



Agenda Item

Planning Commission

Item #: 4.3.

1/22/2026

File #: 26-0017

TO: Chair and Members of the Planning Commission

THRU: Hayden Beckman, Planning Manager

FROM: Arlen Beck, Associate Planner

1. SUBJECT

Public Hearing to consider a request to convert a historic warehouse building to a church use at 527 W. Almond Avenue and 180 S. Cypress Street and finding of CEQA Exemption (CUP-3236).

2. SUMMARY

The applicant is proposing an adaptive re-use of a historic steel frame warehouse into a church/religious assembly use and the remodel of an existing office building on a single site located at 527 W. Almond Avenue and 180 S. Cypress Street.

3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

1. Conduct and close the Public Hearing.
2. Adopt Planning Commission Resolution No. 03-26, approving Conditional Use Permit No. 3236, Design Review No. 5159, and Minor Site Plan Review No. 1191, to permit the adaptive re-use of a historic steel frame warehouse to a church/religious assembly use and the remodel of an existing office building on a single site that includes improvements within the connecting plaza located at 527 W. Almond Avenue and 180 S. Cypress Street.
3. Find the request categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in accordance with Section 15301 and Section 15331 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

4. PROJECT BACKGROUND

Property Information	
Applicant	Kyle Zimmerman representing Friends Church
Property Owner	Lisa Perrine (Cibola Systems)
Property Location	527 W. Almond Avenue and 180 S. Cypress Street
Existing General Plan Land Use Element Designation	Old Towne Mixed Use 15 (OTMIX15)
Existing Zoning Classification	Old Towne Mixed Use-15 (OTMU-15)
Old Towne	Yes
Specific Plan/PC	Santa Fe Depot Specific Plan

Site Size	1.1 Acre (48,804-square-feet)
Circulation	The site is accessed through a gated drive Cypress St and a pedestrian gate off W. Almond Ave.
Existing Conditions	A 1.1 acre site with an 11,452-square-foot building with an 1,841-square-foot loading dock, a 6,447-square-foot office building, an improved plaza between the two buildings, and an on-street parking lot with 38 spaces with an existing trash enclosure.
Surrounding Land Uses and Zoning	North: Old Towne Mixed Use-15 (OTMU-15) with commercial office buildings.
	South: Old Towne Mixed Use-15 (OTMU-15) with Almond Ave. with a historic packing house at the current location of Friends Church Orange.
	East: Old Towne Mixed Use-24 (OTMU-24) with BNSF railway with a multi-tenant commercial building.
	West: Single-Family Residential (R1-6) adjacent to Cypress St. with single-family residences.
Previous Applications/Entitlements	Design Review No. 4429-09, and Minor Site Change No. 590-09 to permit the improvements to the West Building at 180 S. Cypress Street for Cibola Community Center. Design Review No. 4460-09 to remove 11' of warehouse building on the east side due to BNSF ROW encroachment.

5. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project involves the establishment of a church and related community-serving uses within two existing buildings located at 527 W. Almond Avenue (West Building) and 180 S. Cypress Street (East Building). Friends Church Orange proposes to relocate its current operations to the site and consolidate worship, administrative, ministry, and outreach activities into a single permanent location. The project includes interior improvements to support a religious assembly use and an 1,841-square-foot expansion of the West Building created through the conversion of the existing loading dock area into conditioned interior space.

The church's primary activity consists of regularly scheduled worship services held on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings, with multiple service times. Average attendance ranges from approximately 150 to 270 congregants per service. Services are generally one hour in duration and include live music and sermons. In addition, the church operates a monthly food pantry on Saturday mornings that serves approximately 150 families over a two-hour period.

Weekday operations occur during business hours and early evenings and include staff offices, administrative functions, Bible studies, small group meetings, and preparation for worship services. The church employs a mix of full-time and part-time staff, though weekday on-site staffing is limited. The church also partners with community organizations to host youth programs, after-school activities, tutoring, and social services. Programming is scheduled to stagger arrivals and departures

and avoid late-night activities, with evening activities concluding by 9:00 p.m.

The project also includes a proposed coffee shop accessory to the church use, intended to operate in conjunction with worship services and church programming and, at times, be open to the surrounding community. The coffee shop is designed as a secondary use that supports fellowship, informal gatherings, and community engagement and is not intended to function as a standalone commercial use. Overall, the proposed church use is characterized by predictable operating hours, a mix of religious and community-serving activities, and management practices intended to minimize potential land use impacts on surrounding properties.

6. PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff believes the proposed project represents a thoughtful adaptive reuse of an existing historic site by introducing a community-oriented church use that aligns with the mixed-use character of the surrounding area. The project is consistent with the Santa Fe Depot Specific Plan, which emphasizes the preservation and rehabilitation of historic industrial properties for continued use. The project retains and preserves both its interior and exterior character-defining features, including its rounded roof structure, metal cladding, multi-paned windows and doors, and large bay doors for the exterior and its large open space with a steel truss ceiling support system, concrete floors, and corrugated metal walls for the interior.

Staff finds that the project's operational characteristics, including predictable service times, managed weekday programming, and accessory uses that remain subordinate to the primary religious assembly use, are appropriate for the site. The limited expansion of converting the existing loading dock to interior space and reliance on existing site infrastructure further support staff's conclusion that the project will function without creating adverse land use impacts. Overall, staff believes the project is well-conceived, responsive to its context, and suitable for approval subject to the recommended conditions.

Parking:

Pursuant to Government Code Section 65863.2 (AB 2097), the City is prohibited from imposing or enforcing minimum automobile parking requirements for development projects located within one-half mile of a major transit stop or high-quality transit corridor. The subject site is located within approximately 800 feet of the Metrolink station on N. Atchison Street, which qualifies as a major transit stop, and therefore minimum off-street parking requirements do not apply to the proposed project (Attachment 5). While minimum parking standards cannot be required, AB 2097 does not preclude the City from evaluating existing parking conditions or applying reasonable operational and parking management conditions to avoid adverse impacts.

Notwithstanding the prohibition of the City's ability to impose minimum off-street parking standards, the number of off-street parking spaces required by OMC Section 17.34.060 for this request would be 236 spaces. This number serves as a benchmark of reference in the evaluation of potential parking demand for the project. The project site has a parking lot with 38 spaces and the 198 space deficiency to meeting the benchmark will be met through the use of shared off-street parking with the packing house property at 426 W. Almond Avenue providing 70 parking spaces, and the Depot property at 194 N. Atchison Street providing 128 spaces.

The Friends Church Orange has been operating at their current site across the street from the project site at 426 W. Almond Ave for the last 10 years and have not had any code enforcement cases

related to parking during those 10 years. Staff anticipates that the church will continue their good faith operations to mitigate parking impacts to the surrounding area which includes having parking lot attendants providing direction and managing the availability of parking lot spaces for their Sunday morning services, and continuing to stagger pick-ups and drop-offs for weekday activities.

On-street parking demand in the surrounding area varies by time of day and day of week, with higher utilization during weekday business hours and lower utilization during evenings and weekends. The proposed religious assembly use is anticipated to operate primarily on Sundays and limited weekday evenings, which generally do not coincide with peak parking demand for the surrounding commercial and industrial uses. This temporal separation reduces the likelihood of parking conflicts.

The project has been conditioned to address parking coordination among on-site uses, and operational timing of ancillary activities relative to worship services. These conditions are intended to mitigate potential impacts associated with a religious assembly use and ensure compatibility with surrounding development. Additionally, the site is located within an urbanized, mixed-use environment with access to, and infrastructure for, multiple transportation modes, including walking, bicycling, and transit.

7. AUTHORIZING GUIDELINES

Orange Municipal Code (OMC) Section 17.08.020 B.2.a. authorizes the Planning Commission to review and take final action on applications for Conditional Use Permits, Design Review, and Minor Site Plan Review. Footnote (b) of Table 17.08.020 of the OMC - Reviewing Bodies - states that when more than one type of application is filed for a single project, the application requiring the highest level of approval shall dictate the review process for the entire group of applications. The Planning Commission is the highest level approving body for these applications.

8. PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice was provided to owners and tenants within 300 feet of the project and posted at the project site on or before January 8, 2026.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per State CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (Class 1 - Existing Facilities), and Section 15331 (Class 31 - Historic Resource Rehabilitation/Restoration) because the project consists of an adaptive re-use which will result in the restoration or rehabilitation and minor alteration of existing deteriorated private structures involving negligible or no expansion of the former use and does not involve an addition of more than 10,000 square feet where the project can be served by all public services and is not located in an environmentally sensitive area. Alterations to the exterior and interior of the historic building are compatible with the character of the historic packing house and will not negatively impact historic materials or features, in conformance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*.

10. ADVISORY BOARD ACTION

Staff Review Committee:

The Staff Review Committee (SRC) conducted reviews of the project on August 21, 2024, December 4, 2024, March 5, 2025, and April 30, 2025. On October 2, 2025, SRC recommended that the project proceed to the Design Review Committee.

Design Review Committee:

The Design Review Committee reviewed the subject proposal on December 17, 2025, and recommended approval with conditions. The conditions of approval added by the Design Review Committee were related to landscaping, lighting, signage, and exterior paint color. The applicant has revised the project to incorporate these changes and are included in the attached project plans (Attachment 3).

11. ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 Planning Commission Resolution No. PC 03-26
- Attachment 2 Vicinity Map
- Attachment 3 Project Plans
- Attachment 4 Applicant Justification Letter
- Attachment 5 AB 2097 Exemption Map
- Attachment 6 Design Review Committee Staff Report from December 17, 2025