

Luther Prep Music Center – new 36,000 sf performing arts center and music education facility

Watertown Conditional Use Application – Project Description

August 8, 2025

Luther Preparatory School (“LPS”) is proposing the construction of a modern new 36,000 SF performing arts center (“PAC”) and music education facility on the SW quadrant of the campus, immediately south of the current auditorium off College Avenue. This new building will provide state-of-the-art instruction and performance space for the high-quality curriculum and programming offered by LPS to its nearly 400 enrolled students, most of whom live on campus. The design and scale of the PAC are carefully considered to be fully compatible with the existing institutional character of the LPS campus and surrounding residential areas. Once completed, the current auditorium will be available for use by students primarily for intramural and extra-curricular activities, ensuring the continued productive use of existing campus infrastructure. The goal is to begin construction of the new building in 2026 with occupancy in 2027. Exact construction dates have not yet been set.

The new PAC will be designed with modern sound attenuation measures and exterior lighting will be strategically designed to minimize light spill onto adjacent properties, ensuring no adverse noise or light impacts on surrounding properties. New landscaping will be incorporated into the site design to enhance aesthetics and provide appropriate screening where necessary. In addition to the annual tree planting which is a part of LPS’s Arbor Day activities, appropriate plans will be put in place to address the replacement of several trees which will need to be removed as part of the site preparation for the new PAC building.

It is important to note that this is not a new use that will cause more parking or visitor counts. This project addresses the need for a modern, purpose-built facility for LPS’ established and highly regarded performing arts programs, rather than introducing new uses that would alter existing campus operations or increase overall demand on city services. The seating capacity of the new fixed-chair PAC is approximately the same size as the current LPS auditorium, which utilizes a combination of bleachers, folding chairs, and standing room. Presently, visitors to LPS for auditorium and other events throughout the year are already using on-campus parking lots and drive lanes along with available street parking around the LPS campus.

Zoning requirements in Watertown call for off-street parking at a ratio of 1 stall for every 3 seats planned as PAC capacity, in this case equaling 173 as the proposed new PAC has a seating capacity of 519. As there are currently parking for 130 cars on the property, the site plan for the new facility includes the addition of at least 45 new parking stalls adjacent to the new building entrance, bringing the total on-site parking to 175 stalls, meeting the zoning requirement. This will provide a substantial improvement over the current parking arrangement. With these new parking stalls being added on the LPS property as part of this new facility, not only will the PAC events benefit, but all high-attendance events on campus will have access to the new parking lot, significantly relieving pressure from the surrounding street parking spaces. The site plan also includes well-defined access points from College Avenue designed to facilitate smooth traffic flow, and a modern stormwater management system in compliance with all City regulations.

Throughout the year LPS hosts sporting events, conferences, musicals, choral festivals, fundraising galas, etc. The investment in the new parking will support all those functions, not just the PAC. Examples of some of these events include:

August – Registration and Opening Service
September – Co-ed volleyball tournament
October – Homecoming
October – Fall Play (multiple performances)
November – Fall Band Concert
December – Lutheran Elementary School Basketball Tournament
December – Christmas Concert
February – Phoenix for a Day
March – Spring Musical
March – Co-Ed Basketball Tournament
March – Sacred Spring Concert
March – Annual Gala Fundraiser
April/May – Children’s Theater
May – Spring Band Concert
May – Commencement Concert and Commencement
June – WELS Western Wisconsin District Convention (annual)
June – WELS Synod Convention (every 3-4 years)

In the process of planning these events, there are only two events which have any daily overlap. These are the Co-Ed Basketball Tournament in March which takes place on the first 2 days of the Spring Musical. For those first 2 days, the basketball activities are planned to be completed well before any cars are expected on campus for the musical that evening. Since we do not house most of those visitors on campus, they leave campus in the afternoon, opening the parking for the musical.

This project is a crucial investment for LPS, offering state-of-the-art space for current programs and allowing it to continue providing exceptional educational experiences, while also enhancing campus infrastructure to the benefit of the entire Watertown community. While the addition of the new PAC does not increase overall campus use or visitor traffic, the project proactively addresses parking needs by adding 45 new stalls, significantly improving parking availability for all campus events and alleviating pressure on surrounding streets, all while adhering to Watertown's zoning and conditional use standards.