position between the school and the primary open space portion of the site, with a direct view alignment towards Cathedral Rock. It will be of a similar scale to Brady Hall, and will serve as a second structure that could accommodate whole student-body events. It will also be able to serve the projected adult educational programs, potential larger community events (ex: farm-to table fundraisers, VVSID talks), and occasional weddings for alumni and others. Parking for this building will be provided partially in a new lot to the northwest, and partially distributed among the CSE classroom spaces and across the road adjacent to Brady Hall.

The equestrian facilities will be expanded to accommodate 40 horses, which does not expand upon that allowed in the current Use Permit. The primary equestrian facility will remain in the current location in the southern part of the campus, but additional facilities for event use may be constructed adjacent to the current rink in the northwest corner of the property. In addition, a challenge and skills course will be created on the northern part of parcel # 408-30-010E, which will leave this area along Verde Valley School Road visually open as it currently stands. All equestrian facilities including trails will be upgraded with dust mitigation products and so maintained.

The heart of the former CSE property will be developed primarily as a landscape vision, providing space for an expansion of the current agricultural gardens and orchards, the development of new botanical gardens, and a multi-modal trail system for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. The trail system will be utilized for education, within the context of an interpretive plan, intended to communicate information about the local flora and fauna, history, appropriate local agriculture, and sustainable development. The trail system may also integrate student and local art projects. Past disturbance and impacts to the environment on VVS property will be gradually rehabilitated and integrated into a sustainable mosaic of varying ecological themes.

Within the context of this landscape vision, VVS also plans to construct two outdoor venues--an outdoor grassy amphitheater (no fixed seating) and a small outdoor theater in the round (utilizing one of the old unfinished CSE development pads). The amphitheater will have a constructed stage and potential proscenium, while the theater will have a central stage only and

with constructed stone bench seating built into the existing bedrock ledge. These two venues will have a limited number of school and public events per year (see proposed limitations enumerated in the Additional Traffic section below), and these will be scheduled to minimize any unreasonable noise impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Overnight accommodation in the 7 eco-bungalows will be accommodated along the southern edge of the CSE parcel, to the south of the secondary fire department access road. These single-story structures will be tucked into the native vegetation on the hillside, visually blending into the environment. Several of the cottages will have associated parking spaces where the terrain is appropriate, and others will be served via an electric cart path.

The walk-in campsites will be located between the main wash and Verde Valley School Road on parcel # 408-30-010E. This area is heavily vegetated, and the goal is to tuck each site into the terrain and trees in such a way as to maintain visual privacy between sites and from the rest of the property and neighbors. Each site will consist of a tent platform and a composting toilet. Common bathrooms and shower facilities will be accommodated adjacent to the Orientation Center. The total maximum capacity of the campsites will be 45 people (average of 3 per site).

Parking for the campsites, some of the cottages, and for daily visitors to the gardens will be located in an existing over-excavated area (visually screened from Verde Valley School Road) in the southeast corner of the site. A short walking and cart path will connect to the Orientation Center building. A control gate will keep school and property visitors from going beyond the Orientation Center in their cars. The primary School access will remain via Verde Valley Way as it currently stands. Emergency and law enforcement services will have access to the control gate, as will certain cottage users with parking privileges. The future communications tower will also be located in the new parking lot footprint.

Lot Coverage:

At maximum build-out per this proposed CUP, lot coverage would be a maximum of 4.03%, if all new construction were one story. It is assumed

that a few of the future campus buildings may be two-story, in which case this number would be slightly smaller. Under the previous CUP for both VVS and CSE, the maximum lot coverage was 5.88%. Future expansion on the campus side of the property has been reduced by approx. 5800 sf from that in the original CUP, and maximum development on the former CSE side of the property has been reduced by approximately 70,300 sf.

Signage:

New project signage will be installed at both entrances. The sign size, location, and design shall be approved during the construction plan phase as part of a separate process, not to exceed the maximum of 24 sq. ft. per sign per the county's ordinance.

Enrollment:

The School's academic year begins in late August and ends by early June of each year. The School currently has 120 students enrolled, of which 30 are day students from the surrounding local area. There are 40 members of the staff who live on campus and 15 members of the staff who commute to campus. As the student population increases by the desired goal of 30 boarding students, the staff will grow proportionately (i.e., 2.67 students for each on-campus staff member). Additional off-campus staff members would increase by 5-10 to accommodate additional program needs as funding permits.

School Campus Traffic:

90 of the School's current students board at the School and are not allowed to have cars on campus. The School also has approximately 30 day-students. Many carpool, so the impact is estimated at 15 parent drop-offs each morning at 7 a.m. and pick-ups each evening between 5:30 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Once on campus, day students are not allowed to leave and come back as they do not leave until after sporting events, dinner, or study hall. There is no mass exodus at any given time in the evening.

Boarding students arrive at the beginning of the school year in two ways. Either they are brought by parents (approximately 40 students), or they are brought to campus by a chartered tour bus. Similar arrangements are made for extended semester breaks with a chartered tour bus that leaves campus at 5 a.m. for the Phoenix airport.

40 staff members live on campus and do not commute to work daily, but most have vehicles on campus and occasionally leave campus when not working. The School also employs a small number of staff who live off campus and do daily commutes to the campus. At full future student capacity, we anticipate a maximum 25 student drop-offs and pick-ups, and 25 staff commuting per day.

Additional Traffic:

To estimate additional traffic generated by this proposal, we offer the following outline of projected use patterns for the other new facilities.

Adult education utilizing the CSE buildings and/or Community Building may be ongoing, but would be limited to a maximum of 50 participants per session. For multiple-day seminars (ex: Elderhostel), some participants may choose to stay in the on-site casitas or campground (no car trips per day), while others may stay in the general area and commute (one trip each way/day), and carpooling would be facilitated by the adult education planner. Occasionally, in conjunction with a particular course, there may be an evening lecture utilizing the community building that would allow for additional local participation. Capacity would be limited by the size of the Community meeting room space, currently projected at a maximum of 200 persons.

Special event use is projected as follows:

- Weddings – 1/month during the 9-month school year, and up to 3/month during the 3 summer months. These would have a maximum of 100 attendees.
- Farm-to-Table fundraisers – 2/year with 125 persons max. capacity.
- VVSID Workshops (similar to “TED Talks”) – 4/year, with 200 persons max. capacity.

- Plays in the “Theater-in-the-Round” – While this open-air gathering place may be used by students ongoing throughout the school year, we also envision up to 6 plays/year that would be open to the public, primarily during the summer months) with a maximum capacity of 150 persons.
- Music Concert fundraisers in the Amphitheater – 3/year maximum. Capacity has yet to be determined, but concert traffic would be mitigated by the use of a shuttle service from an approved location in the Village of Oak Creek through a special event permitting process. Timing of events would be restricted to operate within Yavapai County noise regulations.

Cottage and Campground use would be limited by the number of rooms and spaces. We assume 1 car/campsite or cottage, with a few extra, resulting in a maximum of 25 at any given time. Traffic volume might be projected as that similar to a “hotel” use, which is less than that for a residence. We would project that our guests would have even fewer trips/day than a typical hotel user, due to the number of amenities provided on site for learning and recreation.

Finally, day users of the Botanical Gardens and Trail System would be capped at 50 users/day. Assuming an average of 2 persons/car, this would result in 25 trips each way per day, spaced out over the operational hours.

The School will not schedule any special events that would overlap with other scheduled programs, unless there was reason to plan for the same participants attending both functions/facilities.

To date, VVS has not retained a traffic engineer to create a traffic impact statement. However, it is assumed that there would be a significant shared use factor between the various groups listed above, and that the total traffic generated by this proposal would be less than that generated by a 34-lot subdivision (per existing zoning) on a daily basis, except during infrequent special events. Per feedback from Public Works during the 8/11/21 Pre-Code Meeting, VVS will provide a traffic study to determine whether any improvements are needed at the two main access points from Verde Valley School Road, prior to the issuance of any new building permits for additional uses proposed under this CUP.

Parking Waiver:

The main VVS campus provides a large amount of distributed parking in the staff housing, dorms, garden, equestrian, and maintenance areas, and has larger developed parking lots associated with Brady Hall, and the Administration building, totaling approximately 150 spaces. Many of these are undeveloped, but easily and actively used. This existing parking provides more spaces than would be required by Yavapai County's parking ordinance for a High School, based on the number of students, staff, and classrooms.

However, due to the difficulty in assigning parking requirements to the unusual mix of proposed uses on the former CSE area, and the high probability that various facilities may be shared by the same users, we are requesting a waiver from providing a strict parking calculation for the whole property. Due to the unique nature of the new uses, the Zoning Ordinance would not accurately provide a reasonable parking calculation.

The proposed parking lot at the new east entrance to the property (adjacent to the original historic entrance), will provide 46 new spaces. This should be sufficient to accommodate the campground spaces, those cottages that have walk-in or cart-path access only, and the Trail System day users, assuming that they are spread out over the daytime hours.

Approximately 42 parking spaces are shown between the new lot proposed north of the proposed Community building, and those distributed in front of the CSE buildings and garden. These should be sufficient for any ongoing educational program use as described in the previous section, and would only need to be augmented with extra spaces in the Community Building had a full-capacity event. In such a case, the parking across Verde Valley Way adjacent to Brady hall is close enough for a reasonable walk, and would be more than sufficient to make up the difference. Events would not be scheduled at both Brady Hall and the Community Building at the same time, unless they were of smaller capacity character.

The preliminary grading for the secondary fire access road by CSE is sufficiently wide that we anticipate being able to provide the required 20-foot wide access surface, and have a level graded shoulder on one side that could provide additional overflow parallel parking should it ever be needed. The site in general is large and un-developed enough that should

other parking solutions ever need to be implemented, it would be relatively easy to do so. We do not want to start out with more parking impact than is needed, as the intent is to live lightly on the land, and demonstrate environmentally appropriate parking and carpooling solutions.

Screening Waiver:

A waiver will be necessary to eliminate the required screening around the School, which is currently unscreened. The site is a residentially zoned site developed as a school. Traditionally, these uses are commonly associated with screening. However, the property is surrounded by the Coconino National Forest on three sides. The site is open to wildlife and should remain open to ensure that drainage and viewsheds are not obstructed. Under these circumstances, screening is not a desirable goal and would serve to create more problems that it would solve.

Phasing of New School Development:

The School intends to phase implementation of these development changes over a long period. Within the first five years, the existing CSE buildings are expected to be finished and brought up to code, the secondary access road completed, and several additional staff housing units constructed. Planning will also occur for the Campground, Cottages, and Trail System. Infrastructure for these will be put in place, and some of the landscape vision begun to be implemented. The second phase (5-10 year timeframe), will include the Community Building, The new Learning Center/Maintenance Facility in the heart of the campus, and completion of the Cottages, Campground, Trail System, and Gardens. Other new campus construction and development will likely occur on an as-needed basis.

Community Facilities and Services:

Fire Protection:

The site is located within the Sedona Fire District. The School and its representatives have held a number of meetings with Fire District

personnel over the last several years, and pre-pandemic some progress was made in widening and upgrading internal campus roads and drives per SFD direction. The School is currently underway with a new master plan for clarification of all building numbering and addressing, also per Fire Department request. The proposed CUP site plan shows an additional new core “loop” road making access more direct to most existing and proposed new structures, and this will be implemented in phases along with new construction in the core campus area. As mentioned previously, the secondary access road begun by Camp Soaring Eagle will be completed to SFD specifications as a first step along with remodel construction to complete the unfinished CSE buildings. Any application for building permits will address Urban/Wildland Interface Code issues, as well as comply with requirements for fire alarm systems and sprinklers.

In addition to finalizing the internal addressing plan for all campus buildings, the Warren House Property will be given a unique internal address, and a new road name will be created for the secondary ingress/egress road.

Emergency Services:

The School has trained staff for on-site minor medical needs of students and adult staff. Historically, the School has had to call emergency medical personnel to transport to local area medical facilities approximately 3-5 times per year for the students and adults on campus at any given time. It is anticipated that the addition of 30 students along with the staff to support them will not raise the rate of emergency transports more than 3-5% for the increased population. As a result, we anticipate the impact on the Sedona Fire District to remain relatively low.

Law Enforcement:

The property is within the jurisdiction of the Yavapai County Sheriff’s office, whose substation is located at 6646 Hwy 179, approximately 3 driving miles from Verde Valley School.

Utilities:

Rough-in for CSE utility needs was partially accomplished prior to project abandonment. An assessment of existing utility infrastructure conditions

will be made prior to the development of the Cottages, Orientation Center, and Campground.

Power and Phone:

Dry utilities will be provided by the following entities: Electrical--APS, Telephone-- Century Link. "Will serve" letters will be provided prior to any building permit approval.

Wireless Communications Facilities:

The School has been in ongoing negotiations with MerIT for the location and construction of a Lattice Tower in the SE corner of the property. This will significantly increase the School's communication interconnectivity, and also provide increased wireless access for the adjacent neighborhoods. The location of this tower will be in the same general area that it was originally proposed, but will now be integrated into a corner of the visitor parking lot per the attached site plan.

Water:

The School is currently served by the Big Park Water Company, and it is assumed that capacity exists to serve future expansion needs. The School also has an existing well on Parcel #408-30-010E, which is currently used to water the soccer field and other non-edible landscaping. Long-term plans are to install a water treatment system to remove arsenic, so that the well can also serve all edible agricultural irrigation needs.

Wastewater:

The School is currently serviced by a number of on-site septic systems, one of which includes a leach pond. This will be upgraded to conform to current ADEQ requirements when significant core campus expansion takes place. It is anticipated that the initial proposed projects of remodeling the unfinished CSE buildings, and construction of several additional staff housing units, can be accommodated with new septic systems in their immediate vicinity, without connection to any of the existing systems. All new wastewater facilities will be designed by a licensed engineer to

conform to the requirements of Arizona Administrative Code R18-9-E323. It is also anticipated that the proposed plan will not have any problem staying under the maximum allowable nitrate levels in the wastewater stream for the property, given the overall size and low-density development on the former CSE side of the property. Per feedback from the Environmental Unit during the 8/11/21 Pre-Code Meeting, VVS will complete a Master Wastewater Plan by a licensed engineer for the existing campus, prior to any new building permits being issued under the proposed CUP.