

Notice of Exemption

To:
County Clerk
County of Orange
Public Services Division
Santa Ana, CA 92702

From:
City of Newport Planning Division
100 Civic Center Drive P.O. Box 1768
Newport Beach, CA 92658-8915
(949) 644-3200



Project Title:

Sage Hill Middle School and Gymnasium Building

Project Applicant:

Sage Hill School, Patricia Merz, Head of School

Phone: (949) 887-2070

Project Location - Specific:

20402 Newport Coast Drive, Newport Beach CA 92657

Project Location - City:

Newport Beach

Project Location - County:

Orange

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project: Construction of a new middle school and gymnasium building within the existing Sage Hill School campus. The project proposes to expand the existing facilities with a new building for eight new classrooms for a 7th and 8th grade middle school, associated support facilities, and a new gymnasium for all school use. The expansion area will occur on the northern portion of the existing school campus between the existing science building and the baseball field. The project will replace a grassy practice field with a smaller footprint field with artificial turf. The project will add artificial turf and night lighting on the existing baseball field as shown on the site plan.

The new building will be three levels and will follow the grade of the existing terrain, which slopes approximately 35 feet from east to west. The new building will comply with the 65-foot height limit. At the entry to the building on the east side, the building will appear to be a single-level structure in-line with the height of the existing science building. The first floor will include a gymnasium, bleachers, and associated support facilities including offices, restrooms, team rooms, a training room, and storage. The gymnasium will be configured to allow for multiple sports courts in an east/west orientation, or for use as a single exhibition court in a north/south orientation. The bleachers will provide up to 824 seats, with the option for portable bleachers to further increase bleacher seating. The first floor will provide access to the reconfigured practice field located to the south of the building.

The second floor will include four middle school classrooms, office space, and storage space, and a café. The café is intended to serve middle school students. The second-floor classrooms will open to an outdoor learning area on the east that includes a flat patio and terraced spaces. The second floor will provide access to the top of the gymnasium bleachers via an internal concourse between the gym and the classrooms. An outdoor patio will be located immediately adjacent to the café along the southern side of the building. The third floor will include four middle school classrooms, a restroom, and office space. An interior corridor will provide flexible breakout space for the third-floor classrooms.

In addition to the new middle school/gymnasium building and modernized baseball field, the project also proposes a fuel modification plan because the subject property is located in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. The project also includes roadway work on Newport Coast Drive to extend an existing left turn pocket through modification of the median to increase storage capacity at the Newport Coast Drive and the Renewable Energy Facility intersection by approximately 400 feet, resulting in total storage capacity of 550 feet.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project:

City of Newport Beach

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project:

Sage Hill School

Exempt Status: (check one):

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
☒ Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: Sec. 15301 and 15314
☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

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Reasons why project is exempt: The City has analyzed potential environmental effects of the proposed use permit and has determined that the action is not subject to CEQA pursuant to Section 15301. This project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under Class 1 (Existing Facilities) and Class 14 (Minor Additions to Schools) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Division 6, Title 14, Chapter 3, because it has no potential to have a significant effect on the environment.

Class 1 exempts projects involving the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. Specifically, 15301(c) exempts work on existing highways and streets, sidewalks, gutters, bicycle, and pedestrian trails, and similar facilities. The proposed project includes the extension of an existing left turn pocket on Newport Coast Drive that would not result in the expansion of the existing roadway.

Class 14 exempts projects involving minor additions to existing schools within the existing school grounds where the addition does not increase original student capacity by more than 25% or ten classrooms, whichever is less. The proposed project would be located within existing school grounds and add eight new classrooms to the school site, which is within the 10 classroom limitation. The student population would be increased by 150 students, from 600 to 750 students, which is consistent with the allowable 25% increase identified in the Class 14 exemption. There will not be a significant increase in vehicle trips associated with the increase in enrollment.

CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Division 6, Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 15300.2 lists exceptions to exemptions. There are no applicable exceptions to the exemptions listed for this project as detailed below.

- (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 in 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.

The exemptions applicable to the proposed project are Class 1 and Class 14. Therefore, the exception that qualifies consideration of Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 do apply to the proposed 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.

There are no cumulative impacts anticipated with the proposed project. The roadway work would not expand the existing roadway and the proposed additional school facilities are located at an existing school campus. There are no other projects proposed in the vicinity of the proposed project.

- (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.

There are no unusual circumstances at the proposed project site that would result in a significant effect on the environment. There will be no impacts to biological resources from new building or fuel modification plan. A biological assessment evaluated the proposed project and the fuel modification area. The biological assessment concluded the Fuel Modification Zone (FMZ) as having been originally landscaped as Front Slope and Landscape Drifts, and for Front Slope vegetation even noting that this is "transition planting between the NCCP zone and the campus," including some ornamentals as well. None of the species in these two zones comprised any coastal sage scrub. The FMZ planting will not include any Cal-IPC listed plants as confirmed in the notes. This area always was a maintained landscaped zone and the FMZ plantings will not include any invasives that would have the potential to change the CSS conditions adjacent to the toll road.

- (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.

The proposed project is not within the vicinity of a scenic highway.

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- (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.

The proposed project is not located within a hazardous waste site or included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.

- (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.

The proposed project will not impact a historical resource and would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.

Lead Agency Contact Person:

Jenny Tran, Assistant Planner

Area Code/Telephone/Extension:

(949) 644-3212

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.

2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? ☒ Yes ☐ No

Signature:

Date:

12/12/2023

Title:

Assistant Planner

☒ Signed by Lead Agency ☐ Signed by Applicant

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BY: TN DEPUTY