Zoning Administrator Agenda Report Meeting Date 4/23/2019

DATE: March 26, 2019

File: UP 19-05

TO: ZONING ADMINISTRATOR

FROM: Shannon Costa, Associate Planner, 530-879-6807 (shannon.costa@chicoca.gov)

RE: Use Permit 19-05 (EMS On-Call Housing) 2279 Nord Avenue, APN 042-810-010

RECOMMENDATION

Planning staff recommends that the Zoning Administrator find the project categorically exempt from further environmental review and approve Use Permit 19-05 (EMS On-Call Housing) based on the findings and subject to the recommended conditions of approval.

BACKGROUND

This is a request to operate an ambulance station and crew quarters in an existing commercial building. The site is located at 2279 Nord Avenue, approximately 200 feet northwesterly of Glenwood Avenue (See **Attachment A**, Location Map, and **Attachment B**, Plat to Accompany Use Permit 19-05). The site is designated Low Density Residential on the City's General Plan Land Use Diagram and is zoned R1 (Low Density Residential).

An ambulance station falls within the definition of "public safety facilities" as provided by Title 19. Use of the R1 zoning district as a public safety facility requires use permit authorization, pursuant to Chico Municipal Code (CMC) 19.42.020, Table 4-2 (*Allowed Uses and Permit Requirements for Residential Zoning Districts)*. The existing commercial building has historically been used for a variety of commercial retail uses and is considered legal non-conforming, as commercial uses are not generally permitted in the R1 zoning district. Establishment of an ambulance station and crew quarters at this location would bring the site further into conformance, as the retail aspect of the use would be discontinued, and a permitted use would be established.

The use of existing buildings, including single-family homes, as staging locations for ambulance crews is found in several other locations in Chico, including East Avenue near Cohasset and Pillsbury Roads and Chestnut Street, between W. 8th Street and W. 9th Street. Pre-positioning ambulances at various locations in Chico improves emergency response times, directly contributing to improved health and welfare of Chico residents. The site would serve the westerly portion of the City, and would operate 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The proposal includes minor modifications to the interior of the existing 1,200 square foot building to accommodate the ambulance crew. A maximum of two crewmembers would be stationed at this location 24 hours a day, with one office staff member during business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven days a week). No public services are offered at this site (see **Attachment C**, Project Description). The existing parking area at the front of the site would be used for staff parking, parking for one service ambulance and one back-up ambulance.

No access would be taken from Riverwood Loop, and to protect the surrounding neighbors from parking and traffic impacts associated with the proposed ambulance station, a condition of approval is included (see Condition of Approval #3) that would restrict ambulance and staff to taking access to the site from Nord Avenue only.

The use of the property as an ambulance station appears appropriate, provided its location on Nord Avenue. The site is oriented such that the front of the building and all access points are positioned on Nord Avenue, reducing interface with the adjacent residential neighborhood. Potential issues related to the operation of an ambulance station adjacent to an existing residential neighborhood includes noise associated with ambulance sirens. It is not anticipated that the proposed use would generate noise disturbances in excess of existing noise levels for this location, given its proximity to Union Pacific Railroad tracks and Nord Avenue (Highway 32).

Nord Avenue is identified as an arterial roadway on the General Plan, which generally handles large volumes of traffic. Noise levels can range from 60-70 decibels (dBA) along the Nord Avenue corridor (Highway 32). Noise associated with passing trains on the Union Pacific Railroad tracks can range from 96-110 decibels and can occur approximately 19 times per day in this area (see **Attachment D**, 2030 General Plan Noise Contour Map). A typical ambulance siren is 120 decibels, which could cause potential short-term noise disturbance for adjacent residential neighbors. At other locations, it has been found helpful for a sign to be placed facing the ambulance crews as they depart the site, reminding them not to use the siren until they have fully exited the site and entered the arterial roadway (Nord Avenue). Staff recommends that such a sign be required for this project (see Condition of Approval #4), and that the lights and sirens not be activated until the ambulance has fully exited the site and entered Nord Avenue.

With conditions addressing these issues and other code compliance aspects of the project, staff recommends approval of the use permit.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This project is categorically exempt pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15301 (Existing Facilities). Consistent with this exemption, the project is: consists of the leasing of a private structure involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency's determination.

FINDINGS

Following a public hearing, the Zoning Administrator may approve a use permit application, with or without conditions, only if all the following findings can be made:

<u>Use Permit Findings</u>

A. *The proposed use is allowed within the subject zoning district and complies with all of the applicable provisions of Chapter 19.24 (Use Permits).*

Chico Municipal Code Section 19.42.020 allows public safety facilities in the R1 zoning district, subject to use permit approval. This use permit has been processed in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 19.24.

B. *The proposed use would not be detrimental to the health, safety, and general welfare of persons residing or working in the neighborhood of the proposed use.*

The proposed use consists of the conversion of an existing building fronting an arterial roadway to an ambulance station. Noise impacts to neighboring residences will be minimized via the conditions limiting the use of lights and sirens until the ambulance has fully exited the site and entered Nord Avenue (Highway 32). Pre-positioning an ambulance in west Chico will improve emergency medical response times in the area, contributing to the improved health, safety, and welfare of neighborhood residents

C. *The proposed use will not be detrimental and/or injurious to property and improvements in the neighborhood of the proposed use, as well as the general welfare of the City.*

The proposed use consists of the conversion of an existing commercial building fronting on an arterial roadway to an ambulance station. Existing public improvements will be repaired and/or replaced as needed. No other impacts to property or improvements have been identified

D. *The proposed use will be consistent with the policies, standards, and land use designations established by the General Plan.*

The project is consistent with the Low-Density Residential designation for the site, which provides for a limited variety of nonresidential uses, including public safety facilities. The project is also consistent with the following General Plan Goals and Policies: Policy LU-2.4, promoting land use compatibility through use restrictions; Goal CD-5, supporting infill and redevelopment compatible with the surrounding neighborhood; Policy S-1.1, promoting public safety through emergency preparedness and awareness; and Goal S-4, providing effective and efficient fire protection and preventive services (which includes emergency medical response) to Chico area residents. No specific plan, neighborhood plan, or area plan applies to the project site.

E. *The design, location, size, and operating characteristics of the proposed use are compatible with the existing and future land uses in the vicinity.*

The proposed use consists of the conversion of an existing commercial building to an ambulance station fronting an arterial roadway (Nord Avenue). As conditioned, the impacts from emergency response activities will be minimal on the neighboring properties.

CONDITIONS OF PROJECT APPROVAL

1. Use Permit 19-05 authorizes an ambulance station and crew quarters in the R1 zoning district, in substantial accord with the “Plat to Accompany Use Permit 19-05 (EMS On-Call Housing)” and in compliance with all other conditions of approval.

2. The permittee shall comply with all other State and local Code provisions, including those of the Building Division, Public Works Department, Fire Department, and Butte County Environmental Health. The permittee is responsible for contacting these offices to verify the need for permits.

3. Ambulance and staff shall take access to the site from Nord Avenue only, no access from Riverwood Loop associated with the ambulance station is allowed.

4. Ambulances based at the site shall not activate emergency lights or sirens until they have fully exited the property and are traveling on Nord Avenue (Highway 32). The permittee shall install a sign, visible to ambulance crews as they leave the property, reminding them of this requirement.

PUBLIC CONTACT

A notice was published in the Chico Enterprise Record 10 days prior to the meeting date and notices were mailed out to all property owners and tenants within 500 feet of the project site.

DISTRIBUTION

Internal (3)
Brendan Vieg, Zoning Administrator
Bruce Ambo, Principal Planner
Shannon Costa, Associate Planner

External (2)
Mike Pickering, 844 Husa Lane, Chico, CA 95928 (email: pick.michaelj@gmail.com)
Bryon Parsons, 4171 Rio Bravo, Chico, CA 95973

ATTACHMENTS

A. Location Map
B. Plat to Accompany Use Permit 19-05 (EMS On-Call Housing)
C. Project Description
D. 2030 General Plan Noise Contour Map