



**Port St. Lucie School of Autism
Major Site Plan
P25-020**



Project Location Map

SUMMARY

Applicant's Request:	A request for site plan approval for the development of a Pre-K through 12 school for children with autism.
Applicant/Agent:	Connor Kennedy, Haley Ward, Inc.
Property Owner:	Port Saint Lucie School of Autism, LLC
Location:	North of SW Kestor Drive and East of SW Darwin Boulevard
Project Planner:	Bethany Grubbs, AICP, Senior Planner/Public Art Program

Project Description

The City of Port St. Lucie has received a site plan application from Port St. Lucie School for Autism, LLC, the property owner. The subject property has a Future Land Use designation of Institutional (I) and is located within the Institutional (I) Zoning District. The 6.28-acre parcel is currently vacant.

This site plan application proposes the development of a multiphase school for children with autism. One building will be constructed during each phase of development. Phase I will consist of a two-story, 12,556-square-foot building with an associated playground area, designed to accommodate approximately 160 students in Pre-K through grade 5. Phase II will introduce a second two-story building, also designed to serve 160 students in grades 6 through 12. Upon Phase II completion the project is projected to have 244 students.

The project proposes operational hours beginning at 7:30 AM and ending at 5:30 PM. Drop-off and pick-up times for pre-k and grade schools will be staggered to reduce unnecessary vehicle accumulation.

All remaining land on the parcel will be reserved for potential future expansion consistent with the Institutional designation. There is a 26-foot wide cross-access easement, recorded in OR Book 5340, Page 2821, that provides cross access through the property to the south.

Previous Actions and Prior Reviews

The City of Port St. Lucie Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) reviewed and recommended approval of the Minor Site Plan at their February 26, 2025, meeting.

Location and Site Information

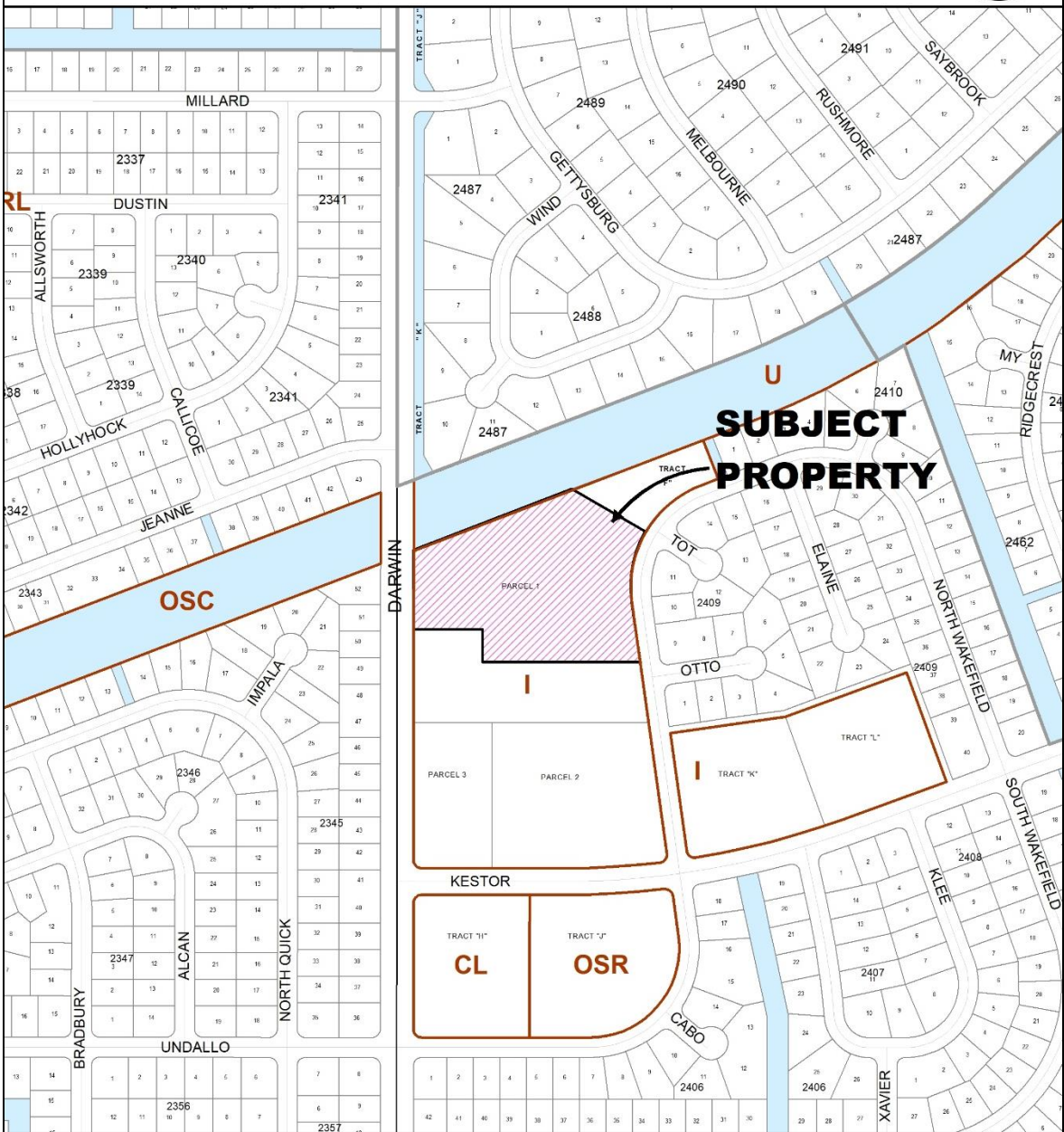
Parcel Number:	4432-500-0001-000-1
Property Size:	6.28 acres
Legal Description:	Lot 1 of Parcel 1 Replat, according to the Map or Plat thereof, as recorded In Plat Book 125, Pages 15 And 16, of the Public Records of St. Lucie County, Florida.
Future Land Use:	Institutional (I)
Zoning:	Institutional (I)
Existing Use:	Vacant
Proposed Use:	Private School

Surrounding Uses

Direction	Future Land Use	Zoning	Existing Use
North	RL	RS-2	Drainage right-of-way followed by single family residences
South	I	I	Worship Center
East	RL	RS-2	Road right-of-way followed by single family residences
West	RL	RS-2	Road right-of-way followed by single family residences

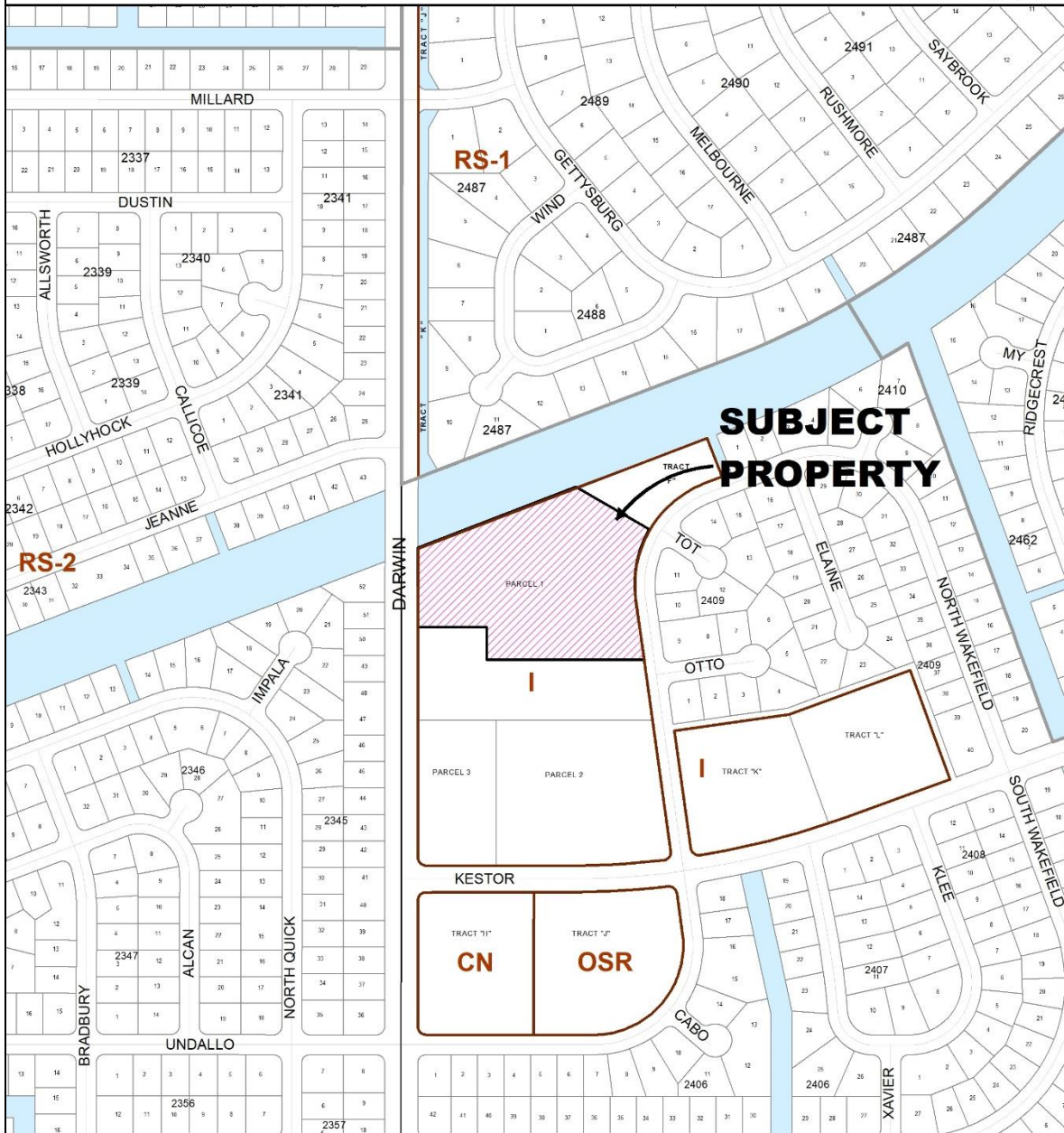
RL - Low-Density Residential, RS-2 – Residential Single-Family (2du/ac), I - Institutional

FUTURE LAND USE



Future Land Use Map

EXISTING ZONING



Zoning Map

IMPACTS AND FINDINGS

ZONING REVIEW: The project has been reviewed for compliance with the requirements of Chapter 158, Zoning Code and documented as follows:

<u>CRITERIA</u>	<u>FINDINGS</u>
USE	Per Section 158.110 of the City's Zoning Code, schools are listed as a permitted use within the Institutional (I) Zoning District.
DUMPSTER ENCLOSURE	The site plan depicts a 12' x 24' dumpster enclosure to accommodate refuse and recycling collection.
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN STANDARDS	The applicant has provided documentation of the St. Lucie West Architectural Design Review Committee's approval of the building elevation drawings.
QUEUING AND STACKING REQUIREMENTS	<p>Darwin Autism School proposes a phased development accommodating approximately 40 pre-kindergarten students, 120 kindergarten through 5th grade students, and 160 students in grades 6–12. Of the K–5 population, 30% (36 students) are expected to participate in before/aftercare programs. Upon completion of Phase II, total enrollment is projected to be 244 students.</p> <p>To manage traffic flow, drop-off and pick-up times for the pre-kindergarten and grade school programs will be staggered to minimize vehicle accumulation and queuing impacts.</p> <p>A 235-foot southbound left-turn lane will be constructed on Darwin Blvd at the southern driveway to accommodate additional site traffic. The applicant has also submitted a Traffic Management Plan and Queuing Analysis demonstrating adequate on-site queuing capacity and a contingency plan for full build-out conditions. The full analysis is included in the agenda packet.</p> <p>Phase I includes a 675-foot designated drop-off/pick-up lane with capacity for approximately 27 vehicles. Phase II expands this capacity to 34 vehicles. Two optional secondary lanes (225 feet in Phase I and 400 feet in Phase II) can be activated as needed, providing additional queuing for 18 vehicles in Phase I and 32 vehicles in Phase II.</p> <p>To reduce impacts on the SW Darwin Boulevard right-of-way, parents will be instructed to remain in their vehicles and proceed through the designated drop-off/pick-up lane. The queuing layout is designed to prevent spillovers onto the public roadway, with a contingency plan in place should queuing demands exceed on-site capacity.</p> <p>Vehicles will access the site via the existing driveway connection shared with The Life Shift Church. After drop-off or pick-up, vehicles may exit through either the existing driveway or the newly constructed driveway. Phase II operations will follow the same circulation pattern established in Phase I. (See the attached Traffic Management Plan and Queuing Analysis.)</p>

BUILDING HEIGHT	The proposed building height is 33.33 feet. The maximum building height allowed for the development is 35 feet.	
SETBACKS	The proposed buildings meet setback requirements under the zoning district.	
	Required	Provided
	Front: 25' Rear: 25' Side (South): 10' Side (North): 10'	Front: 40' Rear: 94' Side (South): 25' Side (North): >10'
PARKING	<p>Although the City's Zoning Code establishes off-street parking requirements for schools, the proposed facility operates under a unique educational model that anticipates no student drivers. The school serves students with autism and related developmental needs, and as such, the program includes intensive therapeutic services (e.g., speech and occupational therapy) and a higher staff-to-student ratio than traditional schools. Under Section 158.221(C), "Where there is any question regarding the number of off-street parking spaces to be provided, the number shall be determined and fixed by the Site Plan Review Committee." The applicant has referenced the State Requirements for Educational Facilities (SREF) and Florida Building Code Section 453.10.2.8, typically used for charter schools, as advisory guidance due to the specialized nature of the program.</p> <p>The site plan provides 135 standard parking spaces, including eight ADA-accessible spaces, exceeding the minimum requirement.</p> <p>Parking requirements per the Zoning Code are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elementary and Junior High Schools: 2 spaces per classroom • Senior High Schools: 8 spaces per classroom or office room <p>Based on the current floor plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase I requires 32 spaces • Phase II requires 82 spaces • Total minimum required: 114 spaces <p>The applicant's projected parking demand is based on staffing and student enrollment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase I (Pre-K–5th grade): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 faculty (60 spaces at 1 per faculty member) • 160 students (2 spaces at 1 per 100 students) • Subtotal: 62 spaces • Phase II (6th–12th grade): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 faculty (60 spaces at 1 per faculty member) • 160 students (2 spaces at 1 per 100 students) • 46 students in grades 11–12 (5 spaces at 1 per 10 students) • Subtotal: 67 spaces <p>Total required parking: 129 spaces, including six ADA-accessible spaces.</p>	

	<p>Although students are not expected to drive, student-based parking allocations account for occasional parent visits, therapy appointments, and administrative meetings.</p> <p>Enrollment figures and classroom configurations will be updated with the City as each phase progresses. Final parking requirements may be adjusted by the Site Plan Review Committee accordingly.</p>
BUFFER	Buffering complies with the applicable code requirements. The site design includes the required perimeter buffer strips and an eight-foot-high masonry wall along the eastern property boundary to provide visual screening and noise attenuation from the adjacent residential neighborhood.

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION (Chapter 157)

The project has been reviewed for compliance with the requirements of Chapter 157, Natural Resource Protection Code, and documented as follows:

Native Habitat/Tree Protection: The property is greater than two (2) acres; therefore, an environmental assessment report was prepared by Advanced Restoration Ecology in August 2024. Native habitat was determined not to be on site due to the dense exotic vegetation throughout. There are no State or Federally jurisdictional wetlands on the site as the site's characteristics do not meet the minimum thresholds required for wetland classification. There are five large live oak trees on the site. Three of the live oak trees are proposed to be preserved onsite and have been incorporated into the landscape plan. Mitigation will need to be provided for the two live oak trees that are proposed to be removed.

Wildlife Protection: Per Section 157.06(B), a site survey for gopher tortoises shall be conducted on all upland properties prior to any land clearing activities. Gopher tortoise burrows were observed on site; no other State or Federally listed species were observed on the property during the site visit. A 100% gopher tortoise survey of the property was conducted and completed by an FWC licensed gopher tortoise agent during the site investigation.

CONCURRENCY REVIEW

The project has been reviewed for compliance with Chapter 160, City Code, regarding the provision of adequate public facilities and documented as follows:

<i>CRITERIA</i>	<i>FINDINGS</i>
SEWER/WATER SERVICES	Port St. Lucie Utility Services will be the service provider. A service agreement is required.
TRANSPORTATION	<p>This application and Traffic Report prepared by Mackenzie Engineering & Planning Inc. dated February 5, 2025, has been reviewed by the Public Works Department and the transportation elements of the project were found to be in compliance with the adopted level of service and requirements of Chapter 156 of City Code, and Public Works Policy 19-01pwd.</p> <p>This development proposes constructing a single-story daycare and a 320 student K-12 facility. Per the 11th edition ITE trip generation manual, the proposed development will generate 592 daily, 358 AM Peak Hour and 237</p>

	PM Peak Hour trips.
PARKS AND RECREATION	Not applicable to non-residential development.
STORMWATER	Paving and drainage plans have been submitted in compliance with the adopted level of service standards.
SOLID WASTE	Solid waste impacts are measured and planned based on population projections on an annual basis. There is adequate capacity available.
PUBLIC SCHOOL CONCURRENCY	Not applicable to non-residential development.

OTHER

Fire District: The access location (external and internal) has been reviewed by the Fire District for safety purposes.

Public Art (Chapter 162): This project is subject to Chapter 162 of the Code of Ordinances, Art in Public Places. All private development meeting the applicability requirements of Chapter 162 must elect one of three methods for providing public art within ninety (90) days of the issuance of the first building permit. The three options are artwork on site, fee in lieu of providing public art onsite, or a combination of artwork on site and payment in lieu.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The Planning and Zoning Department staff finds the request to be consistent with the direction and intent of the City's Land Development Regulations and policies of the Comprehensive Plan. The Site Plan Review Committee recommended approval of the proposed site plan at their meeting of February 26, 2025.