

**April 7, 2025**

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ISG

**RE: Conditional Use Permit Narrative  
St. Olaf College Campus Parking Re-balance – Northfield, Minnesota**

Mikayla,

St. Olaf College (St. Olaf) is a highly residential campus with a growing annual enrollment of nearly 3,200 full-time students supported by 900 members of faculty and staff. Of the annual student enrollment, 1,141 students currently hold parking permits, including 186 commuting students and 122 students with approved accommodations. In addition, 672 of the 900 commuting staff and faculty members hold parking permits. As a result of continued positive growth, St. Olaf also has a current waiting list of nearly 300 individuals seeking parking permits.

While St. Olaf actively manages traffic and parking demand through several strategies, policies, and tactics as outlined in the attached Campus Parking and Transportation Demand Management Memorandum, today's waiting list still results in several on-campus and off-campus frustrations while St. Olaf proactively works to reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips and vehicular parking demand. Therefore, St. Olaf is exploring options for providing additional on-campus parking to eliminate today's imbalance, while remaining committed to continually take action to reduce future parking demand rates.

St. Olaf shares similar goals with the City regarding travel to, from, and on its campus. The college meets many of these objectives through campus planning, availability and access to multiple modes of transportation, design elements that promote access and safety, policies and services that reduce vehicular demand, and education for students, faculty, and staff about transportation opportunities and safety.

Unfortunately, the long wait list still leads to frustration by current and prospective students and families in need of a parking option and students parking in places they are not intended. This also results in frustration from neighboring community members who have students parking along nearby residential streets in front of their homes.

The college embarked on a new residential hall and townhomes project along St. Olaf Avenue which opened for students in the fall of 2022. In addition to replacing dated and declining single-family properties with updated accessible student housing, this project realigned student parking from these previous single-family driveways to developed campus parking lots.

At the time of this project, St. Olaf also sought to construct additional parking needed to address the parking deficit being experienced at that time. Unfortunately, the additional parking did not move forward, and only replacement parking was constructed compensatory to that which was being lost due to the decommissioning of the single-family homes which had formerly served as student housing.

Enrollment has continued to grow year-over-year, resulting in a natural intensification of the existing use. However, to-date, no additional parking has been added in response to the increased enrollment. As previously noted, the college has continued to educate students, in addition to staff and faculty, about public transportation and ride-share options as well as to persist in growing partnerships with local transit options to combat increased parking pressures.

However, despite continued implementation of these measures, a day-to-day parking deficiency exists. On-campus parking is also not sufficient to meet the current demand of various community events held on campus including the Christmas Festival and various sporting events held throughout the year.

The parking currently being proposed seeks to balance the available parking with the quantity of students present, thereby also decreasing parking pressures on adjacent neighborhood streets both day-to-day and during events.

The college is seeking to balance parking through 3 steps:

- Step 1 (PID 2235100001): Adding 93 spaces in a lot between Skoglund and the softball field. The college currently needs to park cars on green space in the winter during its Christmas Festival to accommodate visitors in addition to the campus community. This would help alleviate those issues as well as day-to-day parking pressures.
- Step 2 (PID 2236325017): Adding 26 spaces to the existing parking lot east of the football field and west of Lincoln Street North, which was previously designed to provide additional parking, and which would require a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) due to its location within the Perimeter Transition Area (PTA).
- Step 3 (PIDs 2236351067, 2236351030, and 2236352005): Adding 20 spaces to the utility street east of the New Residence building by creating one row of parking spaces at the east side of this road into college owned property. It is anticipated that this would also require a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) due to its location within the Perimeter Transition Area (PTA).

These areas have been carefully considered and located so as to achieve the necessary parking balance without great impact to any one area. Further, all additional parking will enjoy pedestrian connectivity throughout the campus and public sidewalk networks and be appropriately screened with landscaping complementary to the existing campus aesthetic.

It is understood that all new parking is governed by the Type 2 City Site Plan Review process. In addition, both Step 2 and Step 3 would be subject to the Type 4 Conditional Use Permit process since they are located within the Perimeter Transition Area (PTA) which governs the area within 200 feet from edge of college zoned property. Therefore, the following narrative will substantially focus on the Step 2 and Step 3 areas.

The following information has been prepared to illustrate how the proposed St. Olaf College Campus Parking Re-balance project meets the criteria for a CUP.

## CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT CRITERIA NARRATIVE

### 1. The proposed use is allowed as a conditional use in the district for which it is proposed as shown in Table 2.7-1.

The proposed properties will continue to be categorized as School (Institutions of Higher Education - College, Seminary, or University) use, which meets zoning district standards for CD-S district zoning. As such, parking to support the existing principal school use will continue to be a permitted accessory use within this district.

With that in mind, the proposed project sites are also adjacent to residential uses to the east and are within the Perimeter Transition Area of CD-S zoning which necessitates the CUP for the proposed work.

### 2. Is the proposed use within the Perimeter Transition Area (PTA) of the College Development District?

The proposed parking areas subject to a CUP are within the PTA of the College Development District. The continued use of the properties by the school will continue, and the proposed uses will continue to be compatible with other adjacent land uses including the collegiate uses to the north, south, and west as well as the existing single-family homes to the east. The existing landscaping will continue to provide pedestrian connectivity and a greenspace transition from the campus property into adjacent neighborhoods.

**3. The conditional use will be in accordance with the general objectives, or with any specific objective, of the city's comprehensive plan and this LDC.**

The design and construction of the proposed Campus Parking Re-balance project will be compliant with all required codes and regulations, including the City's Land Development Code. In addition, the proposed project upholds the objectives of the City's Comprehensive Plan in the following categories:

Chapter 3: Community Identity – Objective 7: Continue to support local schools and colleges.

CI 7.2 “Cooperate with the local colleges to minimize negative impacts of parking and traffic on Northfield neighborhoods.”

- As detailed in the attached Campus Parking and Transportation Demand Management Memorandum, the college has continued to put great emphasis on programs to reduce parking needs; however, as student population grows, an increased need for parking is also inevitable. A denial to allow the College to meet this basic need will hamper their continued growth and limit their opportunity to compete as a leader in higher education offering the same essential amenities of other private colleges.

CI 7.3 “Collaborate with the local colleges to provide the overall community with quality public programs, and quality open spaces.”

- The site plans incorporate balanced parking while maintaining existing pedestrian connections and alleviating parking pressures on adjacent neighborhoods. The balanced parking proposed has been strategically designed to provide the minimum number of stalls to accommodate the growing need while carefully preserving existing outdoor gathering spaces where both students and community members enjoy the enduring beauty and collegiate ambiance of the St. Olaf campus.

With Objective 7 in mind, the college respectfully requests the City's cooperation to allow this campus initiative in support of balancing parking to sustain the overall programming and educational mission of the college.

Chapter 4: Land use – Objective 3: Encourage a compact development pattern, and support infill, redevelopment and land intensification.

LU 3.2 “Work collaboratively to identify structures and sites for redevelopment, intensification or reuse.”

- In 2022, the college sought to accommodate current enrollment via a student housing redevelopment project that consolidated multiple deteriorating single-family residences at the outer boundary of campus to create new student housing in a more interior campus location. At that time, only replacement parking was constructed compensatory to that which was being lost due to the decommissioning of the single-family homes which had formerly served as student housing.

Enrollment has continued to grow year-over-year resulting in a natural intensification of the existing use. However, to-date, no additional parking has been added in response to the increased enrollment. Instead, the college has sought to educate students, in addition to staff and faculty, about public transportation and ride-share options as well as to persist in growing partnerships with local transit options to combat increased parking pressures. These on-going efforts are detailed in the attached Campus Parking and Transportation Demand Management Memorandum.

However, despite continued implementation of these measures, a parking deficiency exists. The parking currently being proposed would better balance the available parking based on the quantity of students present as well as visitors for special events, thereby also decreasing parking pressures on adjacent neighborhood streets.

With Objective 3 in mind, the college requests the support of the City to address the existing parking deficiency which cannot be wholly met through transit and rideshare education and partnership opportunities.

4. **The conditional use will be designed, constructed, operated, and maintained so as to be harmonious and appropriate in appearance with the existing or intended character of the general vicinity and that such use will not change the essential character of the same area.**

The additional on-campus parking will improve today's parking imbalance, while at the same time acting in harmony with the existing character of the college campus by complementing the landscaped, scenic conditions surrounding the school. In addition to remaining committed to on-going actions to reduce future parking demand, this project will also provide a tangible way to balance parking needs and lessen the impact of un-permitted student parking on adjacent residential streets.

5. **The conditional use will not be hazardous or reasonably disturbing to existing or future neighboring uses.**

The proposed Campus Parking Re-balance project will not pose any hazardous or disruptive conditions to existing or future neighboring uses but rather will seek to better existing conditions as unmet needs begin to be addressed. The proposed locations have been selected with care to provide a minor addition within the PTA without any notable landscape, traffic level, or pedestrian implications. This proposal will decrease today's parking imbalance and reduce existing parking pressures within adjacent neighborhoods, while the college remains committed to continually reducing future parking demands.

6. **The conditional use will be served adequately by essential public facilities and services such as, streets, police and fire protection, drainage structures, refuse disposal, water and sewer, and schools.**

As the proposed use consists of accessory parking to accommodate in-place facilities and existing enrollment, existing public services will remain adequate to serve the continued principal collegiate use. Sidewalks will be maintained to continue to provide pedestrian connectivity throughout the campus and to adjacent neighborhoods.

7. **The benefits of the conditional use outweigh the potential negative effects to the surrounding area or community.**

No negative effects are anticipated as a result of the proposed Campus Parking Re-balance project. On the contrary, the project will allow the college to provide balanced parking management in conjunction with their on-going efforts to educate students, staff, and faculty and partner with local programs to offer alternate transportation options.

This project addresses a significant on-campus parking imbalance with a lens focused on both student and community interest and sustainability. Step 2 parking within the PTA will be located within the boundaries of the existing parking lot, and Step 3 parking will be located along the existing private utility street owned and maintained by St. Olaf. Both will be accessed via existing curb cuts and will continue to be appropriately screened with landscaping complementary to the existing campus aesthetic.

Continued enrollment growth benefits the overall Northfield community in a variety of ways as students visit local businesses and fill part-time jobs. Appropriate balancing of adequate parking infrastructure with continued actions to reduce single occupancy vehicles is practical and must be allowed to realize improvement in the current parking conditions both on campus and within adjacent neighborhoods. Based on the available parking data, the minimum parking increase is being requested to balance available parking commiserate with the existing enrollment and staffing levels needed to accommodate increased enrollments. The proposal also takes into account that many staff and faculty must commute from various areas of the metro not well connected to the Northfield area via public transit and not necessarily from common locales that would be conducive to carpooling with other staff.

**8. The conditional use will not create excessive additional requirements at public cost for public facilities and services.**

No public cost will be incurred during this project.

**9. The conditional use will not involve uses, activities, processes, materials, equipment and conditions or operations that will be detrimental to any persons, property, or the general welfare by reason of excessive traffic, noise, smoke, fumes, glare, or odors;**

No negative environmental impacts, traffic or student activity not already present, or any conditions associated with excess noise, smoke, fumes, glare, or odors are anticipated with the proposed parking use. As an existing lot is already in-place adjacent to Lincoln Street North and the private utility street is also already in-place, no further lighting or additional curb cuts would be required to facilitate additional parking at either location, and existing pedestrian connectivity and landscaping already meets current City requirements.

**10. The conditional use will not result in the destruction, loss or damage of natural, scenic, or historic features of major importance as may be established in the comprehensive plan or other city plans related to natural, scenic, or historic features.**

With Step 2, 26 new parking stalls are proposed to be added within the existing parking lot located east of the football field and west of Lincoln Street North. Step 3 proposes to add 20 new spaces to the existing private utility street east of the New Residence building. The additional stalls will improve existing parking conditions in these areas while preserving the existing scenic atmosphere of the St. Olaf Campus which continues to be photographed and enjoyed by many. No additional curb cuts will be needed. Existing lighting, landscaping, and pedestrian infrastructure will be maintained, and the northern filtration basin and in-place storm sewer will continue to be meet stormwater requirements for this area as it was initially designed.

**11. The traffic and parking generated by the use will not lower the Levels of Services as described in the comprehensive transportation plan update of intersections within a quarter of a mile of the site.**

Traffic is not anticipated to increase as a result of the project since the traffic and parking needs already exist. Alternatively, this project seeks to right-size existing parking by making further on-campus parking available, thereby reducing the parking stress being experienced by adjacent neighborhoods.

**12. In residential districts, the use is of a similar height, building orientation, massing, setback, and scale as to be compatible with surrounding uses in compliance with Section 3.5, Neighborhood Compatibility Standards.**

The project is not within a residential district. However, the additional parking within the PTA is designed with the adjacent neighborhood in mind and will be compatible with all above referenced standards as well as the maintenance of existing lighting and landscaping complementary to adjacent residential properties.

- 13. In the Perimeter Transition Area (PTA) within the college development district (CD-S) that abut residential and commercial districts, height, building orientation, massing, setback and scale shall be considered in building renovation and/or new construction in order to maintain compatibility with surrounding areas as described in Section 3.4, Neighborhood Compatibility Standards. These neighborhood compatibility standards are to be administered in order to maintain a harmonious neighborhood environment and absolute compliance with these standards is not intended.**

The additional parking within the PTA is designed with the adjacent neighborhood in mind and will be compatible with all above referenced standards as well as the maintenance of existing lighting and landscaping complementary to adjacent residential properties.

- 14. Impacts such as noise, hours of activity, and outdoor lighting have been sufficiently addressed to mitigate negative impacts on nearby uses.**

There will be no change in existing conditions except that adjacent neighborhoods are expected to experience less parking in front of their homes due increased permitted parking being available on-campus. While relocated on-campus, all traffic and student activity levels are expected to remain static. No additional lighting is proposed as existing parking lot and street lighting is adequate to meet both City and campus security requirements.

- 15. Parking is adequately provided for the proposed conditional use, but an excessive number of parking spaces are not proposed. The following information shall be provided as part of the Conditional Use Permit application.**

- (i) **Number of customers, patients, visitors, or other patrons of the proposed use. Information should also be included detailing the expected parking behavior of these persons (i.e., how long a customer may be expected to be at the facility);**
- (ii) **Number of full time and part time employees;**
- (iii) **Number and approximate timing of deliveries.**

The Conditional Use Permit is relevant to additional parking being requested with the PTA. The noted criteria are located within the attached Campus Parking and Transportation Demand Management Memorandum.

On behalf of St. Olaf College, thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact me at 952.426.0699 or via email at [Stephanie.Merdan@ISGInc.com](mailto:Stephanie.Merdan@ISGInc.com) with any questions or if there is any additional information we can provide in support of this project.

Sincerely,



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