



July 28, 2020

City of Pasadena Design Commission
Attn: Michi Takeda
Hale Building
175 N. Garfield Ave., 2nd Floor
Pasadena, CA 91101

Re: 127-141 North Madison Ave.

Dear Members of the Design Commission:

Pasadena Heritage would like to provide comment on the proposed project at 127-141 North Madison Avenue. This project was proposed at a sensitive site in respect to our City's important historic resources: it lies between the National Register listed Pasadena Playhouse and Ford Place Districts. It is also directly adjacent to the National Register listed Blinn House, home to the Women's City Club of Pasadena. It was because of this context, and from our experience with the out-of-scale Affordable Housing Concession Permit in other projects citywide, that Pasadena Heritage appealed this project to the City Council. Since then, we have met with the developer, the design team, and planning staff to determine project parameters designed to protect the Blinn House and adjacent historic districts.

Pasadena Heritage and the applicant agreed on several major changes to this project that have improved this project significantly. The building's mass was reorganized so that the tallest portions are closer to Madison Avenue, stepping back from the low-scale Ford Place District. We believed that there was an opportunity for more height on the Playhouse District side, where denser multi-family and historic office buildings define the built environment. We also asked the architect to look towards the Playhouse District for design influence instead of the earlier Craftsman motifs that were used. We are glad to see study of the Scottish Rite Temple, which has helped improve both the design of the "bridge" element as well as the railings. Perhaps the most impactful conditions we agreed on, however, were that all parking would be subterranean and that the underground parking would be set back enough from the lot lines to allow plantings in native soil. Those two changes give this building a little extra breathing room from its neighbors.

We applaud staff for a thorough staff report, and we agree with them on their proposed conditions. We have a few additional suggestions which we believe will add some further depth to the project, listed below:

- Replace glass balconies in inner courtyard – The architect-designed railings are simple and elegant. Railings should be consistent throughout the building to establish continuity. The interior courtyard has become more intimate and welcoming, but the glass railings detract from that experience, and make it appear almost voyeuristic. Metal railings would also add to a richness of detail at the threshold between the street and the interior courtyard, creating an inviting experience.

- Privacy screen at courtyard – Refine the privacy screen at courtyard entrance to better reflect design language used elsewhere in building. Screen should use language established elsewhere, either an interpretation the dark metal railing or of the wooden fins and trellises. Keep top line of fence and gates consistent across span.
- Northeast corner of building at first floor – Where residential and commercial windows come nearly flush ground level, create some separation either through a base element, curb, or other device. It appears a section detail is included on page A7.2, but said detail does not match the elevation drawing.
- Lighting – Rethink contemporary can design, which appear too stark and protruding, and replace with a less drastic sconce. Beneath the bridge, break up the four strips into an asymmetric composition to direct light into strategic access points and further accentuate asymmetry.

We thank the developer and design team for being receptive to our suggestions. This project has come a long way and we recognize that. We look forward to hearing input and suggestions from the Design Commission to further improve this building.

Sincerely,



Susan N. Mossman
Executive Director



Andrew Salimian
Preservation Director