



July 8, 2020

City of Pasadena Planning Commission
Attn: Tess Molinar
Hale Building
175 N. Garfield Ave., 2nd Floor
Pasadena, CA 91101

Re: Church Housing

Dear Members of the Planning Commission:

Pasadena Heritage generally supports the exploration of housing opportunities on church property. In recent years, Pasadena's faith-based communities have been some of the strongest advocates for affordable and transitional housing. As congregations shrink and parking lots are more underutilized, it makes sense to explore ways to expand opportunities for housing.

As historic preservation advocates, we do also recognize that Pasadena's churches and places of worship include some of our greatest historic resources. Many are already designated landmarks, but others are eligible, yet undesignated. We ask that the Planning Commission recognize their historic value and carefully design an ordinance that is respectful of these resources. Some are in more commercial areas but some are integrated into residential neighborhoods where they are part of the overall fabric. A one-size-fits-all approach may not work, and attention must be paid to setbacks, height, and massing so that the new housing does not visually dominate the existing churches or impact their surroundings too greatly.

One suggestion we have in addressing the size and bulk of potential new buildings is to reconsider how the shared open space requirement is calculated. Legislators have recognized that parking could be shared by the residents and adjacent church. Is the same true for open space? Many of our churches in Pasadena have courtyards, gardens, and plazas that are already treated as semi-public space. Allowing this space to count towards the open space requirement could further reduce bulk, while simultaneously reducing the cost of construction.

Parking reductions from current levels are appropriate, but we must also consider peak traffic. On a typical Sunday morning when church is in session and most residents are home, would parking spill over into residential streets? This will heavily depend on how active the current congregation is and where the church is located. We ask that peak parking be considered in some way.

We also recognize the difference between churches in multi-family zones and those in single-family. Churches in the Central District may be the best fit for higher-density infill housing. There is a greater concentration of jobs and more accessible transit in the urban core. In single-family districts, where even the churches have a smaller neighborhood feel, it might be more appropriate to explore ADU-type housing instead of multifamily or there may not be room at all, depending on the specific site. Another question is should the design of new buildings be

related to the architectural design of the church and how will design guidelines be applied, where appropriate to encourage neighborhood compatibility? Would existing design regulations apply or are new standards needed?

Finally, another concern regards the maintenance and management of the new housing. Managing rentals is a long term commitment, and the difference between good and poor management can make all the difference in the world to low-income renters. We ask that this is considered carefully.

We understand that this is a study session, and we offer no definitive positions at this time. Instead, we hope these comments and suggestions can help move the discussion forward and highlight for you our historic preservation perspective which we hope you will take into account.

Sincerely,



Susan N. Mossman
Executive Director



Andrew Salimian
Preservation Director