
TO: St. Francis City Council
FROM: Beth Richmond, Planner
SUBJECT: Educational Facility Zoning Ordinance Amendment – 1st Reading
DATE: February 5, 2024

OVERVIEW:

The City has received a request from ISD #15 to amend the City's Zoning Code to allow educational facilities within the B-1 zoning district. The school district is proposing to move its Transition 15 (T15) program to the existing building at 22978 Butterfield Drive NW in response to recent changes in legislation which increased the maximum age for students in the program. For additional background on this application, please see the January 16, 2024 City Council packet.

CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

This request was reviewed by the City Council at the January 16, 2024 meeting. The applicant was in attendance and spoke to the application. A short summary of the discussion is below:

- Councilmembers weighed the importance of filling vacant buildings along Bridge Street with the desire for commercial uses within that corridor as envisioned by the City's Comprehensive Plan and St. Francis Forward plan. Councilmembers noted that the building on this site was previously used as the Learning Center.
- The proposed amendment would allow educational facilities on any parcel in the B-1 District with approval of an IUP. Councilmembers expressed some concern that this change may open up additional parcels to this use and therefore reduce the overall amount of commercial land within the B-1 District. Staff highlighted this use would only be appropriate on land with guidance for public use, not commercial.
- Councilmembers were interested in the potential partnership opportunities between T15 students and businesses along Bridge Street.
- As currently proposed, the use would not meet all of the district standards of the B-1 District at the time the use commences. This was discussed in depth relative to the City's requirement that 70% of the ground floor frontage on Bridge Street include a use which is active and open to the public. While conditions of approval could be established with the IUP to ensure that the site eventually meets these standards, Councilmembers expressed a concern about how the City would go about revoking the IUP if the conditions of approval were not met.

After discussion, Councilmembers chose to table the request until the February 5th meeting so that members could consider additional information and to give the opportunity for the entire Council to be in attendance to make the decision.

Staff has requested that the applicant provide additional information relative to traffic circulation and the potential future public-facing portion of the use. The applicant provided the following information relative to the future public-facing portion of the use: *At present, our intention is to use this space as an educational setting. Our idea of adding a coffee shop, offering merchandise for sale, and potentially exploring other 'business' type opportunities is to support the city of St. Francis and partner with the city in the effort to make this a business corridor.*

ANALYSIS

During discussion, Councilmembers noted a concern that this amendment has the potential to affect all properties within the B-1 District. Staff shared that an educational facility would need to align with both the land use guidance from the Comprehensive Plan as well as the zoning code in order to be approved as an IUP.

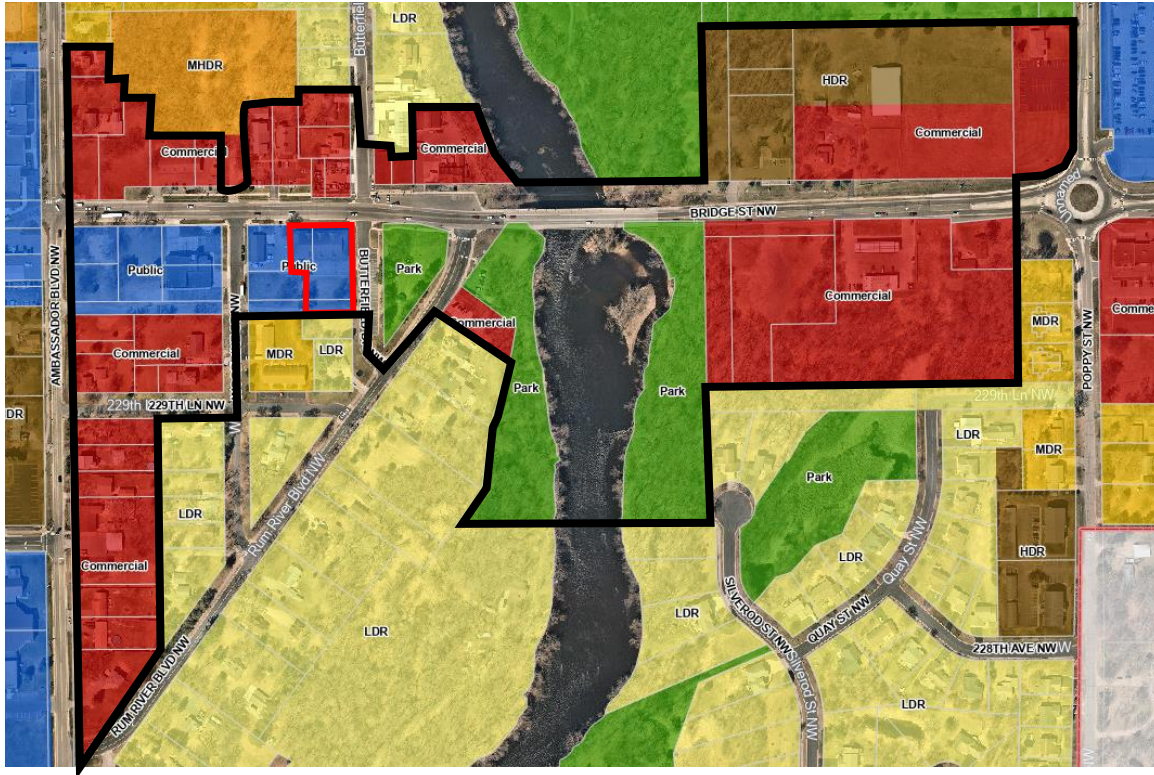
The following maps show the Comprehensive Plan's land use guidance within the Bridge Street corridor as well as the zoning map. The B-1 District extends on both sides of Bridge St between Ambassador Blvd and Poppy St. It also runs on the east side of Ambassador north and south of Bridge St NW.

From Staff's perspective, a public educational facility as proposed would be appropriate only on parcels that are guided for public use in the Comprehensive Plan (shown in blue on the image below). When the parcels involved in the City Hall site are excluded, there are only five parcels within the B-1 District which are guided for public use. Three of the five parcels make up the site currently under discussion. Therefore, there are few sites within the B-1 District which would be appropriate for an educational facility without amending the City's Comprehensive Plan.

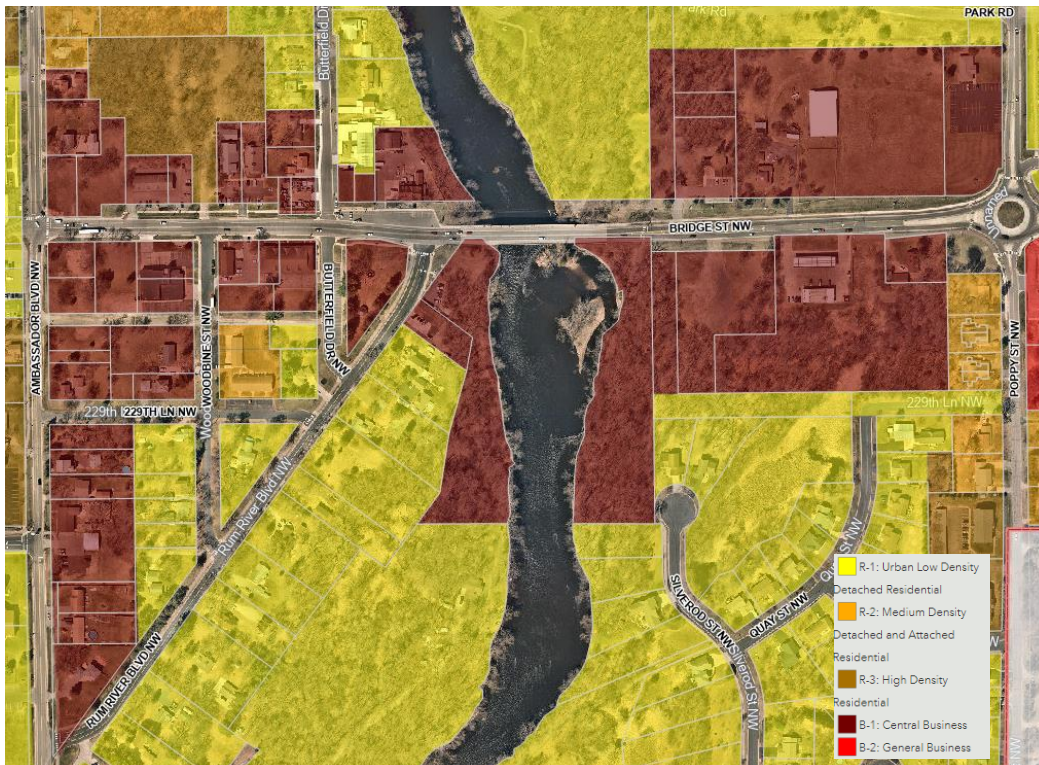
Both a Comprehensive Plan amendment and an Interim Use Permit would require a public hearing and review by the Planning Commission and City Council.

Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map

For reference, the boundaries of the B-1 District are outlined in black and the proposed T15 site is outlined in red.



Zoning Map



ACTION TO BE CONSIDERED:

Based on the Planning Commission’s unanimous recommendation for approval, draft approval documents were prepared for the January 16, 2024 City Council meeting. They have been updated and are attached for your consideration.

Potential Motions:

1. Move to approve the 1st reading of Ordinance 327 amending the Zoning Code to allow educational facilities within the B-1 District.

Some findings of fact which may support approval of the request include:

- a. The proposed use meets the Comprehensive Plan’s land use guidance for public uses. Several parcels within the B-1 district are guided for public use.
- b. The proposed use meets the intent of the B-1 District to allow for a mix of civic, commercial, and residential uses.

2. Move to deny the amendment request to allow educational facilities within the B-1 District for the following reason(s): _____ and direct Staff to prepare written findings.

Some findings of fact which may support denial of the request include:

- a. The proposed use does not meet the intent of the B-1 district to create a walkable, active downtown corridor.
- b. The use does not meet the B-1 design standards established in the City Code – particularly the standard requiring an active use on the ground-floor street frontage along Bridge Street.

Attachments:

- Draft Ordinance 327