



## City of Palo Alto

(ID # 6208)

### Architectural Review Board ARB Staff Report

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**Report Type: Preliminary ARB****Meeting Date: 10/15/2015****Summary Title: Preliminary Review: 693 Arastradero Road - Bowman School**

**Title: 693 Arastradero Road [14PLN-00254] Request by Mary Beth Ricks, on behalf of Bowman International School, for preliminary Architectural Review for demolition of two existing single family residences and the construction of a new 17,200 square feet private school campus. The project also includes a variance request for construction of a "sunken" learning circle and a Conditional Use permit for a private school use. Zoning District: R-1(10,000) Single Family Residential District. Environmental Assessment: Not a Project**

**From: Jonathan Lait****Lead Department: Architectural Review Board****RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends the Architectural Review Board (ARB) conduct a preliminary review of the proposed project. No formal action may be taken at a preliminary review; comments made at a preliminary review are not binding on the City or the applicant.

**SITE INFORMATION**

The project site located on the south-east side of Arastradero Road between Georgia Avenue and the Hetch Hetchy right-of-way (Attachment A), approximately 500 feet south of the existing Bowman School. The site consists of two parcels totaling 54,894 square feet (1.26 acres). Currently, the site includes six residential structures built circa 1948 to 1960.

The Comprehensive Plan map designation is Single Family Residential which allows for one dwelling unit on each lot as well as conditional uses requiring permits such as churches and schools. The site has a zoning designation of Single-Family Residential (R-1 (10,000)) and includes a special setback of 24 feet along Arastradero Road. The purpose of this single family residential district is intended to create, preserve, and enhance areas suitable for detached dwellings. However, private educational facilities are allowed with approval of a Conditional Use permit.

**Surrounding Sites**

Properties to the northeast along Arastradero Road are zoned Single-Family Residential (R-1 (10,000)) and include the Palo Alto Christian Reformed Church, single family homes on Ynigo Way and the existing Bowman School Terman site. Properties to the southeast of the site, zoned PF and RE, include the Hetch Hetchy right-of-way/Pedestrian Trail and Alta Mesa Memorial Park. To the north of the site, across Arastradero, properties are zoned R-1 and are single-family residences. To the west is multi-family housing, zoned RM-40, and Gunn High School. To the east of the site (rear) is the Terman Apartments, multi-family, zoned RM-30.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Bowman International School is a non-profit Montessori school currently serving K-8<sup>th</sup> grade students in multi-aged classrooms at 4000 Terman Drive. Bowman is a year-round school where students are taught individually or in small groups. The applicant is proposing to construct a new preschool campus at 693 Arastradero Road and to provide some additional amenities for the upper school campus. The project would include demolition of two dwelling units and four associated structures and construction of a new 17,200 square foot private school campus including three school buildings, exterior play area, garden, sunken learning circle, associated landscaping, and a 21 space parking lot and driveway. The front setback area includes a large oak tree that would be preserved with sufficient pervious surface to ensure the tree remains healthy.

The three new school buildings include an 11,463 square foot gymnasium/stage, a 2,358 square foot single story classroom building with basement (IDEALab), and a 3,379 square foot primary building for use by Juniors program (preschool). This Arastradero site would be the main location for the Juniors program (preschool). Bowman is requesting capacity for up to 60 students in two classrooms, comprised of three to five year olds. Approximately 20 five year olds are currently enrolled in the Juniors program at the Terman site, so the net increase would be approximately 40 new students across both school sites.

The Arastradero Site would also include the IDEALab, which will provide dedicated space for STEAM activities (Woodshop, Art, Science and Media), as well as a multi-purpose space for sports, PE, and all-school gatherings. These areas would be used by students from both the Terman and Arastradero sites, but would not add to the student population.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Architecture and FAR**

As shown on the title sheet, the site would be constructed with small scale, residential style buildings at the front of the property. The taller 26 foot Gymnasium/Stage building would be located towards the rear of the site where it is less visible from the street. Elevation drawings are shown on Sheets PAR7 and PAR8, with a perspective view of the front of the property on Sheet PAR10. The proposed FAR is 17,200 square feet, under the site maximum 17,218 square feet. This proposed FAR double counts the area of the gym building that exceeds 17 feet, in conformance with Zoning Code Section 18.12.040 Table 3.

### Site Planning

The Primary Play Area for the preschool is south facing for sun exposure and designed with the intention of directing the sound of young children playing towards the Hetch-Hetchy right of way. The Sunken Learning Circle, set below grade and between buildings, creates an area for group gatherings or individual learning. At the rear of the site is the Garden providing space for the school's gardening program.

### Vehicular Parking

In accordance with Zoning Code Section 18.52, day care centers/preschools are required to have one parking space per 1.5 employees. Whereas, elementary schools are required to have two parking spaces per teaching station and office space requires one parking space per 250 square feet. To ensure there is sufficient parking, staff has requested parking be provided for all classrooms, even if Bowman intends these rooms to be used as breakout space for existing students. As shown on Sheet PAR 4, this comes to a total parking requirement of 15 vehicle spaces. The project proposes 21 surface parking spaces.

### Bicycle Parking

In accordance with Zoning Code Section 18.52, day care centers/preschools are required to have one bike parking space per 6 employees. The project does not specify the number of spaces provided, but a bicycle rack area, adequate for at least 5 short term bicycle spaces, is noted on the site plan.

### Circulation

Sheet PAR4.1, shows the school's proposed circulation plan. The applicant proposes a new one-way driveway and parking layout accessed by a right-turn only in driveway at the southern corner of the property and a right-turn only out driveway at the northern corner of the property. The right-turn only approach to the circulation pattern is necessitated by the City proposed median improvements for the portion of Arastradero Road fronting the property. The proposed median improvements will prevent a left-turn in or out of the applicant's property. During formal review, Fire Department staff will determine if an emergency only left-turn pocket is needed in the Arastradero median.

Student drop-off and pick-up is located over 150 feet interior to the site. The drop-off and pick-up area would be for the school's Junior/preschool program (3 to 5 year olds, maximum of 60 students), which are the only full time students on site. The applicant proposes to have a "greeter" at this area during morning and afternoon peak periods to assist students in and out of vehicles. This type of adult supervision will ensure drivers are able to remain in their cars while greeters assist passengers, which minimizes the time required for each drop-off or pick-up. Staff will ensure the formal application includes a condition for this adult supervision of the drop-off and pick-up area during peak periods to ensure all queuing is on-site and does not block off-site through traffic.

Parents with older children will then take a right turn out of the Arastradero site and proceed north to the Terman site. The remainder of students visiting the site will be 1<sup>st</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from the school's existing Terman site, who will walk from the Terman site to the Arastradero site.

#### Traffic

Bowman has stated that current enrollment at their Terman site is 237 students, where they have approvals for 300 students. With this application, Bowman is proposing that total enrollment at both sites would not exceed this currently permitted 300 students. The new campus will require a second Conditional Use Permit or an amendment to their existing CUP. The CUP is not within the ARB's purview.

#### Variance for Sunken Learning Circle

Bowman School is proposing a Sunken Learning Circle with a stage, set below grade between the IDEALab and the Gymnasium/Stage, to create a quiet area for group gatherings or individual learning. The below grade nature of this learning circle would better contain noise from the use of the area and would be screened from off-site views. Because the Sunken Learning Circle also serves as a way to provide light to the lower level of the IDEALab, it is classified as a "below-grade patio". Zoning Code Section 18.12.090(c)(2) states the area shall not exceed two percent of the lot area or 200 square feet (sq ft) whichever is greater. Given the project lot size is 54,894 sq ft then two percent of the lot area would be 1,098 sq ft. However, the Code Section goes on to say that each below grade patio shall be a maximum of 200 sq ft. Therefore, the proposed Sunken Learning Circle would require a variance to exceed the maximum size limitation of 200 sq ft. This variance is not within the ARB's purview.

#### **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

On November 13, 2014, Bowman school held an Open House for the neighbors in order to introduce them to the school proposal. A second Open House was held on May 19, 2015, where Bowman shared the proposed plans with neighbors. Notices for this hearing were sent to all neighbors within 600 feet on the project site.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

No environmental review is required for this Preliminary Review application, as it is not considered a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

An Environment Assessment will be prepared for the review with the formal application, which will include review of the existing structures for historic significance, among other environmental considerations.

#### **COURTESY COPIES**

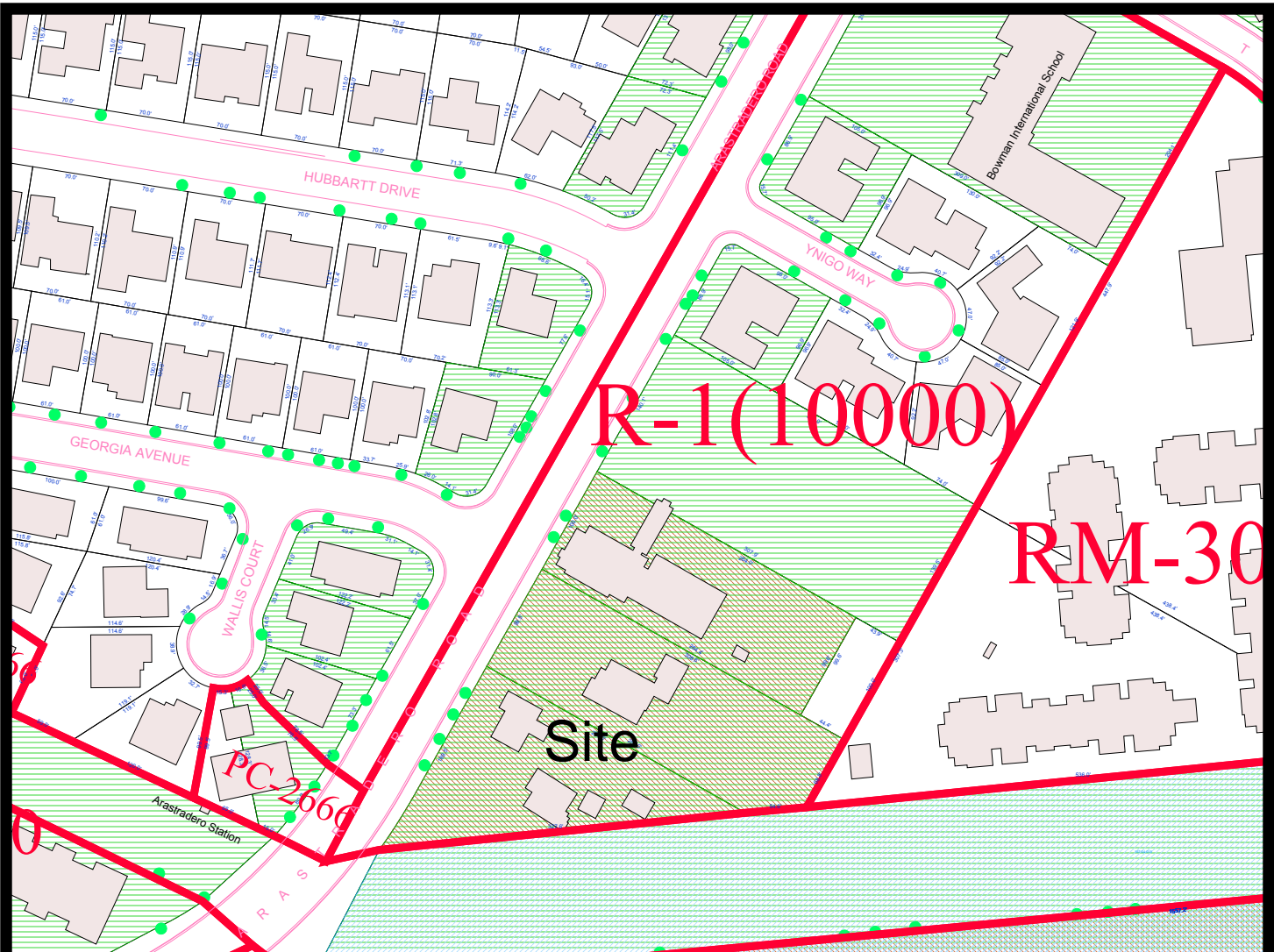
Mary Ricks, Head of School, Bowman School

**Prepared By:** Jodie Gerhardt, AICP, Current Planning Manager

**Manager Review:** Jonathan Lait, AICP, Assistant Director

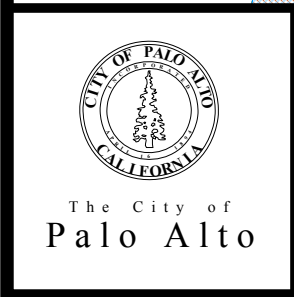
**Attachments:**

- Attachment A: Location Map(PDF)
- Attachment B: Applicant's Project Description (DOCX)
- Attachment C: Project Plans (TXT)



**Legend**

- Staff-Coverage Districts, Project Review
- Historic Site
- Special Setback
- Near Creek (SCVWD)
- Known Structures
- Tree (TR)
- Zone Districts
- Zone District Notes
- Curb Edge
- Dimensions (AP)
- Water Feature
- Railroad
- Zone District Labels



**Location Map**  
**689 - 693 Arastradero**

This map is a product of the  
City of Palo Alto GIS



**Attachment B**

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION – REQUESTED ACTION**

**689 & 693 Arastradero Road**

**June 8, 2015**

Founded in Palo Alto in 1995, Bowman International School is an independent, non-profit Montessori school currently serving K-8<sup>th</sup> grade students in multi-aged classrooms at 4000 Terman Drive. We inspire children to love learning in an academically challenging and internationally aware program that promotes respect, responsibility, and independence. Bowman is a year-round school that incorporates the Montessori principals of individualized learning. This means each student follows his/her learning plan and lessons are taught individually or in small groups, rather than to the entire class at the same time. Our Montessori program is broader than traditional programs in that we provide a strong foundation not only in STEAM topics (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) and language arts, but we also provide an in-depth study of physical and cultural geography, zoology, physical science, history, art, and multiple world languages taught to all students. We emphasize daily PE, teach life skills, provide music instruction twice a week at every grade level, weekly art instruction at every grade level, and the opportunity to participate in theater productions for all grades.

Not only does the subject matter often differ from those subjects taught in a traditional education setting, but even the way we teach those core subjects looks different. Our goal is to inspire the love of learning and this often happens outside of the traditional classroom structure with its rows of desks and the teacher lecturing to the whole group at once. Rather than sitting in a row of desks, students at Bowman will instead be found sitting on the floor, at tables, solo, in pairs or groups, inside, and outside as the teachers take on the role of guide, interacting with small groups of

students or one-on-one with a student while the rest of the students work independently.

Bowman has 37 full time teachers and specialists, with 78% of them holding advanced degrees. In addition to the classes and enrichment programs mentioned above, Bowman provides numerous learning and growth opportunities for students, including: artist-in-residence visits throughout the year; community service with a variety of groups and ages; sports teams for basketball, tennis, golf, and volleyball; student travel trips to Los Angeles, Japan, England, Boston, Washington D.C., and New York City; debate and public speaking clubs; Middle School Model UN; entrepreneurial studies; annual science fair; and several specialized workshops.

Bowman's many successes in its nearly 20 year history include having graduated 108 students from 8<sup>th</sup> grade, all of whom have successfully moved onto, and graduated from, each of the local high schools, as well as colleges and universities including Stanford, Santa Clara, Yale, Princeton, UCLA, and UC Berkeley. Bowman students perform, on average, two years above grade level. Beyond the numbers, we consider it a huge success when we receive feedback from faculty at other schools thanking us for the real life skills our students possess such as time management, personal responsibility, confidence, critical thinking, independence, and effective communication. We also consider it a success when Bowman's students and alumni travel the world, providing care and solutions for their global neighbors.

Current enrollment at Bowman is 237 students representing more than 30 different nations. The Head of School and Board of Trustees believe strongly in the benefits of a small school population and have identified a student body of not more than 300 as the maximum enrollment, no matter the campus size, or number of campus locations.

Bowman's campus at 4000 Terman is approximately 1.45 acres and includes a 22,000 square foot building with an outdoor green space/play area. Inside, there are 11 classrooms, an administrative area with 4 offices, as well as a teachers' lounge and a combination library/multi-purpose space in the basement.



The properties at 689 and 693 Arastradero Road (the “Arastradero Site”) would provide an additional 1.26 acres (approximately) allowing Bowman more space for our enrichment offerings, and the ability to incorporate 3 and 4-year-olds in our student population, a critical component of the Montessori primary classroom model. Please note we are not starting a new preschool, rather, the Montessori education model begins with the Juniors level, composed of students 3-5 years of age. To this point, we have not been able to include the 3 and 4-year-olds because of lack of space at the 4000 Terman campus. These younger students would join our already existing Juniors program and help us better provide the multi-age classroom environment vital to the overall Montessori vision.

Bowman hopes to accommodate up to 60 students in two classrooms at the Arastradero Site. Those 60 students will be comprised of approximately twenty 3-year-olds, twenty 4-year-olds and twenty 5-year-olds. Because the 5-year-olds are part of our existing Juniors program, we are looking to add approximately 40 new students overall. We also hope to include on the Arastradero Site our IDEALab, which will provide dedicated space for our STEAM activities (Woodshop, Art, Science and Media), as well as a multi-purpose space for sports, PE, and all-school gatherings. These programs would expand into outdoor learning areas in the form of a Sunken Learning Circle, Science Garden, Play and Exploration Yards, Patios and Walkways. Total enrollment at both sites will not exceed the currently permitted 300 students.

Architecturally, our vision is to create a site with a small-scale, residential “learning village” style that will be an attractive addition to the area and will provide the best use of indoor and outdoor space for our students. At the site design level, the proposed project achieves this goal through the location of the one-story Primary and IDEALab buildings along the front street exposure, and locating the Gymnasium/Stage building, the tallest building on the site, to the rear of the property where it is not visible from the street. Locating the buildings in this way creates three distinct outdoor areas – Sunken Learning Circle, Primary Play Area, and the Garden. The Primary Play Area is south facing for sun exposure and directs the sound of young children playing towards

the Hetch-Hetchy Right of Way. The Sunken Learning Circle, set below grade and between buildings, creates a quiet area for group gatherings or individual learning that is not impactful to the neighbors. Tucked behind the stage is the Garden providing space for the school's gardening program. This approach to the site design best utilizes the site for Bowman's unique academic and learning program, but does so in a way that also fits in well with the neighborhood context and is respectful of the surrounding uses.

A good example of this respectful approach to site design is the Sunken Learning Circle. In our earlier designs we had this circle located behind the Gymnasium/Stage building, where the Garden is currently shown. The circle was intended to be at grade and slope upwards on a semi-circular berm. We initially earmarked this spot for the circle so we could open the stage (front and back) to be used for both the Gymnasium and the circle. When it was pointed out that use of the circle at this location may cause a "noise issue" for our Terman Apartment neighbors, we rethought the location of the circle.

The circle is now located between the IDEALab and the Gymnasium/Stage, sunken below grade, and internal to the site. In this arrangement, sound is well contained within the circle and activities are screened from off-site views. Though we lost the dual use of the Gymnasium stage, we have transformed the circle from a strictly performance circle into a true Learning Circle where its connection to the IDEALab invites indoor learning to flow outdoors. The central location of the circle also invites students to use the space for small group gatherings, reading, or just hanging out and talking.

Because the Sunken Learning Circle also serves as a way to provide light to the lower level of the IDEALab, it could be classified for zoning purposes as a "below-grade patio". The code does have area/size restrictions for "below-grade patios," however, these limitations were developed for residential uses and do not translate directly to an internal Learning Circle serving an educational function. To rectify this difference in function, City staff has recommended that we apply for a variance for this component of our site design.

Bowman's neighbors have been informed multiple times about our purchase of the Arastradero Site. On November 13, 2014, we held an Open House for our neighbors in order to introduce them to our hopes for the site. We also hosted a second Open House on May 19, 2015, where we shared our plans and proposal with neighbors. At the Open Houses, and via email to the surrounding neighborhood group list serves and Nextdoor.com groups, we have invited and welcomed neighbor comments throughout the process. We have created an open line of communication with neighbors by providing email and online updates, a website page dedicated to the Arastradero Site news, and a dedicated email they can use to reach the Head of School directly with questions and comments. Of the neighbors we have heard from, there have been no issues of major concern or opposition to Bowman's plans at the Arastradero Site.

This is our first submittal to the Architectural Review Board and we would encourage any and all comments from the Board. In particular, our desired focus for this review is:

1. General site layout and its relation to neighborhood context
2. Appropriateness of proposed programs on site
3. Proposed number of parking stalls provided, parking layout and circulation, including proposed drop-off and pick-up locations
4. Proposed massing and scale of structures
5. Review, comments and acceptance of findings from initial Traffic Study
6. Review, comments and acceptance of findings from Historical Review
7. Review, comments and acceptance of findings from Arborist Report
8. Initial comments on the proposed Sunken Learning Circle

Bowman has worked successfully with the City of Palo Alto for more than two decades and remaining in Palo Alto was an important objective in our search. The Arastradero Site allows Bowman to maintain the majority of our students and program at our current 4000 Terman Drive site, to continue working with the City of Palo Alto, and to provide additional space for our unique style of teaching. We look forward to a

partnership with the City of Palo Alto for many years to come. Thank you for your review and consideration of our proposal.

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Link for the project plans:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/news/displaynews.asp?NewsID=3343&TargetID=319>