Exhibit J

Major Variance Submittal

Submittal Items

Please included the following:

- ❍ Application
- ❍ 2 sets any applicable plans
- ❍ Residential Project
  - Intake fee: $400
  - Deposit: $1000
- ❍ Nonresidential Project
  - Intake fee: $750
  - Deposit: $2000

The applicant shall be responsible for the actual cost incurred by the City in processing the application. The total fee shall be reduced by the amount of the deposit. The applicant shall remit to the City the amount exceed by the deposit. If

THE CITY OF FIRCREST

Planning and Building
115 Ramsdell St Fircrest WA 98466
253-564-8902
www.cityoffircrest.net

Describe variance requested *(be as specific as possible):*

See attached.

Please *demonstrate* how the proposal is compliant with the following criteria: *(An answer of YES is not sufficient; Use a separate sheet, if necessary.)*

***1. What** special circumstances apply to the subject property or intended use that do not apply to other property or classes of use in the same vicinity and zoning?*

The combination of existing site conditions and school space needs constitute special circumstances that are unique to this property. Due community request to replace the school on it's existing site, there is limited site area that can accommodate the new school building without disrupting the existing school that will remain in operation until the new school is built. To fit the required school program within this area, a two-story structure is necessary. The proposed design also maximizes open space for recreation and playgrounds for outdoor learning and play.

2. How is the *variance* necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a substantial property right or use which is possessed by other property in the same vicinity and zoning classification but denied to the subject property because of special circumstances?

Residential properties in the R-4 zone are able to fully utilize their lots, as typical residential structures are often under 30 feet without issue. In contrast, strict enforcement of the 30 foot height limit would prevent the school from accommodating the required program within the limited developable area of the site and continue to provide its essential educational services to the community.

3. How will the variance not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity and zoning classification?

The proposed building height is limited to the minimum necessary to accommodate the school's program within the constrained site, balancing functional needs with community compatibility. The building is carefully sited to maintain adequate setbacks and the overall campus scale and massing remain consistent with the existing neighborhood context. Furthermore, the project supports the positive role that high-quality schools play in enhancing communities, fostering safe, active, and engaged neighborhoods, and contributing to overall community wellbeing.

Exhibit J

4. How would strict enforcement of the provisions of this title create a practical difficulty or unnecessary hardship for the property owner?

Students will continue to attend the existing school while construction occurs, so careful siting is required to maintain safe and functional learning environments. Strict enforcement of the 30-foot height limit would create a practical difficulty because the existing site has limited developable area that can accommodate the new school building without disrupting ongoing school operations. Enforcing the height limit would force a larger building footprint to accommodate all school programming. This would reduce outdoor recreation and playground areas and compromise the school's ability to operate safely and efficiently during construction.

5. How is the practical difficulty or unnecessary hardship has not been created by the owner or by a predecessor in title?

The existing site layout, circulation patterns, and topography were established long before current zoning standards and are inherent to the property. The proposed design responds to these conditions to minimize disruption during construction and accommodate the future needs of the school. The school's operational and educational needs—including classroom space, library, gathering areas, bus and vehicle circulation, and outdoor play and learning areas—are intrinsic to its public institutional use.

6. How will the granting of the variance be consistent with the purpose and intent of the zoning classification and the comprehensive plan land use designation of the subject property and will not conflict with other applicable codes, design guidelines, and comprehensive plan goals and policies?

Granting this variance is consistent with Fircrest's Comprehensive Plan to provide essential public facilities, such as schools, within the community while ensuring convenient and equitable access to residents. It also aligns with the objective of enhancing residential neighborhoods with public amenities, including schools and play areas. Finally, the variance does not conflict with other applicable codes or guidelines, as setbacks and design standards will be met to fit in with the surrounding neighborhood context.

For complete development regulations, please see FMC Chapter 22.74.

Exhibit J

MAJOR VARIANCE – BUILDING HEIGHT

Describe variance request (be as specific as possible):

Fircrest Municipal Code Sections

FMC 22.32.005 R-4 Development Standards establishes a maximum building height of 30 feet in R-4 zones.

FMC 22.58.007(c) Height Exceptions establishes that "a public… structure may be erected to a height necessary for proper use. For proposed structures above 45 feet, the city shall require the applicant to submit certification from a qualified and licensed engineer that the proposed height is the minimum necessary for utility purposes."

Request

The proposed Whittier Elementary School project requests approval to exceed the 30-foot base height limit for a public elementary school in the R-4 zone, under the FMC 22.58.007(c) public structure exception. The proposed building heights range from of 40'-0" to 49'-6" with the majority (72%) being under 45'-0".

For limited sections, the building height surpasses 45 feet at locations directly affected by significant drops in existing site topography along the building footprint and are not representative of the majority condition. The design team including McGrahananPBK, PCS Structural Solutions, and GFT Mechanical certify that the limited portions of the proposed structure exceeding 45'-0" (with a maximum height of 49'-6") are the minimum height necessary to accommodate the sloping topography and maintain the character and use of the building.

Community Benefit

The community has expressed a strong preference to replace Whittier Elementary on its existing, occupied site to minimize student displacement, maintain continuity of neighborhood use, and retain the school as a long-term community asset. To prioritize uninterrupted education and reduce disruption, the existing school will remain operational throughout construction and will be demolished only after the new facility is complete. This occupied-campus phasing significantly limits the developable area; as a result, the south portion of the site is the only feasible location for the new approximately 46,000 SF school and necessitates a compact, two-story building solution.

A two-story organization allows the project to deliver the full educational program while preserving essential site functions—playgrounds and playfields, accessible routes, parking and service access, and safe separation of pedestrian and vehicle circulation. Concentrating the program vertically is also cost-effective and reduces unnecessary community impacts by limiting grading, tree removal, and overall site disturbance. The resulting campus investment is a durable community resource: classrooms, library, and administration are efficiently stacked within a compact footprint, paired with a one-story gymnasium, preserving valuable outdoor space and maintaining safe operations throughout the multi-phase construction period.

Exhibit J

Local Preference

In response to community feedback and neighborhood context, the building uses a sloped gable roof rather than a flat roof with parapets and screened rooftop equipment. This roof form aligns more closely with the residential character of the surrounding Fircrest neighborhood and provides familiar architectural language appropriate for an elementary school.

While the gable roof contributes to overall building height, it allows mechanical systems to be fully enclosed within the building, reducing visual clutter, eliminating open-air equipment screening, and resulting in a quieter, more durable, and more context-sensitive design. The portions of the roof that extend past the ridge are to accommodate the ventilation needed for the enclosed mechanical system, to meet code and extend the life of the equipment.

Height Sections Above 45’

The limited areas exceeding 45'-0" are driven by existing topography and the need to maintain a continuous roof elevation that accommodates building systems while keeping consistent, accessible floor levels across the floors serving the classrooms.

Because the building location was limited to the south end of the site where the grade slopes steeply, the building height increases at the downhill condition even as the roofline remains consistent. As shown in the section in the accompanying drawing set, the academic and administrative spaces maintain ceiling heights typical for elementary schools. The volume above the ceilings and within the mechanical platform is reduced to the minimum necessary to coordinate mechanical ductwork, equipment clearances, insulation, and structural framing in accordance with building codes.

The design does not add unnecessary floor-to-floor height; the localized exceedance is a direct result of essential utility and structural requirements coordinated with the site’s grade change.

Measures to Reduce Visual Impact and Perceived Height

The building is sited, massed, and detailed to minimize perceived height and overall visual prominence from the public right-of-way:

- The building is located on the lower portion of the site and follows the natural contours, reducing the apparent height from off-site viewpoints.
- Existing mature trees along Alameda Avenue and Elm Tree Lane help obscure and soften views of the upper portions of the building.
- The building massing steps down to the east, creating two distinct roof forms that break up the overall volume and reduce the perceived scale of the two-story building within the neighborhood context.
- Recessed entries and recessed stair volumes provide shadow lines and depth, improving wayfinding while further breaking down the building scale by providing modulation.

- A heavier brick base anchors the building at the pedestrian level, with a transition to lighter metal panel cladding above. This approach reduces perceived mass and emphasizes horizontal proportions rather than height.

For reference, see accompanying renderings showing building elevations from the adjacent street that were developed and submitted with the Design Review resubmittal, reattached here for convenience.

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES - STREET VIEWS
DR-003a
FOR BLUEBEAM LABELING/OCR:

0"
1"

EXISTING CONDITION

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

LOOKING SOUTHWEST FROM CONTRA COSTA AVENUE

EXISTING CONDITION

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

LOOKING EAST FROM ALAMEDA AVENUE

McGRANAHAN
PBK

WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

777 Elm Tree LN
Fircrest, WA 98466

DESIGN REVIEW

TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
EVERY STUDENT, EVERY DAY.

NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

CLIENT	
TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS	
DATE	PROJECT NUMBER
2025/12/12	2507

DRAWING HISTORY

No.	Description	Date

CHECKED BY: Checker

DRAWN BY: Author

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES - STREET VIEWS

DR-003a

Plot Stamp:
10/14/2025 12:33:27 PM

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES - STREET VIEWS
DR-003b
FOR BLUEBEAM LABELING/OCR:

0"
1"

EXISTING CONDITION

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

LOOKING NORTHEAST FROM ANNAPOLIS STREET

EXISTING CONDITION

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

LOOKING NORTH FROM PARADISE LANE

McGRANAHAN
PBK

WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

777 Elm Tree LN
Fircrest, WA 98466

DESIGN REVIEW

TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
EVERY STUDENT, EVERY DAY.

NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

CLIENT	
TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS	
DATE	PROJECT NUMBER
2025/12/12	2507

DRAWING HISTORY

No.	Description	Date

CHECKED BY: Checker
DRAWN BY: Author

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES - STREET VIEWS

DR-003b

Plot Stamp:
10/14/2025 12:33:27 PM