



**CITY OF RICHLAND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIVISION  
STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

**GENERAL INFORMATION:**

PROPOSAL NAME: 520 Thayer Drive Request for School on a Small Site

LOCATION: 520 Thayer Drive

APPLICANT: Redeemer Lutheran Church

PROPERTY  
OWNER: Redeemer Lutheran Church

FILE NO.: PLN-T2-2025-00009

DESCRIPTION: Request a site size reduction to allow for the construction of a private school on a lot that is less than the required site area (six acres) as established in RMC 23.42.250.

PROJECT TYPE: Type II School on a Small Site

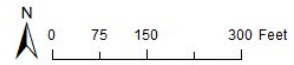
HEARING DATE: February 26, 2025

REPORT BY: Kyle Hendricks, Planner

RECOMMENDED  
ACTION: Approval subject to completion of proposed conditions

**Vicinity  
Map**

Item: 520 Thayer, Small School Site  
Applicant: Karin Nickola  
File #: PLN-T2-2025-00009



**Figure 1 – Vicinity Map**

**PROJECT DATA**

Approximate Site Area:	3.98 Total Acres (3.25 and 0.73 acre parcels)
Parcel width at street frontage:	527 Feet, approximate
Existing parking stalls:	59 spaces from 2024 aerial image.
Proposed additional parking:	19 spaces, 7 are a mixed parallel parking/drop off/pickup lane, 12 regular parking spaces.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL**

The Redeemer Lutheran Church has filed an application to allow the construction of an approximately 10,844 square foot (measured on the proposed site plan) school on a site that is smaller than the required size as stated in Richland Municipal Code Title 23.42.250. This code requires that a given school site shall be at least five acres in size, and an additional acre for each 100 students or portion of this number. Therefore, this school of approximately 98 students shall have a minimum of six acres of total area. The subject site area is approximately 3.98 acres, this results in approximately a 33% reduction in school site size.

The proposal shows that the existing house on the property would be demolished, and the proposed school would then be erected in its place. The application also states that there will be

98 students (grades K-5), nine staff, and six classrooms. The existing building hosts the Lutheran Church's programs, and this application hopes to have the school services on the same parcel, but it is staffs understanding that the operations will be mostly separate besides certain activities, like a school play, may utilize the church space to accommodate seating.

### **REASON FOR REQUEST AND REVIEW AUTHORITY**

Richland Municipal Code (RMC) Chapter 23.42.250 states the following:

A. The minimum acreage of a school site shall be five acres and one additional usable acre for each 100 students or portion thereof of projected maximum enrollment plus an additional five usable acres if the school contains any grade above grade six.

B. For school sites having less than 100 percent of the usable acreage as required in subsection (A) of this section, the planning commission, upon written request, may grant a site size reduction if it is demonstrated to the planning commission's satisfaction that the neighborhood in which the school facility is or will be situated will not be detrimentally impacted by the proposed site size reduction for reasons including, but not limited to, lack of parking for students, employees and the public or by the reduction of open space in general. Such written requests shall be reviewed by the planning commission following the public hearing and notice procedures set forth in Chapter 23.46 RMC for special use permits.

### **SITE DESCRIPTION**

The subject site is located along Thayer Drive, adjacent to the Carmichael Middle School property, to the north of the subject site. The subject site is approximately 650 feet north from the Duportail Street and Thayer Drive traffic circle. The subject site consists of two lots that are owned by the church, the primary lot that the existing church and the proposed school are on is approximately 3.25 acres in size, while the narrower lot behind the primary lot is approximately 0.73 acres in size and would consist of a driveway, connecting the existing and proposed parking lots if the application is approved.

According to inspection records, it appears that the existing house, that would be demolished for this school, was permitted in 1956 and the church was built sometime before this time, but Staff could not readily find the record. There have been a number of additions to the church since its original construction.

The subject site is generally flat with a gradual slope near the rear of the property to the east from Thayer Drive, which is a challenge the proposed driveway may have to navigate.





**Figure 2 – Aerial view**  
(Obtained from Google Earth)

### **CURRENT ZONING & ADJACENT USES**

The subject site is zoned R-1-12, Single Family Residential use district. A school is a permitted use in this zone district, subject to the conditions of RMC 23.42.250. Surrounding parcels are zoned as follows:

**North:** PPF, Public Park and Facility district, Carmichael Middle School

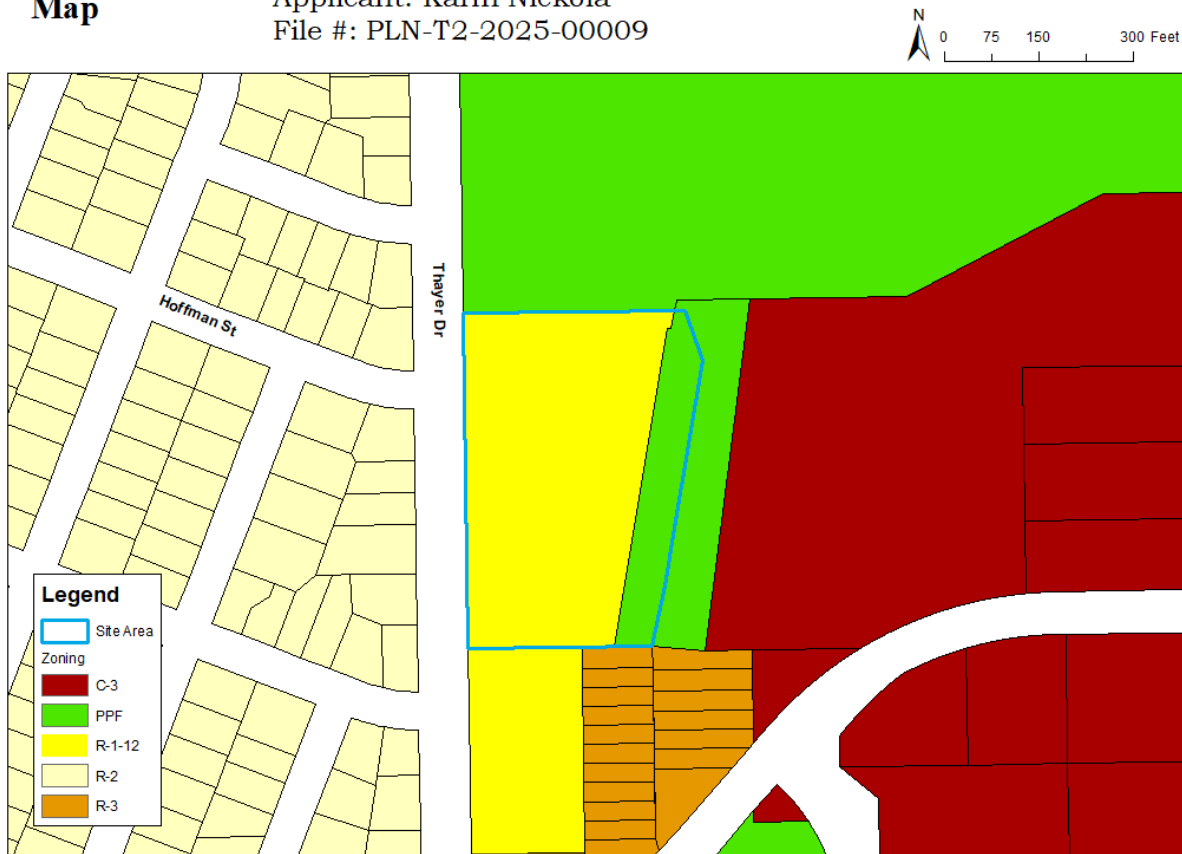
**East:** PPF, Public Parks and Facilities, existing parking stalls, then trail for the James Lawless Park on the neighboring property.

**South:** R-1-12, Single Family Residential, Masonic Temple

**West:** R-2, Medium Density Residential, single-family homes.

## Zoning Map

Item: 520 Thayer, Small School Site  
 Applicant: Karin Nickola  
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**Figure 3 – Zoning Map**

The single-family residential – 12,000 (R-1-12) is a residential zone classification requiring the lowest density of population within the city, providing protection against hazards, objectionable influences, building congestion and lack of light, air and privacy. Certain essential and compatible public service facilities and institutions are permitted in this district. This zoning classification is intended to be applied to some portions of the city that are designated low-density residential (zero to five dwellings per acre) under the city of Richland comprehensive plan.

### **R-1-12 DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS**

The following standards apply in the R-1-12 zone per RMC 23.18.040:

<b>Minimum Lot Area Requirement</b>	10,000 sq. ft.
<b>Minimum Lot Width</b>	90 feet
<b>Minimum Front Yard Setback</b>	20 feet (35 feet RMC 23.42.050 Churches)
<b>Minimum Side Yard Setback</b>	10 feet (35 feet RMC 23.42.050 Churches)
<b>Minimum Rear Yard Setback</b>	25 Feet (35 feet RMC 23.42.050 Churches)

Maximum Building Height	30 feet
Maximum Lot Coverage	40% (35% per RMC 23.42.050 Churches)

### **UTILITY AVAILABILITY**

There are existing electrical power line, water, stormwater, and sewer connections in place, available near the site with adequate capacity to supply the proposed project.

#### **Sewer**

There is an existing eight-inch gravity main within the Thayer Drive right of way.

#### **Water**

There is a 12 inch and a 20-inch distribution mains within the Thayer Drive right of way.

#### **Power**

The site has connections to existing overhead power lines.

#### **Stormwater**

The City has an existing stormwater gravity main in front of the existing church building, within the Thayer Drive right of way.

#### **Irrigation**

There are no irrigation connections or other irrigation infrastructure in place or available for future use in proximity to the subject site.

### **TRANSPORTATION & ACCESS**

Access to the site will come from Thayer Drive. The proposal includes a new drop off/pickup lane with about seven parallel parking spots in front of the proposed school building. As shown in the application materials site plan, a new driveway will also be installed near the rear of the property to connect the existing parking lot to the proposed parking lot. This connecting driveway is approximately 24' wide.

Bus Route 20 of the Ben Franklin Transit (BFT) system runs along Thayer Drive, and there is a bus stop currently in front of the existing church. The applicant will need to coordinate with BFT if they wish to alter the location of this bus stop.

### **SEPA**

The proposal is not subject to State environmental review under the State Environmental Policy Act.

#### **Critical Areas**

The subject site does appear to lie within a five-year aquifer recharge area. Critical Area requirements are not applicable with this proposal but may be applicable during building construction.

### Shoreline Master Program

The subject site lies outside of the jurisdiction of the Shoreline Master Program. This project will have no effect on shorelines of statewide significance. Shoreline permitting requirements are not applicable with this proposal.

### **AGENCY COMMENTS**

A variety of public agencies and City departments were given an opportunity to comment on the proposal. Comments received are included as an exhibit to this report and/or utilized as conditions of approval. No comments were received from these agencies in opposition of this project.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Owners of all properties within 300-feet of the plat site were directly notified of the project by way of USPS mailing. As of the date of this report, city staff have received no public comments regarding this project.

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Notice of Hearing Mailed:	January 24, 2025
Notice of Hearing Posted:	January 23, 2025
Notice of Hearing Published:	February 2, 2025
Public Hearing:	February 26, 2025

Public hearing notices were distributed through posting of the property, mailing of notice to property owners within 300 feet of the site and publication in the Tri-City Herald newspaper. Copies of the notices and affidavits are included in *Exhibit 6*.

### **ANALYSIS**

Based upon the Code language in RMC 23.42.250, discussed previously, Staff will offer the following analysis.

*The minimum acreage of a school site shall be five acres and one additional usable acre for each 100 students or portion thereof of projected maximum enrollment plus an additional five usable acres if the school contains any grade above grade six.*

The applicant is proposing to place a school on a site that is only approximately 3.25 acres in size, as well as owning an adjacent property of about 0.73 acres. In this instance a minimum of six acres would be required for a school to be placed with no special approvals. When considering all of the property owned by the church, the applicant is requesting a 33% size reduction in school site size.

*For school sites having less than 100 percent of the usable acreage as required in subsection (A) of this section, the planning commission, upon written request, may grant a site size reduction if it is demonstrated to the planning commission's satisfaction that the neighborhood in which the school facility is or will be situated will not be detrimentally impacted by the proposed site size reduction for reasons including, but not limited to, lack of parking for students, employees and the public or by the reduction of open space in general. Such written*

*requests shall be reviewed by the planning commission following the public hearing and notice procedures set forth in Chapter 23.46 RMC for special use permits.*

Although this section of code states that the site size reduction must meet the Planning Commissions satisfaction, staff will offer its analysis of the mentioned review guidelines. The school is proposing six classrooms, with approximately 98 students and nine staff members, with 12 additional parking spaces. The minimum parking standard (RMC 23.54) for an elementary school (grades K-5) is two parking stalls per classroom, the proposal meets this requirement. When considering the existing church and the proposed school building, the lot coverage percentage is approximately 16.3%, well within the maximum of 35% in RMC 23.42. As shown on the site plan in the application materials, the playground area is approximately 6,750 square feet and is oriented on the opposite side of the school building from the neighborhood across Thayer Drive. This playground area is setback approximately 100' from the Thayer Drive sidewalk, this design choice appears to minimize potential noise impacts to the neighborhood from the children playing during recess. The proposed driveway that would connect the parking lots would pave over land zone PPF, however this sliver of property owned by the church has not previously been used as park space. This piece of land was sold by the City of Richland to the church some time ago. Open space generally would not be reduced, since the Lawless Park trail is located on the neighboring city property to the east of the subject site.

The only impact that Planning staff see with this application is in regard to students being picked up and/or dropped off. Currently, there is designed a one way drop off/pick up lane in front of the school accommodating approximately seven (7) vehicles. Worst case scenario would result in one car coming to or leaving the site for each of the 98 children attending the school. The applicants have proposed offset start and end times when compared to nearby schools in an attempt to mitigate possible traffic congestion in the area. Furthermore, there is a driveway that wraps around the school property that will accommodate numerous vehicles, and the applicants believe that this long driveway will assist in the picking up/dropping off of students.

Staff has provided a condition of approval requiring that should congestion occur as a result of this drop off/pick up arrangement; the applicants will need to work with the City's Public Works Department in order to figure out a way to mitigate the issue.

### **FINDINGS OF FACT**

Staff has completed its review of the request for a Small School Site (PLN-T2-2025-00009) and recommends approval of the request subject to conformance to the conditions of approval identified below and based on the following findings:

1. The subject site is located within the Single-Family Residential use district (R-1-12), a school is approved use within this zone type.
2. RMC Chapter 23.42.250 designates the Planning Commission to conduct the review of a School on a Small Site application.
3. A School on a Small Site application is classified as a Type II application under RMC 19.20.010.
4. The proposal has sufficient parking available for an elementary school.
5. The playground area is oriented away from residences to minimize noise impacts.



6. Required findings for Type II applications are found under 19.60.095 and this application appears to be in the best interest of the public, providing additional schooling opportunities and mitigating potential impacts.
7. General criteria for review by the Planning Commission review are outlined in RMC 23.42.250.
8. Public notice of the application and hearing was provided via mail to surrounding landowners within 300 feet of the site; through the posting of a sign on-site and through a legal advertisement in the Tri-City Herald, all in accordance with the notice provisions contained in RMC 19.40.010.
9. There are existing power, water, sewer and stormwater facilities near the site, all of which have adequate capacity to serve the proposed development.
10. The proposed site is not impacted by the City's Critical Areas regulations or Shoreline Master Program.
11. City staff and other utility providers reviewed the project and have recommended specific conditions of approval as set forth in this report.
12. As conditioned, the project meets the criteria for the issuance of a School on a Small Site.
13. The proposed school on a small site conforms to the requirements of title 23 and 19 of the Richland Municipal Code.

### **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

1. The Richland Planning Commission is granted the authority to decide permits for schools on small sites pursuant to RMC 23.42.250.
2. The proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, Richland Municipal Code, and is in the public interest as it will provide another educational opportunity for children within the City of Richland.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission concur with the findings and conclusions set forth above and approve the request to operate a school on the subject site.

### **RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL**

1. The applicant shall obtain approval from the local health officer that the proposed development site presents no health problems. A comprehensive site assessment must be completed on the site and submitted to the Benton-Franklin Health District for review, along with the required applications. It must be demonstrated that the school is a size sufficient to provide for the health and safety of school enrollment.
2. The applicant shall conduct a noise assessment that measures noises from all sources during the hours that school is normally in session must be conducted, and results submitted to the Benton-Franklin Health District. Noise must not exceed an hourly average of 55 dBA (Leq 60 minutes) and shall not exceed an hourly maximum (Lmax) of 75 dBA during the time of day the school is in session; except sites exceeding these sound levels are acceptable if a plan for sound reduction is included in the new construction proposal and the plan for sound reduction is approved by the health officer.

3. The applicant shall apply for all necessary building permits and meet all relevant building code requirements.
4. The applicant shall direct users to the appropriate drop-off and pickup zones.
5. If drop off and pickup activities related to any school functions begin to affect traffic flow on Thayer Drive, then the applicant shall contact the City of Richland Public Works Department to determine possible mitigation measures.

Please note that although the Public Works Department did not include specific conditions of approval in regard to the approval of the land use, the applicant should review their comments provided in the attached agency comments.

**EXHIBIT LIST**

1. Application Materials
2. Site Plan
3. Public Notice and Affidavits
4. Agency Comments