

## PROJECT NARRATIVE

Project: Replacement of the existing Whittier Elementary School  
Site Address: 777 Elm Tree Lane, Fircrest, WA 98466  
Tax Parcel: 0220114002  
Proposed Use: Elementary School, approximately 46,000 sf  
Zone: R-4

### Project Introduction

The existing Whittier Elementary School (WES) is situated in the City of Fircrest on a 4.96-acre site with a significant elevation change of approximately 50 feet, sloping from the west at its highest point to the east at its lowest. Mature evergreen trees, including a prominent grove in the southwest corner, and being located directly adjacent to Whittier Park contribute to the site's character. The new school is planned to accommodate approximately 380 students, with a move-in date for Fall 2027 school year, with remaining site improvements being fully complete December 2027.

The current school consists of multiple buildings and additions, originally constructed in 1961, with the most recent addition completed in 1970. The proposed project entails the demolition of the existing facilities and the construction of a modern, community-focused school. The scope of work includes the development of new buildings, utilities, and infrastructure, as well as on-site and off-site improvements. Additional project elements will include a new parking lot, playgrounds, and play fields.

The Fircrest community expressed a clear preference for the site to remain an elementary school in order to retain this long-standing public asset within the community and to maintain continuity of education for local students. To meet this objective, the project is planned as an occupied-campus replacement, allowing students to remain on site throughout construction, minimizing disruption to learning, and prioritizing responsible use of public funds by avoiding temporary relocation or acquisition of a new site.

Because the existing elementary school must remain operational until the new facility is complete, the replacement school is necessarily constrained to the southern portion of the property, which is the only feasible area for construction while maintaining safe campus operations. Elm Tree Lane is considered frontage with a 25' setback; Alameda Avenue and the private road Annapolis Street to the east is considered side yard with a 15' setback; and Annapolis Street to the south is considered rear yard with a 20' setback.

### Scope

The new Whittier Elementary School is designed to accommodate approximately 380 students. The building program includes:

- Sixteen (16) classrooms, including two (2) preschool spaces (ECEAP and Transition Kindergarten) and three (3) Kindergarten classrooms.

- Student support spaces such as Occupational Therapy/Physical Therapy (OT/PT), Learning Assistance Program (LAP), Multi-Language (ML), Learning Resource Center (LRC), and Speech-Language Pathology (SLP).
- Core support spaces including Music, Gymnasium, Administration, Library, Multi-Purpose Commons, Food Service, restrooms, storage, and custodial areas.

## Schedule, Logistics, and Phasing

The project is scheduled for completion in time for the Fall 2027 school year and will be delivered in two phases. Phase 1 (Summer 2026–Summer 2027) will focus on the southern portion of the site and include rough grading, utility installation, and construction of the new school building. Phase 2 will begin once the new facility is occupied and will include demolition of the existing buildings, final grading of the northern portion of the site, and construction of bus loading areas, paved play areas, playfields, and a covered play structure.

Contractor parking and staging will be accommodated within a designated portion of Whittier Park. The contractor will install approximately six inches of crushed rock over geotextile fabric and the area will be fully fenced for security for the duration of construction. Following construction, the area will be fully restored to match existing park conditions. Additional details are provided on Sheet CUP-002 Preliminary Phasing Plan within the CUP Drawing Set.

## Parking

To minimize costs and environmental impacts, the project will reuse the existing asphalt parking lot located at the corner of Alameda Avenue and Elm Tree Lane. The lot will be reconfigured to provide one-way access aisles with entry and exit limited to Alameda Avenue, improving traffic flow and safety.

The existing parking area, situated at the front of the school, offers convenient access to the main entry and administration office. Maintaining this location supports clear public wayfinding, reinforces a visible and welcoming front entry, and ensures accessibility for visitors and staff.

The parking lot sits approximately five feet below street level and is surrounded by mature trees and established landscaping, all of which are planned to remain. This existing vegetation provides effective natural screening and helps integrate the parking area into the neighborhood fabric, reducing visual and noise impacts for adjacent properties.

As part of this Conditional Use Permit submittal, the project requests an increase of up to 50 percent above the minimum required number of parking spaces per FMC 22.60.006 Maximum Parking Space Provisions, from 34 stalls minimum to 50 stalls proposed (a 47% increase). This request is supported by a parking demand study prepared by Heath & Associates, Inc., a professional traffic engineering firm. Additional details can be found in the Traffic Impact Report (pages 31–32).

The project will also comply with WAC 51-50-0429 – Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure by providing (2) EV charging parking stalls, (2) EV-ready stalls, and (1) EV capable stall (voluntary.) See CUP-001 and C-002 for more calculations and location.

For Group E occupancies, WAC 51-50-0429.2 allows compliance using Exception 2.1 or Exception 2.2, whichever is greater. Exception 2.1 applies the EV provisions only to designated employee parking; because the project does not include employee-designated stalls, Exception 2.1 would not establish a meaningful minimum and is not the controlling pathway. Exception 2.2 requires one EV-ready space per 200 parking spaces (or fraction thereof) and one EV charging station per 200 parking spaces (or fraction thereof); with 49 total stalls (fraction thereof), the minimum required is (1) EVSE stall and (1) EV-ready stall, with no EV-capable stalls required under this exception.

Additionally, WAC 51-50-0429.4 provides for EV charging infrastructure for a minimum of 10% of the accessible parking spaces. To meet this portion of the code (1) accessible ESVE stall and (1) accessible EV-ready stall have been provided.

## Outdoor Lighting

Elementary schools present unique safety considerations due to the presence of small children arriving, departing, and using the site at all hours. As part of this Conditional Use Permit submittal and due to the specific hazardous conditions of this site, the project requests approval for District 3 Parking Lot and Security Lighting illumination standards, per FMC 22.58.018 Outdoor Lighting.

Parking lot lighting will be provided by 20-foot full cutoff LED poles with integral motion sensors to comply with the Washington State Energy Code. Illumination levels are carefully controlled to be no less than 0.2 foot-candles and no more than 0.3 foot-candles, providing adequate visibility for pedestrians and vehicles while preventing unnecessary light intrusion into neighboring areas.

Security lighting for building perimeters and pedestrian walkways will consist of 12-foot pedestrian light poles, wall-mounted fixtures along the building perimeter, and soffit or recessed fixtures at entryways. All fixtures are full cutoff, dark-sky compliant LEDs with integral motion sensors, and average horizontal illumination is limited to 0.5 foot-candles. This approach ensures safe movement around the site for students, staff, and visitors, while protecting the surrounding community from excessive light exposure.

Walkway lighting provided complies with FMC 22.58.018(j). The proposed site walkways will be illuminated by 10' pedestrian light pole fixtures with less than 1,000 lumens initial output. The revised walkway lighting will provide an overall design average of no less than 0.3 and no more than 0.5 foot-candles. All exterior lighting will be provided with the dark sky compliant, full cutoff lighting optics with 3000 kelvin color temperature. In addition, all outdoor walkway fixtures will be provided with an integrated motion sensor to automatically dim the light output to 50% to comply with the lighting setback requirements of the 2021 Washington State Energy Code.

Three existing field lighting poles serving Whittier Park are currently located on the Whittier Elementary School property and are planned to remain in place.

## Concerning Underground Utilities & Transformer Location

Provision 22.58.008(f) requires underground utilities for new development or for existing development expanded by  $\geq 50\%$  of existing gross floor area. The proposed project is a replacement on an occupied elementary school site. The existing Whittier Elementary School consists of (3) buildings for educational use totaling 52,380gsf. These buildings

will be demolished. The proposed two-story replacement elementary school will be approximately 46,000gsf. This is 6,380gsf smaller than the existing school or an overall 12% decrease in floor area. The overall development is not being expanded by 50% or more of the existing gross floor area, and therefore this threshold is not triggered.

The new transformer is located on the south side of the building adjacent to the main electrical room to minimize underground feeder lengths, reduce trenching and site disturbance, and support a cost-effective installation. While it is within the setback, this placement is consistent with typical Tacoma Public Utilities transformer locations in both Tacoma and Fircrest and is coordinated to meet utility access requirements. The transformer is positioned along the service drive to maintain the required 10-foot clear working/access zone in front (to the west), with landscape screening provided to the south to reduce visibility from Annapolis Street.

### Similar Properties in City of Fircrest



**Roy H. Murphy Community Center**  
*Street-visible transformer and black vinyl-coated mesh utility/refuse yard gates.*



**Fircrest City Administration Building**  
*Street-facing transformer located at the sidewalk edge.*

## Fencing and Gates

The project requests Conditional Use Permit (CUP) approval for the use of black vinyl-coated mesh fencing. This is proposed to occur in two conditions: perimeter security fencing and maintenance gates; including site obscuring privacy slats, at the utility/refuse yards. This fencing approach is appropriate for a public school campus with extensive security requirements, as it balances durability, safety, maintenance efficiency, and compatibility with the surrounding community. Specifically:

- **Safety and Visibility:** Maintains clear sightlines for staff supervision and passive surveillance, reducing concealed areas and enhancing campus safety compared to solid walls in many perimeter conditions.
- **Neighborhood Compatibility:** The upgrade to black vinyl-coated fencing compared to galvanized options allows the fencing to blend into the landscaping and surroundings.
- **Longevity of Appearance:** Vinyl-coated mesh fencing is long-lasting and can be repaired in small sections in response to wear or vandalism. It also does not patina or rust overtime compared to galvanized.

## Siting the Building

FMC 22.58.022(b) addresses the siting of essential public facilities, including state educational facilities such as Whittier Elementary School. Consistent with the Growth Management Act, local development regulations may not preclude the siting of essential public facilities.

As an accredited K–12 public school, Whittier Elementary is a permitted use within the R-4 zone, subject to approval of a Conditional Use Permit pursuant to FMC 22.32.004, and is therefore evaluated under the siting criteria of FMC 22.58.022(b)(1)–(4).

### **(1) Justifiable need for the public facility and its location within Fircrest**

The proposed Whittier Elementary School is a full replacement of the existing facility and is necessary to meet the District’s long-term educational needs, including safe and code-compliant learning environments, equitable and appropriate instructional spaces, and modern building systems that support student health, safety, and educational outcomes.

The existing school was originally constructed in 1954, with additions and renovations in 1985 and 1995. The facility has exceeded its useful service life and no longer efficiently supports contemporary educational programming or current standards for building performance, accessibility, and life safety. The replacement project addresses these deficiencies by providing a right-sized, durable, and maintainable facility designed to serve the Fircrest community for decades.

The proposed location is justified because it is the District-owned site that currently serves Fircrest residents and is already established as a public school campus. Replacing the school at this location maintains continuity for students and families, preserves existing walk zones and transportation patterns, and avoids the cost, delay, and disruption associated with acquiring and entitling a new site.

### **(2) Site selection analysis**

A traditional multiple-site search was not conducted for this project because the Fircrest community expressed a clear preference for Whittier Elementary School to remain a neighborhood school at its existing location. Acquisition of a new site would introduce significant cost, schedule uncertainty, and community disruption, and would relocate a Fircrest-serving public facility away from the population it is intended to serve. Replacing the school on the current, actively operating campus maintains continuous educational services within Fircrest. The selected site is therefore the only feasible and appropriate location for the proposed essential public facility.

### **(3) Distance/separation from sensitive uses; mitigation of impacts**

The proposed facility is located on an existing school campus and is surrounded by an established mix of residential and civic uses that already accommodate school-related activity. The project does not introduce a new or incompatible land use; rather, it modernizes and replaces an existing public school in a manner that improves operational safety and reduces impacts where feasible.

To mitigate potential impacts to adjacent residential areas and the public realm, the project incorporates measures including:

- Improving drop-off and pick-up operations along the private Annapolis Street driveway to reduce queuing and neighborhood traffic impacts
- Screening service functions to minimize noise and visibility.
- Modulating building massing through roof forms and façade articulation to reduce perceived scale
- Preserving existing mature trees and providing landscape buffering.

# Exhibit B

## Whittier Elementary Schools

TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- Sequencing construction to maintain safe pedestrian routes and minimize disruption during the occupied-campus build.

### (4) Other similar facilities in Pierce County + fair distribution

Below is a list of similar public educational facilities in Fircrest including a map of the properties. The proposed project replaces an existing elementary school serving Fircrest residents and maintains the current level of service. It does not introduce a new essential public facility or result in a disproportionate concentration of such facilities within the City.

Facility Name	Address	Contact Person	Telephone	Size	Scope
Wainwright Intermediate School	130 Alameda Ave Fircrest, WA 98466	Morris Aldridge Executive Director, Planning & Construction Tacoma Public Schools	253-571-1000	65,000 sf	Grades 4-8

