



STAFF REPORT

TO: Chair and Planning Commission Members

FROM: Chad Weaver, Community Development Director
Paul Michaud, Planning Manager
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DATE: March 17, 2026

DEPARTMENT: Community Development Department – Planning Division
George Burton, 480-348-3525

AGENDA TITLE: Discussion on Phoenix Country Day School
Intermediate Special Use Permit Amendment (SUP-25-06)
(3901 E Stanford Drive)

SUMMARY STATEMENT:

Request

The applicant, Rose Law Group P.C., on behalf of Phoenix Country Day School (PCDS), requests a Statement of Direction for an Intermediate Special Use Permit amendment (SUP-25-06) for Phoenix Country Day School located at 3901 E Stanford Drive to update/renovate the existing baseball field, construct a new Wellness Center building, and add a digital display sign in the north parking lot and the east parking lot for school use.

The baseball field improvements and new Wellness Center building are located on the west side of the campus. The existing baseball field will be updated and improved in the same location (setback approximately 28 feet from the west property line) and located south of the existing maintenance buildings. Construction of the new Wellness Center is located east of the baseball field (setback approximately 345 feet from the west property line) and south of existing Building M - Middle School Classroom Building.

One digital sign will be placed in the north parking lot, setback approximately 200 feet from the north property line (adjoining Stanford Drive) and will be next to existing Building D – Shepard Welcome Center. The other digital sign will be placed in the east parking lot, setback approximately 200 feet from the east property line (adjoining 40th Street) and will be next to the existing Building Z – Dady Aquatic Center.

Location

The site is approximately 38.8 acres. It adjoins the City of Phoenix to the east (along 40th Street with single-family residential on 24,000 minimum square foot lots) and commercial uses to the south. Within the Town limits, the site adjoins Stanford Drive to the north (with the Camelback Bible Church located across the street) and R-43 single-family residential zoned properties to the west (which were annexed into the Town at nonconforming sizes that range from one quarter of an acre to one third of

an acre). The Cudia City Wash (also referred to as the Echo Canyon Wash) bisects the property/campus with the lower and middle school grade activities generally north of the wash and the upper grade school activities south of the wash.

History/Background

This private school opened in 1961, with the Town issuing the Special Use Permit (SUP) in 1972. The school provides college preparatory instruction up to Grade 12 focusing on humanities, sciences, the arts, and a comprehensive range of skills in athletics. The Town approved numerous SUP amendments since 1972. The latest approvals included a Minor SUP Amendment for a new Music Building in 2024, an Intermediate SUP Amendment for a new Performance Art Center Building in 2024, a Managerial SUP amendment in 2022 to remodel Burch Hall, and an Intermediate SUP amendment in 2017 for the replacement of the existing administration building, new fencing, and updated signage. The baseball field and Wellness Center improvements are located at the western part of the campus between the wash and existing maintenance buildings. The digital signs will be placed in the north and east parking lots.

Town Council Discussion

The Town Council reviewed the draft Statement of Direction (SOD) at the February 12th study session and approved the SOD at the February 26th public meeting. Town Council expressed concern regarding the proposed information signs and the applicant clarified that the signs are for information purposes, are setback 200 feet way from the property lines, and are angled so they do not directly face the neighboring properties.

Scope of the Request

Baseball Field Update & Improvements

The existing baseball field is located on the west side of the campus and will remain in the same location. It is setback approximately 28 feet from the west property line and is located just south of the existing maintenance buildings. The school is proposing to:

- Replace the existing dirt fire lane with an asphalt fire lane.
 - Replace the existing fencing around the baseball field with new 6-foot-tall chain link fencing.
 - Replace the natural grass field.
 - Add new artificial turf along the north and east sides of the field.
 - Replace the backstop with a new 34-foot-tall chain link backstop.
 - Add a 12-foot-tall warm-up batter's cage
 - Replace the two existing bleachers and shade canopies with two new bleachers and canopies (the canopies are steel frame structure with fabric tops, are 14 feet 6 inches tall, and placed over the bleachers). The shade canopies are approximately the same size as the existing ones (40 feet long by 13 feet wide).
 - Add a new/third bleacher with canopy will be placed behind the back stop (this canopy is also a steel frame structure with a fabric top at a height of 14 feet 6 inches tall). This canopy is 23 feet long by 13 feet wide.
 - The existing seating/bleacher capacity accommodates 128 people. The renovated seating capacity will accommodate a maximum of 165 people.
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- Replace the metal roof over the existing dugouts with new metal roofs. The new roofs maintain the existing size and existing height of 9 feet tall (measured to the top of the roof).
- Add two new 20-foot-tall foul line poles at the edges of the field. One pole will be placed near the northwest corner of the field (setback approximately 28 feet from the west property line) and the other pole will be placed near the southeast corner of the field.

The baseball field will maintain its existing use, will not be illuminated, and will only be used by the school (and will not be rented out). Baseball games will begin after dismissal (around 2:00 p.m.) and typically end by 6:00 p.m. Any weekend games will take place on Saturdays and will end at dusk. The school averages 6 middle school baseball games and 18 upper school baseball games each year.

The school will use its existing PA system. A recent sound study conducted by Newton Environmental Consulting concluded that the existing PA system registers around 48-50 decibels of sound when it reaches the nearest neighbor's property. This sound level is less than the Town's daytime limit of 56-decibel (from 7 am – 10 pm), measured at the property line (which is the time of day the field will be used).

New Wellness Center Building

The new building will be located east of the baseball field and south of existing Building M - Middle School Classroom Building. This building is setback approximately 344 feet from the west property line (adjoining the neighboring residence), setback approximately 664 feet from the north property line (adjoining Stanford Drive), is approximately 22 feet tall measured from the lowest natural grade (LNG) under the structure, is single story, and is 7,756 square feet in size.

The proposed elevations illustrate the building architecture. The proposed design, building materials, earth tone colors, and textures match and complement the existing improvements on campus (with brown and tan colored block and reddish and grey accent colors).

The Wellness Center will provide a workout facility for the students and facility, will have a multi-purpose room for dance classes and other physical education programs, a concession stand for athletic events, two locker rooms to be used by the PCDS soccer team and the visiting soccer team (the existing PCDS soccer field is south of this building within the wash, not changing, and not part of this SUP), restrooms for athletic events, and an office for PCDS athletic staff.

Digital Information Signs

These signs will be located on campus to provide parents with school information during drop-off and pick-up. The signs will display static text messages, pictures, and graphics that will cycle through transitions in a similar way to a slide show on a computer screen.

The first sign will be positioned adjacent to the Shepard Welcome Center and will be setback approximately 200 feet from the north property line (adjoining Stanford Drive). The second sign will be situated near the aquatic center and will be setback approximately 200 feet from the east property line (along 40th Street).

These signs are an illuminated screen attached to a masonry wall which is 12 feet tall by 11 feet 4 inches wide. The size of the illuminated screen is 4 feet 2 inches high by 8 feet 4 inches wide. The height of the digital screen is 10 feet 2 inches tall, measured from the finished grade. The signs will be illuminated Monday - Friday between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. on a regular basis. If events (e.g. a school band concert) take place during evening hours, the signs will be operational during those events and will not go past 10:00 p.m. The signs will only be used on weekends if there is a school event taking place over a weekend and they will adhere to the same hour restrictions as regular school week.

The applicant also provided photometric plans showing the output for these signs. According to the photometric plans, the maximum output of each sign is 0.03-foot candles measured at the property line (and Town Code limits the output to 0.75-foot candles at the property line). The applicant also identified that the brightness of the screens may be adjusted and the draft ordinance (Ordinance 26-01) has a stipulation that states:

- If the Town receives a complaint from an offsite owner that the signs are too bright, the Town Community Development Director or designee may inspect the signs and require the Owner to adjust the brightness of these signs and/or adjust the operational hours of these signs.

Site Area

The site area and lot coverage are compliant with the recommended limit outlined in Town SUP Guidelines. There is no change in the total site area with this request. The lot coverage will increase from 17.4 percent to 18.4 percent. The large site acreage, Echo Canyon Wash that crosses the site, and outdoor fields allow this site to fall well within the 25 percent limit recommended by the SUP Guidelines.

	SUP Guidelines	Existing	Proposed
Lot Size	Minimum 5 acres	1,700,420 net square feet (39.0 net acres)	No change
Lot Coverage	25% 425,105 square feet	17.4% 257,296 square feet	18.4% 272,166 square feet

The request is an Intermediate SUP amendment of the private school's zoning requiring a Statement of Direction (Section 1102.8.C of the Zoning Ordinance). There are three criteria for an Intermediate SUP amendment. The first is that the request does not change or add any uses (an updated baseball field, a Wellness Center building, and signs to display school information are compliant school uses). The second criterion limits the amount of floor area that can be added over the last 60-month period. This amount is more than 5,000 square feet of new floor area (the limit for a Minor SUP amendment) but less than 40 percent of the existing or approved total floor area. This improvement, including improvements over the past 60 months, results in an increase of 41,826 square feet or a 17.7 percent increase in floor area. The third criterion is that the improvements do not have any significant material effect on the adjoining property owners that are visible, audible, or otherwise perceptible from adjacent properties that

cannot be sufficiently mitigated (which is vetted and mitigated through the Planning Commission/Town Council review process).

Traffic, Parking, and Circulation

The Town's professional staff reviews traffic, parking, and circulation to ensure compliance with the required safety standards and code requirements. The applicant provided a traffic statement from a traffic engineer identifying that:

- The baseball field will serve the same functions and purposes as currently provided; and therefore, the improvements to the baseball field will not change the number of vehicles entering and exiting the Phoenix Country Day School campus nor the campus parking demand.
- The new Wellness Center building will serve the existing students, faculty, and administrative personnel. As a result, the new Wellness Center will not increase the number of students, the number of faculty, or the number of administrative personnel. Therefore, the new Wellness Center will not increase the number of vehicles entering and exiting the campus nor the campus parking demand.
- Because the renovated baseball field and the new Wellness Center will not generate additional traffic and parking demands, a traffic and parking analysis is unnecessary.

Statement of Direction (SOD)

Section 2-5-1.C of the Town Code requires the Town Council to issue a SOD for Intermediate SUP Amendments. The SOD is not a final decision of the Town Council and creates no vested right to the final action of this Special Use Permit. Rather, a SOD provides the Planning Commission with general guidance on a variety of development aspects of the project (such as height, setbacks, design, density, landscaping, lighting, noise, etc.), guidance on procedural aspects (such as application timing/completion of review, etc.), and guidance on policy aspects (such as identifying appropriate and acceptable standards, uses, and compatibility with the SUP) in response to the unique aspects of each SUP amendment. The full merits of the request are examined in detail during the Planning Commission review and recommendation process, with a full review and decision by the Town Council after the Planning Commission makes a formal recommendation.

There are two timing provisions. Section 1102.3.C.3.c of the Zoning Ordinance requires the Town Council issue a SOD within 45 days from the date of the first staff presentation (which is by March 19th) and Section 2.5.2.D of the Town Code requires the Planning Commission forward a recommendation to the Council within 90 days from the approval date of the SOD, or 150 days from the filing of the application for the Special Use Permit, or within a specified time set by Council in the SOD (*with the Planning Commission to hold their public hearing review no later than April 21, 2026*).

Below is a detailed comparison of how the proposed project falls within the Town SUP guidelines for a private school. Staff's primary concerns regarding these improvements are the potential lighting impacts of the digital information signs on neighboring properties and the potential noise from the improved baseball field. For quick reference,

the areas of recommended Planning Commission study are *italicized* in the summary below.

1. Uses. In general, the improvements consist of upgrading or complementing existing school uses and facilities. The improvements to the existing baseball field are like a remodel in which many of the existing baseball structures and facilities are being replaced with new structures and facilities in the same locations. No exterior lighting is being added to the field, the school is using the existing public announcement (PA) system for the games, and the frequency of the use of the field will remain consistent with its current use.

The proposed Wellness Center building will complement the existing athletic programs at the school. *The primary areas for the Planning Commission to study include, and are not limited to, the design/layout of the building, the impact of the Wellness Center to the surrounding area outside the site (specifically traffic impact, noise, and light), as well as the specific operational factors (hours of operation, etc.).*

Informational signs are customary to schools; however, the SUP Guidelines do not address these types of signs and these would be the first digital signs on a SUP property. *The primary areas for the Planning Commission to study include, and are not limited to, the lighting impact of the signs to the surrounding neighbors/area outside the site (which may be mitigated via location, height, and lighting output).* For reference and comparison, the SUP Guidelines recommend that directional signs be limited to 12 square feet in area and a maximum height of 5 feet tall and the Kiva School (which is a public school not regulated by the Town) has an approximately 9-foot-tall digital sign setback several feet from McDonald Drive. Cherokee School also has an existing digital sign.

2. Noise Mitigation/Impact. As previously noted, the improvements to the existing baseball field are like a remodel in which many of the existing baseball structures and facilities are being replaced with new structures and facilities in the same locations. No exterior lighting is being added to the field, the school is using the existing public announcement (PA) system for the games, and the frequency of the use of the field will remain consistent with its current use. *The primary areas for the Planning Commission to study include, and are not limited to, the noise impacts the baseball field may have on the neighboring properties, the increase in spectator seating capacity, and any applicable mitigation factors.*

The Wellness Center building is setback 344 feet away from the nearest/west property line and should have limited impact on the neighboring properties. The Wellness Center will be used during school hours and in conjunction with school events.

The informational digital signs will not have speakers and are not designed to make noise and therefore should have no noise impacts on the neighboring properties.

3. Setbacks & Heights. The SUP Guidelines do not identify recommended setbacks and heights for sports fields and athletic equipment. The baseball field improvements are replacing many of the existing structures and facilities with new ones at similar heights and locations. The tallest improvement is the 34-foot-tall chain-link backstop which is setback approximately 240 feet away from the nearest/west property line and does not encroach into the Open Space Criteria. A new 20-foot-tall foul pole will be placed approximately 28 feet from the nearest/west property line. The foul pole consists of a 4-inch pole and a 2-foot square mesh and should have limit impact on neighboring viewsheds.

The proposed height and setback of the Wellness Center building are not out-of-character for the school. The proposed Wellness Center is located next to existing Building M - Middle School Classroom building which varies in height from 15 feet to 25 feet tall. The SUP Guidelines recommend that principal structures maintain a maximum height of 35 feet tall, do not penetrate the Open Space Criteria, and have a minimum setback of 60 feet adjoining residential properties. The Wellness Center building complies with the recommended height limit at 22 feet tall, does not encroach into the Open Space Criteria, and is setback 344 feet from the nearest/residential properties to the west. The mechanical equipment will be roof mounted and is fully screened by the building parapets.

The SUP Guidelines do not identify recommended setbacks and heights for school informational signs. For reference the SUP Guidelines recommend monument signs should be placed at the entrance, be limited to 32 square feet in area, and limited to a maximum height of 8 feet tall. The SUP Guidelines also recommend that directional signs be placed on the property, be limited to 12 square feet in area, and a maximum height of 5 feet tall. The proposed heights of the digital information signs are 12 feet tall and will be setback approximately 200 feet from the nearest property lines. *The primary areas for the Planning Commission to study include, and are not limited to, the lighting impact of the signs to the surrounding neighbors/area outside the site (which may be mitigated via location, height, and lighting output).*

4. Landscaping/Buffers. The SUP Guidelines suggest a 40-foot-wide landscape buffer be placed next to residential properties (adjoining the west property line). However, there is limited space to add landscaping between the existing baseball field and the adjoining neighbors. The existing baseball field is setback approximately 28 feet from the west property line and has a 20-foot-wide fire lane and a 4-foot SRP utility easement between the field and the adjoining residence. Staff asked the applicant to provide documentation from SRP identifying if landscaping can be placed in their easement.

Landscaping compatible with the current campus will also be placed around the new Wellness Center building (which consists of Texas Ash trees, Leaf Plumb trees, agave, and lantana).

If permissible, the Planning Commission shall focus their review on placing landscaping in the western/SRP utility easement to help create a modest landscape buffer next to the baseball field. The Planning Commission shall also focus their review on the landscaping around the new Wellness Center building and identify if additional landscaping should be placed along the west side/area of the building.

5. Exterior Lighting. The SUP Guidelines suggest that exterior lighting be hooded and shielded so as not to be visible from an adjacent property, the brightness for any up lighting not exceed 300 lumens, pole lights be a maximum height of 16 feet tall and the maximum illumination output be 0.5 foot candles adjacent to residential and 0.75 foot candles along other property lines (Section 1023, Zoning Ordinance).

The existing baseball field is not illuminated, and no lighting is proposed with the baseball field renovations. The proposed lighting on and around the Wellness Center building are compliant with the Town's SUP Guidelines. The light source of the Wellness Center building fixtures are hooded, have a color temperature of 2700 Kelvins, and have an output of 0-foot candles 40 feet away from the building (and therefore have 0-foot candle output at the west property line due to the 344-foot setback of the building). Also, no landscaping lighting will be added with these improvements.

The focus areas for Planning Commission review shall include the mounted height of lighting on the Wellness Center building and how illumination might wash the building. The hours of operation of the new lighting shall also be examined.

Although informational signs are customary to schools; the SUP Guidelines do not address these types of signs and these would be the first digital signs on a SUP property.

The primary areas for the Planning Commission to study include, and are not limited to, the lighting impact of the signs to the surrounding neighbors/area outside the site (which may be mitigated via location, height, and lighting output).

6. Signage. No new signage is proposed with the baseball field update/renovation. The applicant will be relocating the existing score board approximately 30 feet to the east.

The new Wellness Center building will have two signs placed on the east side of the building. The signs are 8-inch and 12-inch aluminum letters that will match the other building signage on campus and are not illuminated. One sign identifies the location of the concession stand and the other sign identifies the name of the building.

Although informational signs are customary to schools, the SUP Guidelines do not address these types of signs. *The primary areas for the Planning Commission to study include, and are not limited to, the impact of the signs to*

the surrounding neighbors/area outside the site (which may be mitigated via location, height, size, and lighting output).

Public Comment

There is no required notice for work sessions. The applicant held a citizen review meeting on January 30th and a copy of the meeting minutes are enclosed for reference. There was concern regarding one of the existing trees on the western property line. One neighbor wanted the tree to be removed and another neighbor wanted the tree to remain. The applicant spoke with both neighbors and resolved the issue by agreeing to trim the tree. Also, the applicant will notify all neighboring property owners of the upcoming public hearing on April 7th in accordance with the Town requirements and policies.

Next Steps/Process

In accordance with the SOD, the Planning Commission must complete their review by April 21, 2026. The Planning Commission public hearing is scheduled for April 7th, in which the Commission will forward a recommendation of approval or denial to the Town Council. If additional time is needed, the Commission may continue the April 7th public hearing to April 21st for further review and discussion.

ATTACHMENT(S):

- A. Staff Report
 - B. Vicinity & Related Maps
 - C. Application
 - D. SUP Comparison Chart
 - E. Statement of Direction (SOD)
 - F. Draft Ordinance 2026-01
 - G. Narrative & Plans (with Preliminary G&D Plans)
 - H. Traffic/Parking Statement
 - I. Citizen Review/Neighborhood Meeting Summary Minutes
 - J. General Plan Policies
 - K. SUP Guidelines
 - L. Staff Presentation
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