

Vista Community Church
Concept Plan – 5626 Frantz Road
Development Statement

Vista Community Church seeks the review of a concept plan application in further of its desire to file a future rezoning application for a PUD, Planned Unit Development zoning designation for property located at 5626 Frantz Road (the “Property”). The church is in contract to purchase the Property, contingent upon approval of a rezoning to allow a church use to be operated thereon. The Property consists of +/-6.633 acres zoned in the City of Dublin’s MUR-4 zoning district. It is improved with a building containing +/-43,384 square feet of gross floor area and related improvements such as paved parking lots and landscaped areas. The rezoning request would accomplish a single objective, which is to add a church as a permitted use on the site. All uses and development standards that are applicable to the MUR-4 zoning category would continue to apply to the Property, and the PUD text that will accompany the application will incorporate those standards and requirements by reference. No additions or enlargements to the building are being sought, and the existing condition of the site will remain largely the same as it is today, subject to typical modifications that typically apply when a new occupant comes to a site (such as a change of signage).

Therefore, this Concept Plan review presents a simple question: Is a church an appropriate use for this site? The applicant submits that this is clearly the case. Banks, general and medical offices, research and development, training facilities, and day cares are some of the permitted uses in the MUR-4 district provisions under City Code. In comparison to these permitted uses, a church use is less intensive and friendlier to adjacent residential neighborhoods. As opposed to office uses, for instance, which will have traffic and activity 5 days per week (and maybe six days per week if there is medical office), a church will have its peak traffic on Sundays when other traffic volumes are relatively low. Use of the church during other days of the week will include much less traffic in comparison to Sundays and to businesses that have a steady flow of employees and visitors coming and going during weekdays.

Churches are often located within or close to residential communities, as they are compatible with such areas. Impacts on the community are light, and the relatively slow activity that comes with such uses for a large majority of the time make them great neighbors. In fact, all of the codified residential districts under the Dublin City Code allow religious uses as conditional uses. Moreover, the City’s Suburban Office and Institutional District allows religious uses as permitted uses. That zoning district is very similar to the use rights in the MUR-4 district. In fact, prior to the adoption of the MUR portion of the zoning code, suburban office and institutional uses were permitted to be operated on the Property and therefore religious uses could operate as of right. Given the Property’s proximity to the Llewellyn Farms neighborhood, and the fact that an existing office building would be used by the church, the proposed use is very appropriate and will have little to no impact on the area.

Church Background

Formed out of an initiative of Heritage Christian Church (Westerville, OH), Vista Community Church has been a part of the Dublin community since January 2007. The congregation began meeting at the City's Rec Center on Sunday evenings, moved to Coffman High School in 2008, and to Jerome High School in 2010, but has been without a consistent meeting place since the pandemic dislocated it from Jerome High School in 2020. Since then the church has enjoyed thousands of participants, baptized and dedicated over 1,000 adults and children, contributed thousands of community service hours, granted over \$100,000 to local community organizations and benevolent needs, and invested \$957,000 in high school and Rec Center rental fees.

Post-pandemic, and without a permanent space in Dublin, it is difficult to numerically gauge the size of the church's congregation. Pre-pandemic it was approximately 500 people. Currently, about 250 people gather at a facility in the Worthington area. The Dublin congregation is not likely grow without a permanent site. While churches continue to face headwinds as to growth, Vista's target size is 350-500 members, at which point it would look to originate a new congregation. With a permanent facility, the church intends to host two services every Sunday, one in Dublin and one in the Worthington area.

The use will have its busiest operations on Sundays. Some office use will occur throughout the week. Occasional midweek small or midsize gatherings will occur. Other church-related outreach and uses which are typically accessory to a church will be present here over time.

Site History

As early as 2019, as the church was searching Dublin for potential permanent space, it became aware of the property at 5626 Frantz Road and confirmed with City staff that the then-current zoning allowed "religious institutions" as a permitted use. The pandemic arrived and caused the church to pause its search for a permanent home.

Coming out of the pandemic in July 2021, the Property became available for lease. The zoning remained the same and the church use was permitted. After reviewing a proposed lease, it was determined that the capital improvements to the building which would be required did not make a lease financially viable. Vista then began searching for purchase options throughout the City and evaluated a number of other properties, each of which were not zoned to allow religious uses. The church began meeting with the City staff in July and discussed plans with them. The City encouraged the church to look at the Property again, considering that the use was allowed there. In November Vista determined that a purchase was not viable at the price required by the seller.

However, in late December 2021, the seller came back and offered to sell the property at a price that was acceptable to the church, provided that Vista could close on the purchase relatively quickly. A purchase contract was signed in February 2022 and Vista continued to refine its remodeling plans. As part of final due diligence, Vista again made an inquiry with the

City and it was confirmed on March 17th that the zoning of the Property continued to permit religious uses. Until late March, the City's website also showed the Property as still being zoned to allow for the operation of a church. Then on March 28th, an email was received from the City correcting the e-mail from March 17th and explaining that the Property had been rezoned as of December 2021 into the MUR-4 category. That category does not list religious uses as being permitted.

It is Vista's contention that the new zoning category was not intentionally focused on excluding religious institutions but rather focused on the type of office that is desired for this corridor in the future. City staff has been unable to identify in its records any specific discussion as to excluding these types of uses. Given the fact that a similar zoning district in the City (SO, Suburban Office and Institutional District) allows religious uses, the City obviously has had a long-standing view that religious uses are appropriate in office districts. The use of an existing building by the church also does not foreclose the future use of the building for offices, and even leaves open the possibility that it could be subleased in part for those uses. Given the fact that a church use is less impactful to an area than other uses that are presently permitted on the Property, Vista Community Church respectfully requests approval to move forward with a rezoning of the Property as described herein.