



REPORT TO CITY OF VISALIA PLANNING COMMISSION

HEARING DATE: August 11, 2025

PROJECT PLANNER: Brandon Smith, Principal Planner
Phone: (559) 713-4636
Email: brandon.smith@visalia.city

SUBJECT: General Plan Amendment No. 2025-02: A request by the City of Visalia to change the land use designation on a 16-acre portion of a 21-acre parcel from Parks/Recreation to Commercial Mixed Use.

Change of Zone No. 2025-03: A request by the City of Visalia to change the zoning designation on a 16-acre portion of a 21-acre parcel from QP (Quasi-Public) to C-MU (Commercial Mixed Use).

Location: The site is located on the northwest corner of Akers Street and Riggins Avenue, within the City of Visalia, County of Tulare (APN: 077-100-103).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

General Plan Amendment No. 2025-02: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend that the Visalia City Council approve General Plan Amendment No. 2025-02, based on the findings in Resolution No. 2025-42. Staff's recommendation is based on the conclusion that the request is consistent with the Visalia General Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

Change of Zone No. 2025-03: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend that the Visalia City Council approve Change of Zone No. 2025-03, based on the findings in Resolution No. 2025-43. Staff's recommendation is based on the conclusion that the request is consistent with the Visalia General Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

RECOMMENDED MOTION

I move to recommend approval of General Plan Amendment No. 2025-02, based on the findings in Resolution No. 2025-42.

I move to recommend approval of Change of Zone No. 2025-03, based on the findings in Resolution No. 2025-43.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

General Plan Amendment No. 2025-02 and **Change of Zone No. 2025-03** together are a request by the City of Visalia to change the general plan land use and zoning designations of 16 acres from Parks/Recreation land use (QP zone) to Commercial Mixed Use (C-MU zone), as shown in the attachment to each entitlement's respective resolution. The 16 acres are part of an overall 21-acre undeveloped parcel located on the northwest corner of North Akers Street and West Riggins Avenue (see attached aerial map).

The reclassification of land use and zoning designations is based upon the recommendation of the City Council upon the conclusion of four work session discussions held between January 16, 2020 and August 19, 2024. The site has always held the general plan land use and zoning designation of Parks/Recreation / QP zone since the property's annexation in 2010.

Visalia Unified School District sold the site to the City of Visalia in 2014 and has retained property to the north for development of a middle school and future high school. Visalia’s General Plan, adopted in 2014, illustrates this site in a Parks/Facilities Map as a potential location for a new community park serving the northwest quadrant. General Plan Policy PSCU-P-5 more explicitly calls for the creation of a new community park to be built in and to serve the northwest quadrant.

Over the course of the four work sessions held to discuss land uses on the site, City staff suggested that the City-owned property at Akers & Riggan may be better suited for a land use other than Parks/Recreation given its location at a major intersection, with speculation towards a commercial designation. Under the proposed GPA/COZ, a community park could still be developed on the remaining 5-acre portion of the site, or be developed on a different site in the northwest quadrant. Staff presented viable non-residential land use alternatives to the Council at the work sessions. Between the times that the four work sessions were held, the Carleton Acres Specific Plan was drafted and adopted in 2023, solidifying a new commercial land use designation further to the west.

Based upon the August 19, 2024 work session, the City Council recommended a 4-1 vote in favor of changing the designation to 16 acres out of the 21-acre parcel toward Commercial Mixed Use, and retaining 5 acres on the northwest portion of the parcels for potential park use.

The proposed project only changes the land use and zoning designations associated with the parcel. No development is being proposed or is planned in correlation with the project at this time. The City Council’s direction to staff from the work session meeting was to also prepare and release a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit potential land developers to submit design proposals for this site, and to hold a future meeting to discuss design stipulations and use limitations on the site. These latter actions will be forthcoming .

BACKGROUND INFORMATION	
General Plan Land Use Designation	Parks / Recreation
Zoning	QP (Quasi Public)
Surrounding Zoning and Land Use	North: QP / Ridgeview Middle School South: R-1-20 (Single-Family Residential, 20,000 sq. ft. minimum site area) / Neighborhood Church East: R-M-2 (Multi-family Residential, one unit per 3,000 sq. ft. site area) / Apartment-style residences (Reserve at Ritchie Ranch) West: R-M-3 (Multi-family Residential, one unit per 1,200 sq. ft. site area) / Vacant land with pending multi-family development application
Environmental Review:	Initial Study / Negative Declaration No. 2025-28
Site Plan:	N/A

RELATED PLANS & POLICIES

See attachment pertaining to General Plan policies and Municipal Code sections pertaining to the project site.

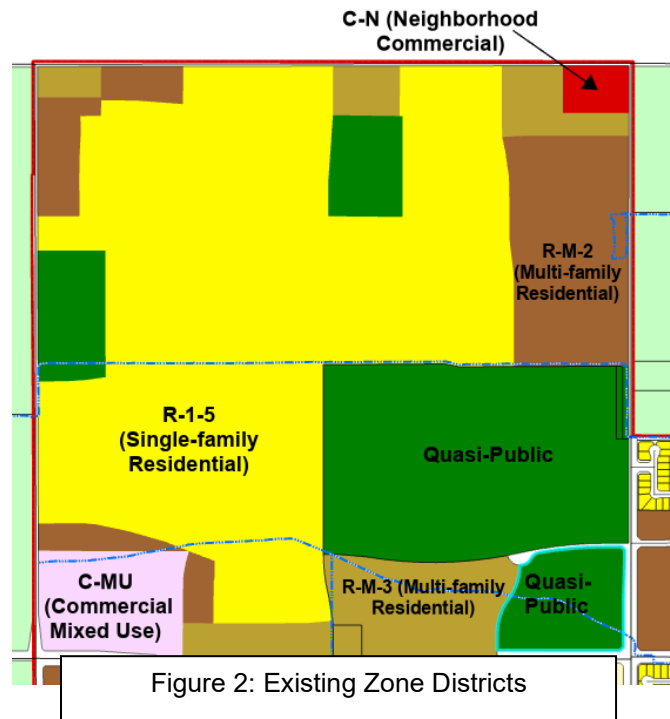
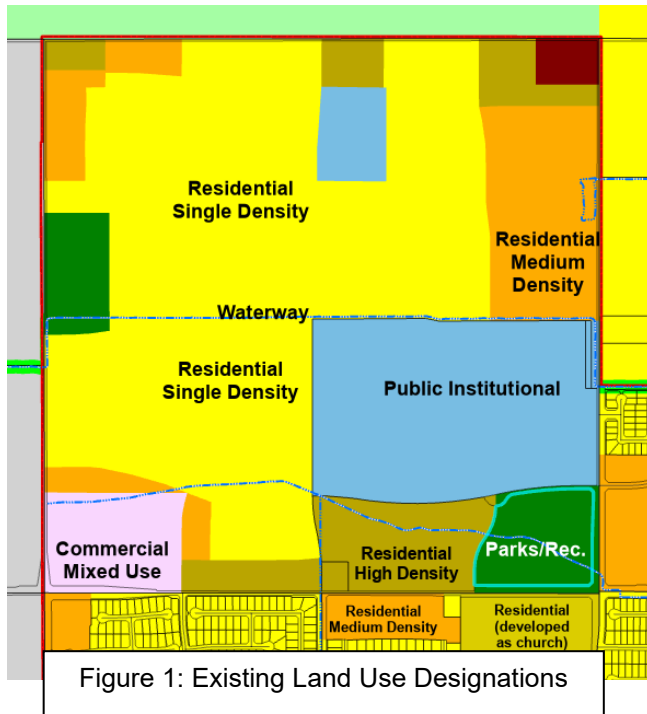
RELATED PROJECTS

There are no other projects that are related to this project site.

PROJECT EVALUATION

Staff supports the requested General Plan Amendment and Change of Zone based on project consistency with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

Surrounding Uses



To the north, on the north side of the Sedona Avenue alignment, a 103-acre parcel owned by Visalia Unified School District (VUSD) contains Ridgeview Middle School and land for a future high school campus.

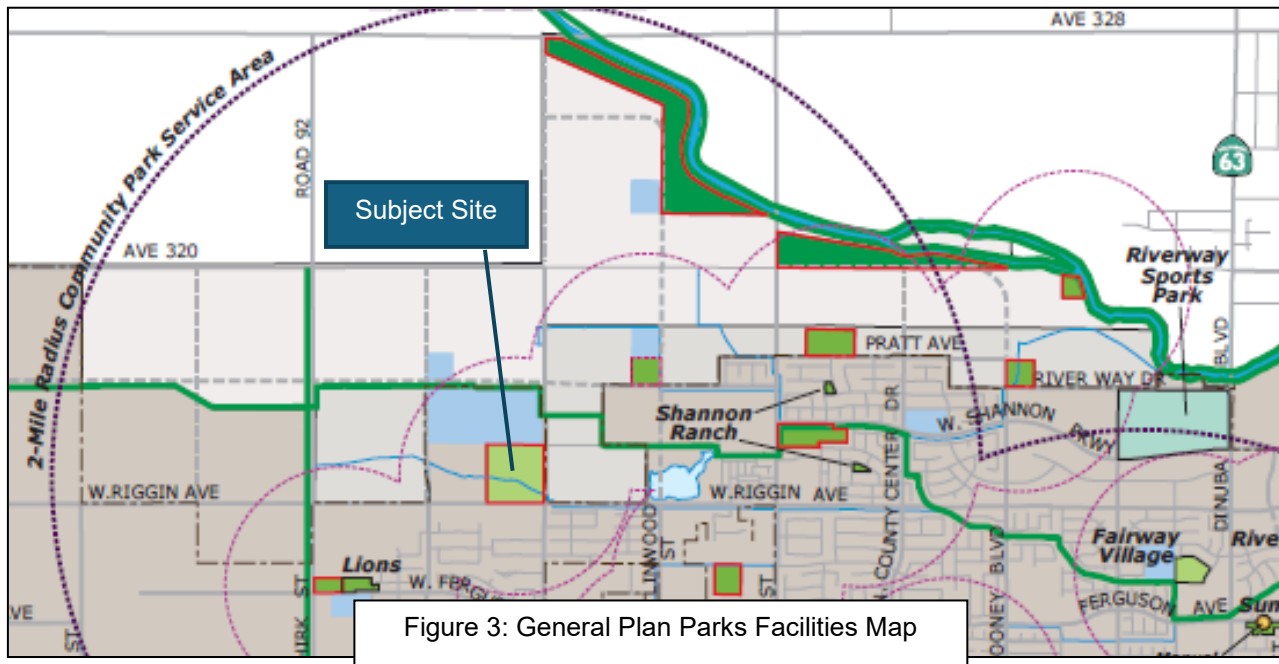
To the west of the city-owned site is a 29-acre parcel that is owned by a private entity and is zoned for high-density multi-family residential use. This parcel has been incorporated into the Carleton Acres Specific Plan. On May 29, 2025, a Conditional Use Permit application was filed with the City for a 442-unit development on this site, at a density of 15 units / acre consistent with R-M-3 zone standards; however, the application is incomplete at this time.

The surrounding area beyond the VUSD parcel is currently seeing a steady amount of growth and interest in future development planning. To the east, the 219-unit Ritchie Reserve Apartments are nearing completion, and two small-lot single family residential subdivisions have been proposed to the City, one of which has applied for a tentative subdivision map (i.e. Ritchie Ranch). To the west and northwest, the Carleton Acres Specific Plan was approved in 2023 for the long-term buildout of approximately 3,200 dwelling units and 29 acres of commercial uses anchored by Costco Wholesale at the corner of Shirk & Riggins and a future neighborhood commercial designation at the southwest corner of Akers Street & Avenue 320 (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 above).

General Plan Consistency

Community Park Designation

General Plan Policy PSCU-P-5 calls for the creation of a new community park to be built in and to serve the northwest quadrant. The policy generally states that the park shall be in the northwest, and the facility map shown as Figure 5-1 identifies the 21-acre site as the potential location of the community park (see Figure 3 below).



Policy PSCU-P-5 further states that community parks shall be 5 to 12 acres in size or more, and are intended to include resources beyond those found at neighborhood parks, such as a community center building, reserved picnic facilities, tennis courts, aquatic center, and/or outdoor concert area.

A community park would fill a void that currently exists for this type of facility that would be comparable to Recreation Park / Anthony Community Center or Whitendale Park / Community Center. The General Plan notes that the northwest quadrant currently lacks a community center building, and Policy PSCU-P-16 calls to provide at least one community center in each of the City's four neighborhood quadrants.

The community park would be different from Riverway Sports Park, located 2.5 miles to the east. The 83-acre Riverway Sports Park is considered a "large city park" that serves the greater Visalia area and contains several playing fields; however, it contains no community center or multi-use courts. The community park would also be larger in scale than neighborhood parks found throughout the City – the closest being Lions and Soroptimist Parks located one mile southwest or southeast from the site.

The current size of the project site, at 21 acres, is significantly larger than the policy guideline of "5 to 12 acres or more" for community parks. The proposed GPA / COZ would reduce the size of the Parks designation to 5 acres, which would remain within the size range of a community park.

Within the City's northwest quadrant, there are two other undeveloped Park land use designations that could facilitate a community park. These sites are 15 acres near the northeast corner of Demaree Street & Pratt Avenue and 10 acres fronting the future Riverway Avenue extension north of Modoc Basin. Both sites are visible in Figure 3 above. Both designated sites could facilitate the northwest quadrant's community park based on their acreage. There is a potential opportunity for the City to purchase the Demaree & Pratt land based on early preliminary discussions with a property owner in that area seeking to develop their property that has a park land use designation of equivalent acreage. There have been no discussions regarding the 10 acres of park designated land fronting the future Riverway Avenue extension north of Modoc Basin.

It should be noted that the conceptual use plan for Carleton Acres does plan for parks to be scattered throughout the development, but none being classified as neighborhood or community parks over two acres in size. This is intentional since the General Plan did not designate any land use designations for parks on the Carleton Acres site. The Parks and Recreation Department does not anticipate purchasing any land in the Carleton Acres neighborhood bound by Shirk, Akers, and Avenue 320.

Exhibit "B", attached to this report, illustrates non-residential land use designations in the surrounding vicinity.

Land Use Element/General Plan/Zoning

Land Use Policy LU-P-66 states that the Commercial Mixed Use land use designation allows for either horizontal or vertical mixed use development and a range of commercial, service, office, and residential uses. Commercial uses must be allowed for in a development, while residential uses may or may not be part of a development. The Zoning Ordinance further states, in Section 17.19.010, that the mixed use commercial zone district may permit development at both at key activity nodes and along corridors. There is no further locational criteria regarding Commercial Mixed Use elsewhere in the City.

Among Visalia's commercial designations (i.e. Regional Commercial, Neighborhood Commercial), Commercial Mixed Use zone provides the largest amount of flexibility for a commercial-oriented designation in terms of uses, size, and placement. The northwest area is not significantly underserved with retail uses at this time; however, the nearest existing shopping areas from the intersection are located at Demaree / Riggin (The Village at Willow Creeks) and Akers / Goshen (Key West Shopping Center), both of which are one mile away.

The project site has the potential to be served by multiple single-family and multi-family residential uses and major school facilities that are all adjacent to the site and would be accessed from the adjacent arterial/arterial intersection. Vacant land to the west is slated for the inclusion of an off-street bike/pedestrian trail linking the City site to the rest of the Carleton Acres development.

A larger Commercial Mixed Use designation (10+ acres) can facilitate a shopping center anchored by a supermarket, warehouse supermarket, or home improvement store and supported by additional retail and food establishments. The nearest such development is located at Demaree / Riggin (Lowes), one mile to the east.

The C-MU designation provides for the widest range of possible non-residential land use alternatives: commercial, retail, restaurant, professional and medical office uses, or residential as a stand-alone or mixed use. A full summary of all allowed land uses (permitted and conditionally permitted) in the C-MU zone is provided in Exhibit "A".

Potential Design Considerations and Future Request for Proposal (RFP) Process

If the City Council approves the proposed GPA / COZ, staff intends to prepare and circulate a Request for Proposal to solicit potential land developers to submit design proposals for this site that demonstrate the Council's desire to have a superior development design and layout for this site. The RFP process would spell out expectations of the development to embody a well-designed and attractive development with a high likelihood of success that will be compatible with and serve the school population as well as the surrounding community. The RFP would address the developer's responsibility to process the necessary Planning entitlement applications (if applicable) and CEQA environmental analysis for the alternative land use.

Staff's expectation is that a future City Council work session will be held to discuss the potential design requirements and land use limitations or stipulations that would apply to the site to ensure a superior development that aligns with Council's vision. This work session would be necessary to finalize the RFP's scope and content prior to its release. Upon successful completion of the RFP process, staff could then present the submittals to Council for their selection on the best design proposal submittal.

Environmental Review

An Initial Study and Negative Declaration were prepared for the proposed project. This environmental review was prepared for the proposed General Plan Amendment and Change of Zone only and does not consider any environmental impacts regarding any future development, as such development would also be subject to separate environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) once details of the development are known.

Initial Study and Negative Declaration No. 2025-28, prepared in accordance with CEQA Guidelines, disclosed that environmental impacts are determined to be not significant. Staff concludes that Initial Study and Negative Declaration No. 2025-28 adequately analyzes and addresses the proposed project and concludes that environmental impacts related to this project will be at a level that is less than significant.

During the public comment period for the Negative Declaration, one comment letter was received by the State Department of Toxic Substances Control (see Exhibit "C"). The letter recommends that in instances where land is proposed to be rezoned to residential use, that the lead agency shall identify certain pesticide materials as described in the letter, which would determine if any remedial action is needed to bring levels below thresholds. Since no activity is proposed on the site and since no residential uses are being considered, no mitigation is necessary in response to the letter.

RECOMMENDED FINDINGS

General Plan Amendment No. 2025-02

1. That the proposed General Plan Amendment is consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the General Plan, and is not detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare, or materially injurious to properties or improvements in the vicinity.
2. That the proposed General Plan Amendment from 21 acres of Parks/Recreation to 16 acres of Commercial Mixed Use and 5 acres of Parks/Recreation is compatible with adjacent land uses and will not impose new land uses that would adversely affect the subject site or adjacent properties.

3. That the proposed Commercial Mixed Use land use designation under the proposed General Plan Amendment results in the placement of a land use designation that provides an efficient transition from the arterial/arterial roadway intersection to residential, parks/recreation, and public institutional uses surrounding the site.
4. That an Initial Study was prepared for the project including the General Plan Amendment, consistent with CEQA, which disclosed that environmental impacts are determined to be not significant, and therefore Negative Declaration No. 2025-28 be adopted for this project.

Change of Zone No. 2025-03

1. That the Change of Zone is consistent with the intent of the General Plan and the Zoning Ordinance, and is not detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare, or materially injurious to properties or improvements in the vicinity.
2. That the proposed Commercial Mixed Use (C-MU) zoning is consistent with the Commercial Mixed Use land use designation and compatible with adjacent land uses.
3. That the proposed Commercial Mixed Use zoning designation under the proposed Change of Zone results in the placement of a zoning designation that provides an efficient transition from the arterial/arterial roadway intersection to residential, parks/recreation, and public institutional uses surrounding the site.
4. That an Initial Study was prepared for the project including the Change of Zone, consistent with CEQA, which disclosed that environmental impacts are determined to be not significant, and therefore Negative Declaration No. 2025-28 be adopted for this project.

RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

General Plan Amendment No. 2025-02 and Change of Zone No. 2025-03

There are no recommended conditions of approval for the General Plan Amendment or the Change of Zone.

APPEAL INFORMATION

General Plan Amendment No. 2025-02 and Change of Zone No. 2025-03

For General Plan Amendment No. 2025-02 and Change of Zone No. 2025-03, the Visalia Planning Commission's recommendations are advisory only and will be forwarded to the Visalia City Council. The final decision on these matters will be made by the Visalia City Council during a public hearing. Therefore, the Planning Commission's recommendations for the General Plan Amendment and Change of Zone are not appealable.

Attachments:

- Related Plans and Policies
- Resolution No. 2025-42 (General Plan Amendment)
- Resolution No. 2025-43 (Change of Zone)
- Exhibit “A” – Uses Allowed in the C-MU Zone
- Exhibit “B” – Non Residential Land Use Map
- Exhibit “C” – Correspondence from State Department of Toxic Substances Control
- Initial Study / Negative Declaration
- General Plan Land Use Map
- Zoning Map
- Aerial Map
- Location Map

RELATED PLANS AND POLICIES

VISALIA GENERAL PLAN

Land Use Element

LU-O-22 Create inclusive, compact neighborhoods with well-integrated single-family and multi-family residential development and activity nodes featuring schools, neighborhood parks, and neighborhood commercial areas.

LU-P-66 Update the Zoning Ordinance to reflect the Commercial Mixed Use designation on the Land Use Diagram, to allow for either horizontal or vertical mixed use development and a range of commercial, service, office, and residential uses.

New development in Commercial Mixed Use Areas should have an FAR of at least 0.4 and up to 1.0 for commercial space. If residential uses are included, density may be up to 35 dwelling units per gross acre. Commercial development must be part of all new development in the Commercial Mixed Use district.

LU-P-108 Designate land for Public/Institutional uses on the Land Use Diagram, including City Hall and other City buildings, County and other government buildings, schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, police and fire stations, the Municipal Airport, and waste management facilities.

LU-P-109 Facilitate the creation of mixed-use activity centers on and adjacent to the College of the Sequoias campus and on other land designated for public/institutional uses by locating commercial and mixed land use areas adjacent to existing or planned public facilities, and by allowing mixed uses to be developed on Public/Institutional land through a master planning process.

Parks, Schools, Community Facilities, and Utilities Element

PSCU-P-5 Create new community parks in the Northwest, Southwest, and Southeast quadrants, consistent with the Parks and Open Space diagram and the following planning guidelines:

- Size: 5-12 acres or more; and
- Facilities to be provided: large children's play area, reserved picnic facilities, open play fields, community building, bicycle parking, and offstreet parking. They also may include tennis courts, outdoor concert areas or other special facilities based on neighborhood needs and community input.

Community parks provide spacious areas for passive enjoyment or group gatherings, special attractions, and recreation facilities, including sports fields and swimming pools. A "heritage farm" and a habitat preserve are examples of special facilities that could be incorporated into community parks.

PSCU-P-16 Provide at least one community center in each of the City's four neighborhood quadrants. Use existing and new community center facilities to provide multicultural programs and teen recreation activities, and provide space for meetings and classes. Community centers should be designed with community input, including guidance from a cross-section of user groups.

Visalia currently operates five community centers as well as the Visalia Senior Center; none are in the City's Northwest or Southwest quadrants.

VISALIA MUNICIPAL CODE – TITLE 17 (ZONING)

Zoning Ordinance Chapter 17.19 – MIXED USE ZONES

17.19.010 Purpose and intent.

- A. The several types of mixed zones included in this chapter are designed to achieve the following:
 - 1. Encourage a wide mix of commercial, service, office, and residential land uses in horizontal or vertical mixed use development projects, or on adjacent lots, at key activity nodes and along corridors.
 - 2. Maintain Visalia's downtown Conyer Street to Tipton and Murray Street to Mineral King Avenue including the Court-Locust corridor to the Lincoln Oval area) as the traditional, medical, professional, retail, government and cultural center;
 - 3. Provide zone districts that encourage and maintain vibrant, walkable environments.
- B. The purposes of the individual mixed use zones are as follows:
 - 1. Mixed Use Commercial Zone—(C-MU). The purpose and intent of the mixed use commercial zone district is to allow for either horizontal or vertical mixed use development, and permit commercial, service, office, and residential uses at both at key activity nodes and along corridors. Any combination of these uses, including a single use, is permitted.
 - 2. Mixed Use Downtown Zone—(D-MU). The purpose and intent of the mixed use downtown zone district is to promote the continued vitality of the core of the community by providing for the continuing commercial development of the downtown and maintaining and enhancing its historic character. The zone is designed to accommodate a wide mix of land uses ranging from commercial and office to residential and public spaces, both active and passive. The zone is intended to be compatible with and support adjacent residential uses, along with meeting the needs of the city and region as the urban center of the city; to provide for neighborhood, local, and regional commercial and office needs; to accommodate the changing needs of transportation and integrate new modes of transportation and related facilities; and to maintain and enhance the historic character of the city through the application of architectural design features that complement the existing historic core of the city. (Ord. 2017-01 (part), 2017)

17.19.015 Applicability.

The requirements in this chapter shall apply to all property within the C-MU and D-MU zone districts. (Ord. 2017-01 (part), 2017)

17.19.020 Permitted uses.

Permitted uses in C-MU and D-MU zones shall be determined by Table 17.25.030 in Section 17.25.030. (Ord. 2017-01 (part), 2017)

17.19.030 Conditional and temporary uses.

Conditional and temporary uses in the C-MU and D-MU zones shall be determined by Table 17.25.030 in Section 17.25.030. (Ord. 2017-01 (part), 2017)

17.19.040 Required conditions.

- A. A site plan review permit must be obtained for any development in any C-MU and D-MU zones, subject to the requirements and procedures in Chapter 17.28.
- B. All businesses, services and processes shall be conducted entirely within a completely enclosed structure, except for off-street parking and loading areas, gasoline service stations, outdoor dining areas, nurseries, garden shops, Christmas tree sales lots, bus depots and transit stations, electric distribution substation, and recycling facilities;

C. All products produced on the site of any of the permitted uses shall be sold primarily at retail on the site where produced. (Ord. 2017-01 (part), 2017)

17.19.050 Off-street parking and loading facilities.

Off-street parking and off-street loading facilities shall be provided as prescribed in Chapter 17.34. (Ord. 2017-01 (part), 2017)

17.19.060 Development standards in the C-MU zones outside the downtown area.

The following development standards shall apply to property located in the C-MU zone and located outside the Downtown Area, which is defined as the area that is south of Murray Avenue, west of Ben Maddox Way, north of Mineral King Avenue, and east of Conyer Street:

- A. Minimum site area: five (5) acres.
- B. Maximum building height: fifty (50) feet.
- C. Minimum required yards (building setbacks):
 - 1. Front: fifteen (15) feet;
 - 2. Rear: zero (0) feet;
 - 3. Rear yards abutting an R-1 or R-M zone district: fifteen (15) feet;
 - 4. Side: zero (0) feet;
 - 5. Side yards abutting an R-1 or R-M zone district: fifteen (15) feet;
 - 6. Street side yard on corner lot: ten (10) feet.
- D. Minimum required landscaped yard (setback) areas:
 - 1. Front: fifteen (15) feet;
 - 2. Rear: five (5) feet;
 - 3. Rear yards abutting an R-1 or R-M zone district: five (5) feet;
 - 4. Side: five (5) feet (except where a building is located on side property line);
 - 5. Side yards abutting an R-1 or R-M zone district: five (5) feet;
 - 6. Street side on corner lot: ten (10) feet.
- E. The provisions of Chapter 17.58 shall also be met, if applicable. (Ord. 2017-01 (part), 2017)

Zoning Ordinance Chapter 17.52 – QUASI-PUBLIC ZONE

17.52.010 Purpose and intent.

The purpose and intent of the quasi-public zone is to provide a zone that is intended to allow for the location of institutional, academic, community service, governmental, and nonprofit uses. (Ord. 2017-01 (part), 2017; Ord. 9717 § 2 (part), 1997; prior code § 7630)

17.52.015 Applicability.

The requirements in this chapter shall apply to all property within the QP zone district. (Ord. 2017-01 (part), 2017)

17.52.020 Permitted uses.

Permitted uses in the quasi-public zone include public uses of an administrative, recreational, public service or cultural type including city, county, state or federal administrative centers and courts, libraries,

museums, art galleries, police and fire stations and other public building, structures and facilities; public playgrounds, parks and community centers. Permitted uses also include wireless telecommunication facilities on parcels that are a minimum of five (5) acres, subject to the requirements of Section 17.32.163 (Regulation of Wireless Telecommunication Facilities) of the Visalia Zoning Ordinance. The keeping of household pets, subject to the definition of household pets set forth in Section 17.04.030. Other uses similar in nature and intensity as determined by the city planner. (Ord. 2017-01 (part), 2017: Ord. 2015-01 § 3 (part), 2015: Ord. 9717 § 2 (part), 1997: Ord. 9605 § 30 (part), 1996: prior code § 7631)

17.52.030 Conditional uses.

Conditional uses in the quasi-public zone include:

- A. Public and quasi-public uses of an education or religious type including public and parochial elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools and colleges; nursery schools, licensed day care facilities for more than fourteen (14) children; churches, parsonages and other religious institutions;
- B. Public and private charitable institutions, general hospitals, sanitariums, nursing and convalescent homes, senior care facilities, senior housing; not including specialized hospitals, sanitariums, or nursing, rest and convalescent homes including care for acute psychiatric, drug addiction or alcoholism cases;
- C. Ambulance service;
- D. Electric distribution substations;
- E. Gas regulator stations;
- F. Public service pumping stations;
- G. Communications equipment buildings;
- H. Wireless telecommunication facilities on parcels that are a less than five (5) acres subject to the Section 17.32.163 of the Visalia Zoning Ordinance;
- I. Residential development specifically designed for senior housing;
- J. Other uses similar in nature and intensity as determined by the city planner.
- J. Emergency shelters, subject to Section 17.32.130;
- K. Low barrier navigation centers, subject to Section 17.32.135;
- L. Other uses similar in nature and intensity as determined by the city planner.