

Capitola Planning Commission

Agenda Report



Meeting: January 15, 2026

From: Community & Economic Development Department

Address: 620 Monterey Avenue, New Brighton Middle School

Project Description: Application #25-0578. APN: 036-101-38, 035-151-19. Coastal Development Permit for field improvements to New Brighton Middle School, including an electronic scoreboard, and perimeter fencing. The project is located within the CF (Community Facility) zoning district. The Coastal Development Permit is not appealable to the California Coastal Commission. Environmental Determination: Categorical Exemption

Recommended Action: Consider application #25-0578 and **approve** the project based on the Findings and Conditions of Approval.

Property Owner: Soquel Union Elementary School District
Representative: Scott Turnbull, SUESD, Filed: 11/14/25

Background: On June 7, 2018, the City approved a Coastal Development Permit (CDP) for the removal of one classroom building and 12 portable buildings and the construction of four new buildings for additional classrooms, locker rooms, and other instructional purposes.

On April 4, 2024, the Planning Commission made findings to support a land swap agreement between the Soquel Union Elementary School District (SUESD) and the City of Capitola, to exchange portions of Monterey Avenue Park for New Brighton Middle School's pathway through Orchid Avenue to maintain public access.

In November 2025, SUESD and City staff met to discuss recent and pending field improvements and determined a Coastal Development Permit would be required.

Development Standards: Development of public-school facilities is regulated by the State of California and is not subject to local zoning standards. However, they may be required to obtain a Coastal Development Permit, which is subject to Planning Commission review for consistency with the City's Local Coastal Program Implementation Plan.

Discussion: The property is located within the Cliffwood Heights neighborhood across from St. Joseph's Church and adjacent Monterey Avenue Park and numerous single-family residences.

The 2018 CDP was for the replacement of aging educational structures and did not include the improvements within the public-school open space around the buildings. The current CDP application includes replacement of the existing natural field with new artificial turf and track, volleyball courts, bleachers, and digital scoreboard. The open space will have security fencing along the athletic grounds as required by the State. New fencing entails six-foot metal picket panels from the Monterey Avenue parking lot to the southeast corner adjacent to the Orchid Avenue pathway with lower fencing between the field and school structures. The application also includes ADA improvements and the demolition of two remaining portable structures, which were originally approved for demolition under the 2018 application. SUESD is seeking retroactive approval as the field improvements have been largely completed without a CDP.

The project includes an electronic scoreboard, located along the southern property line adjacent Orchid Avenue residences. The scoreboard is raised on 8-foot posts and the sign itself measures 3 and a half feet tall and 16 feet in width, for a sign area of 56 square feet. The scoreboard originally selected was larger and mounted on taller posts. The reduced scoreboard dimensions and height are the result of a resolution between SUESD and adjacent homeowners to reduce visual impacts.

Pathway to Monterey Avenue Park: An existing pedestrian pathway connects Orchid Avenue to Monterey Avenue Park and has historically provided public access between the Cliffwood Heights neighborhood, New Brighton Middle School, and the public park. The City participated in a land swap with SUESD for a portion of property behind Orchid Avenue in 2024, to maintain access and to accommodate construction of the school athletic fields. The City owns the pathway. The pathway was realigned and requires regrading to re-establish a clear, safe, and accessible public connection. The pathway improvements are exempt from a CDP (§17.44.080.C.2) as they will not alter the level or type of public use and will preserve public access, consistent with the City's Local Coastal Program. This pathway is not part of the current scope, as it is City owned and the work will be done under a separate grading permit.

CEQA: This project is categorically exempt under Section 15314 of the California Environmental Quality Act and is not subject to Section 753.5 of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations.

Coastal Development Permit Findings:

- A. The project is consistent with the LCP land use plan, and the LCP implementation program.**
The project improves facilities serving the existing public-school use. Public and private schools are specifically identified as permitted uses within the CF (Community Facility) zoning district. The proposed development is consistent with the City's certified Local Coastal Plan (LCP) land use plan and the LCP implementation program.
- B. The project maintains or enhances public views.**
The proposed project is located on an existing public school property at 620 Monterey Avenue. The project improves the quality of the school's open space and athletic amenities. There is no impact on public views.
- C. The project maintains or enhances vegetation, natural habitats, and natural resources.**
The proposed project is located at New Brighton Middle School. The project is not located in an area with natural habitats. The project will maintain or enhance vegetation consistent with the allowed use and will not have an effect on natural habitats or natural resources.
- D. The project maintains or enhances low-cost public recreational access, including to the beach and ocean.**
The project involves field upgrades to a school and will improve low-cost public recreational access.
- E. The project maintains or enhances opportunities for visitors.**
The project involves a public school within the CF (Community Facility), involving enhancements to the existing open space for school use, which will not negatively impact visitor serving opportunities.
- F. The project maintains or enhances coastal resources.**
The project involves a school within the CF (Community Facility) zone, involving enhancements to the existing open space for school use, which will not negatively impact coastal resources.

G. The project, including its design, location, size, and operating characteristics, is consistent with all applicable design plans and/or area plans incorporated into the LCP.

The proposed public-school facilities project complies with all applicable design criteria, design guidelines, area plans, and development standards. The operating characteristics are consistent with the CF (Community Facility) zone.

H. The project is consistent with the LCP goal of encouraging appropriate coastal development and land uses, including coastal priority development and land uses (i.e., visitor serving development and public access and recreation).

The project involves a school within the CF (Community Facility) zone, involving enhancements to the existing open space for school use. The project is consistent with the LCP goals for appropriate coastal development and land uses. The use is an allowed use consistent with the CF zoning district.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Findings:

A. The proposed project has been reviewed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Section 15314 of the CEQA Guidelines exempts minor additions to existing schools within 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 involves upgrades to existing school grounds that will not result in the addition of student capacity within the CF (Community Facility) zoning district. No adverse environmental impacts were discovered during review of the proposed project.

The Project is further exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15303 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures), which consists of the construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures; installation of small new equipment and facilities in small structures; and the conversion of existing small structures from one use to another where only minor modifications are made in the exterior of the structure. These include accessory (appurtenant) structures such as garages, carports, patios, swimming pools, and fences. The proposed scoreboard and fencing constitute small structures appurtenant to the main school building, and are therefore exempt.

Further, none of the exceptions listed in CEQA Guidelines section 15300.2 apply. There are no successive projects of the same type in the same place resulting in cumulative impacts, as the 2024 project dealt with a land swap which also had no impacts. There are no significant effects due to unusual circumstances, as the project is typical for a school conducting updates to its facilities. The project will not result in damage to scenic resources, or within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway. The project does not involve a hazardous waste site or historical resource.

Conditions of Approval:

1. The project approval consists of a Coastal Development Permit to replace an existing grass field with a track and turf field, volleyball courts, digital scoreboard, bleachers, student security fencing, perimeter landscaping, the demolition of two portable buildings and ADA improvements. The proposed project is approved as indicated on the final plans reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission on January 15, 2026, except as modified through conditions imposed by the Planning Commission during the hearing.
2. Prior to making any changes to approved plans, modifications must be specifically requested and submitted in writing to the Community and Economic Development Department. Any significant changes to the plans may require Planning Commission approval.

Attachments:

1. 620 Monterey Avenue – Plans
2. 620 Monterey Avenue – Project Summary
3. 620 Monterey Avenue – 2024 Land Swap and Field Diagram
4. 620 Monterey Avenue – 2024 Final Local Action Notice (Permit Letter)
5. Public Comment Received

Report Prepared By: Sean Sesanto, Associate Planner

Reviewed By: Rosie Wyatt, Deputy City Clerk

Approved By: Katie Herlihy, Community and Economic Development Director