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April 28, 2017

Ms. Amy French, AICP
Chief Planning Official
Palo Alto City Hall, Planning & Community Environment
250 Hamilton Avenue, 5th Floor
Palo Alto, CA 94301

**Re: Castilleja School Request for Variance for Below Grade Setback
Encroachments related to Underground Parking Garage;
1310 Bryant Street and 1235, 1263 Emerson Street, Palo Alto
("Property"); [16PLN-00258] [SCH#2017012052]**

Dear Ms. French:

Castilleja School ("Castilleja") has a pending application with the City of Palo Alto for a Master Plan and Vesting Tentative Map with Exception (to merge the 3 parcels comprising their Property), as well as a request for an amended Conditional Use Permit to increase enrollment. In connection with their application, Castilleja seeks to increase the number of on-site parking spaces at the Property from 74 to 139, primarily through the construction of a below-grade parking structure under the merged parcels to accommodate 115 vehicles and re-route drop-off and pick-up through the garage ("Underground Garage"). In addition to the Underground Garage creating increased on-site parking, its construction allows for an overall *reduction* in existing at-grade parking spaces by 50 stalls.

Unique circumstances of the Property have presented significant constraints in achieving the space and design elements needed for Castilleja to accommodate the Underground Garage. Those same unique circumstances support a variance granting

relief from the special setback requirement limitations found in the Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC). On behalf of Castilleja, this letter serves as a formal request for a Variance to allow the pedestrian access and vehicle ramp into the Underground Garage to encroach into the Embarcadero Road special setback and the Emerson Street side setback, as well as for some below-grade parking to encroach into the Embarcadero Road and side setbacks (collectively, "Below Grade Setback Encroachments").

The variance provisions of PAMC Section 18.76 030 provide a mechanism for granting relief when strict application of the zoning regulations would subject development of a site to substantial hardships, constraints or practical difficulties that do not normally arise on other sites in the same vicinity and zoning district. Variances may be granted from strict site development regulations, such as setback encroachments. The findings required to grant a variance for the proposed Below Grade Setback Encroachments related to the Underground Garage, and the basis for making those required findings, are discussed below.

1. Because of special circumstances applicable to the Property, including, but not limited to, size, shape, topography, location or surroundings, the strict application of requirements and regulations substantially deprives the Property of privileges enjoyed by other property in the vicinity and in the same zoning district.

Castilleja comes to the City with special circumstances, as it has long used its Property for school use (before the inception of the zoning regulations) and has been a conditionally permitted school use in a residential zone for many years since the zoning code took effect. The site development regulations for single-family homes do not entirely translate for school use and the associated amenities (i.e. parking). Thus conditionally permitted uses yield "special circumstances" related to Property use and development by their very nature. Furthermore, the unique circumstances of the Property, such as the location of historic resources on site, the irregular shape of Property and its proximity to Embarcadero (as well as the goal of keeping cars out of neighborhood, as much as possible), have presented significant constraints in achieving the space and design elements needed for Castilleja to accommodate the Underground Garage.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned special circumstances, Castilleja has designed a site plan to meet the parking needs of the school with little or no impact on the surrounding residential neighborhood. Indeed a major design component of the project is to keep cars hidden and away from the neighborhood via the use of the Underground Garage. After multiple community meetings, it was further made clear that many neighbors supported a below grade parking solution.

The tension arises because the logical location of the Underground Garage causes the Below Grade Setback Encroachments. The strict application of below grade set back limitations would force the garage further away from Embarcadero, into the neighborhood (negatively impacting the traffic circulation) and possibly impacting some of the historic resources at the Property. Castilleja seeks a variance for the Below Grade Setback Encroachments in order to allow the proposed location of the Underground Garage, a location chosen to overcome the constraints discussed above.

2. Granting the variance shall not affect substantial compliance with the regulations or constitute a grant of special privileges inconsistent with the limitations upon other properties in the vicinity or in the same zoning district.

The purpose of the Underground Garage is to mitigate traffic and parking impacts to the surrounding neighborhood. Granting this variance is not a special privilege because on the whole, the Project is in substantial compliance with the zoning regulations. Specifically, the project does not propose an increase to the existing above-grade FAR and all above grade setbacks are met. Finally, because the Below Grade Setback Encroachments are only subterranean, they do not materially impact neighborhood views nor are the encroachments detrimental to the surrounding neighborhood.

3. Granting the variance is consistent with the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan and purposes of the Zoning code.

Improving the Property with an Underground Garage particularly fosters certain Land Use Policies and Goals set forth in the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan, as follows:

- Land Use Policy L-15 (“...preserve and enhance public gathering spaces within walking distances of residential neighborhoods”). The campus is open to the public. The location and existence of the Underground Garage quickly delivers cars below grade, allows for a more open campus with less at-grade parking, while preserving mature trees and allowing for enhanced views and gathering spaces.
- Land Use Goal L-3 (“Safe, Attractive Residential Neighborhoods, Each with its Own Distinct Character...”). The design and location of the Underground Garage is aimed to be compatible with the neighborhood (i.e. landscape trellising at the entry, the only visible portions of the Underground Garage are the entry and exit ramps, the entrance is located significantly inside the school’s property and the exit is aligned with Melville, the location and proposed circulation of the Underground Garage promotes fewer cars driving through the neighborhood due to close

proximity of the entrance and exit to Embarcadero, ultimately helping to reduce noise and increase neighborhood safety).

- Policy L-65 ["...encourage...private institutions to provide facilities that promote a sense of community and are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood."]. Both the concept of the Underground Garage and its proposed location take the circulation and parking of cars away from the neighborhood such that the private school use can be more compatible with its residential neighbors.
- Land Use Goal L-2 ("An Enhanced Sense of 'Community' with Development Designed to Foster Public Life and Meet Citywide Needs"). Castilleja's robust and forward thinking Transportation Demand Management Program not only reduces transportation impacts of the School in the neighborhood, but serves as a model for reducing citywide traffic and parking concerns, while at the same time improving the immediate neighborhood experience.

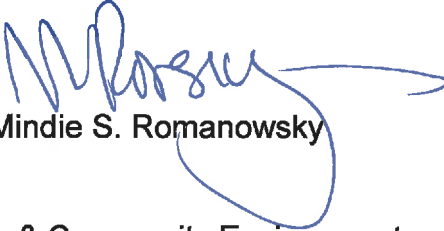
4. Granting the variance will not be detrimental or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity, will not be detrimental to the public health, safety, general welfare or convenience.

Based on strong community feedback to build an underground garage, the location and design of the Underground Garage were conceptualized for the purposes of health/safety/peace in the neighborhood as well as for the protection of the landscaping and improvements in the overall vicinity of the school. The location and design of the Underground Garage allows for the protection of surrounding mature trees and landscaping and trellising is aimed to mitigate the visual impact of the garage. The only visible aspect of the garage will be a portion of the ramp. The ramp exit from the underground garage is strategically located to ensure site line safety. Finally, access to and from the garage was thoroughly studied and designed in such a way that a majority of the vehicles will come off Embarcadero to Bryant and into the parking garage (avoiding the greater neighborhood), before exiting at Emerson, close to Embarcadero, once more. Castilleja is confident these design considerations will promote public health and safety for the vicinity while enhancing the general welfare of the neighborhood.

Amy French, AICP
April 28, 2017
Page 5

For the foregoing reasons, there is substantial evidence by which the City can make the necessary findings and approve the Variance for the Below Grade Setback Encroachments impacted by the Underground Garage.

Sincerely,



Mindie S. Romanowsky

cc: Hillary Gitelman, Director of Planning & Community Environment
Jonathan Lait, Assistant Director of Planning and Community Environment
Nanci Kauffman, Head of Castilleja School
Kathy Layendecker, Chief Financial and Operating Officer