



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: SEPTEMBER 22, 2020

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

FROM: DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW
NEW CONSTRUCTION OF A FIVE-STORY, 24-UNIT MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL PROJECT
164 CHESTNUT STREET

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Design Commission:

Environmental Determination

1. Find that the proposed project is consistent with the General Plan designation, with the General Plan goals and policies for the site, and with the applicable zoning designation and regulations; and that the project site has no value as habitat for endangered or threatened species, and can be served by utilities and public services;
2. Find that approval of the project will not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, water quality or cultural resources; and
3. Conclude, therefore, that the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under §15332, (Class 32) "in-fill development projects" and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class; therefore, there are no unusual circumstances.

Finding for Compliance with the Tree Protection Ordinance

Acknowledge that there are no trees on the subject site.

Finding for Modification of Driveway Location

1. Find that the presence of a 10'-wide easement along the east side of the site and the presence of a street tree near the western property line limits the applicant's ability to

comply with the driveway location requirement of the Zoning Code and, therefore, approve the proposed driveway location.

Findings for Concept Design Approval

1. Find that the project, upon implementation of the conditions of approval, will comply with the purposes of design review, the design-related goals and policies of the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the Design Guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan; and
2. Based on these findings, approve the application for Concept Design Review subject to the following conditions to be further reviewed during Final Design Review:

Conditions

1. All balcony railings shall be the glass-and-metal design proposed for the upper level railings. In addition, the solid side wall on the east side of the easterly stack of balconies on the north elevation shall be removed or broken up to lighten the mass.
2. Incorporate fenestration and/or additional cladding materials into the building walls surrounding the courtyard to break up blank wall conditions and enliven and soften the outdoor space.
3. The proposed fiber-cement wall cladding shall terminate at inside corners, which may include vertically stacked window openings.
4. The project shall comply with all Zoning Code requirements, with the exception of the driveway location requirement modified in this decision. In addition, the project shall comply with the conditions from the Departments of Public Works and Transportation in Attachment A, to the satisfaction of said departments.

BACKGROUND:

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: High Mixed Use (0 – 2.25 FAR)
- Zoning: CD-1 (Central District Specific Plan, Old Pasadena Subdistrict)
- Design Guidelines: The applicable design guidelines are the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan and the Design Guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan.
- Site: The site is comprised of a single 10,012-square-foot lot on the south side of Chestnut Street at the terminus of Townsend Place. It is trapezoidal in shape and is currently developed with a historic two-story house that was previously converted into multiple units and has been approved for relocation to a vacant lot at 781 S. Grand Avenue. There is also a detached garage/carport structure on the site. There are no trees on the site and there is one street tree along the property's frontage.

- **Surroundings:** Surrounding properties are developed with one-to-four-story residential buildings, three-to-four-story office buildings, one-to-three-story church buildings and surface parking lots. The Metro Gold Line right-of-way is in close proximity to the site, separated by a development site, on which a 100-unit residential development has been approved, but not constructed. Nearby historical resources include the Old Pasadena Historic District (nearby contributing structures include St. Andrew’s Church, 1929, 281 N. Raymond Avenue and the Fannie Bonham Rowhouses, 1898, 221 N. Raymond Avenue) and the Pasadena Civic Center Historic District, including nearby contributing site - Memorial Park.
- **Project Description:** The proposed project is a new, five-story approximately 22,492-square-foot, 24-unit multi-family residential building with two levels of subterranean parking.
- **Site Design:** The proposed building covers the entire site with a 5’ setback on the north side and 10’ setbacks on the east, south and west. A driveway entrance ramp to the subterranean parking structure and a ground-level shared courtyard are also proposed at the northeast corner of the site.
- **Architectural Style:** Contemporary
- **Developer:** Alpha Cap, LLC
- **Architect:** Plus Architects
- **Landscape Architect:** SQLA, Inc.

ANALYSIS:

Design Commission Comments from Preliminary Consultation

On February 25, 2020, the Design Commission reviewed an application for Preliminary Consultation for this project. The Commission’s comments from that meeting, with excerpts from the design team’s responses, and staff’s comments, are detailed in the chart below. The design team’s full response are in Attachment B.

Commissioner Comments, February 25, 2020	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
1. Explore ways to create a more prominent pedestrian entrance to the project and, if possible, locating it west of the driveway to create a more pedestrian friendly connection to Old Pasadena and the Memorial Park station. Suggestions include creating a corridor	“...we first looked at creating an entrance in the center of the building connecting to the main hallway by redesigning units 101 and 102. Based on this initial study, we decided against this approach since it would substantially alter and break up the appearance of the front elevation. By creating a direct path to the hallways	The enhancements made to the easterly pedestrian access point create a clear, enhanced main entry to the project, which incorporates the main courtyard into the path of travel to the residential units above. The westerly residential entrance and redesigned pathway at that location will also create a more convenient access point for residents using METRO rail. The creation of direct access stoops to the ground-level

Commissioner Comments, February 25, 2020	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>between units 101 and 102 that would create a more direct path from the street to the courtyard or, if that is infeasible, flaring the driveway to the west to expand the currently proposed pedestrian entrance at the northeast corner.</p>	<p>and bypassing the courtyard, the utilization of the courtyard would have become significantly diminished...</p> <p>We view the courtyard as a focal point and natural gathering space for residents and wanted to facilitate access and visibility by better integrating this Eastern entrance with the rounded nature of the cul de sac... we reconfigured and widened this entrance, and by providing additional landscaping, as well as a pedestrian canopy, we created a more inviting entrance that will encourage use by tenants who will be walking...</p> <p>Additionally, we decided to redesign and reimagine our entrance at the Western corner of the property as an alternative direct access. We eliminated the staircase which was originally proposed near this entrance and redesigned this sideyard also to be more inviting with additional landscaping and trees... By further enhancing and opening this western entrance, tenants will have better optionality in terms of how they will enter from the street. This Western Pedestrian entrance can be used on a daily basis by tenants who may either walk directly from their unit or who will be walking down to the garage below.</p> <p>Finally, in order to further emphasize the walkability for</p>	<p>units at the street edge also improves the building's relationship to the street. As currently designed, the proposed new fencing includes a combination of narrow and wide pickets, which limit public visibility along the street. Current Planning staff has indicated that the Zoning Code requires fencing along the street to be a minimum of 50% open; therefore, the design of the proposed fences will be required to be modified to comply with this requirement and staff has recommended a condition requiring compliance with all Zoning Code requirements. With this condition implemented, staff finds that this comment will be satisfactorily addressed.</p>

Commissioner Comments, February 25, 2020	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
	tenants, unit 101 and 102 will have direct access into their unit from Chestnut Street as well.”	
<p>2. Further explore the design of the parking structure entry portal to create a more integrated massing at that location.</p>	<p>“As mentioned above, we reimagined the main pedestrian and parking entry to be more cohesive with the current streetscape. We eliminated the parking entrance’s stucco pony wall in order to further open up the entrance and better activate the corner of the building. Additionally, we redesigned the entrance of the parking and pedestrian entrance with a grass and concrete paver system. This paver system serves several purposes, first, it is meant to be more inviting and to better blend in with the surround neighborhood landscape. Second, the extended paver system helps to widen and expand the driveway approach making our entrance much better integrated with the flow of the cul de sac...”</p>	<p>While the enhancements that have been made are an improvement to the project, staff remains concerned that the volume of stacked balconies that cantilever over the parking entrance ramp appears heavy and unsupported. The cause of this condition may be the solid balcony railings proposed at the base of the stacked balconies, as well as the easterly solid vertical wall extending from the building face along the balcony edges. Staff has recommended a condition requiring these to be modified to become glass railings on both the front and east sides, similar to the railing design proposed at the fifth floor, or that the east wall be broken up to lighten up the mass. Upon implementation of this condition, staff finds that this comments will be satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>3. Consider whether the side and rear yards may incorporate usable outdoor space for adjoining residential units at the ground level, or enhance common courtyard spaces. In addition, coordinate with the developer of the adjacent future project to the east to identify opportunities for softening the barrier between the two projects with open or glass railings and landscaping rather than solid walls. In future</p>	<p>“As previously mentioned, we redesigned our Western side yard to better focus on accessibility and usability. Each unit on the first floor has a private outdoor deck which will have direct access to the side and backyards. By providing exterior entrances to the private decks, residents will be better able to utilize and activate space in the adjoining side yards.</p> <p>We have discussed the opening of the shared property line wall with Metropolitan Pacific Real</p>	<p>The design of the side yards includes landscape elements and direct access to units’ decks, which will ensure that these spaces are able to be utilized. The applicant has committed to working with the developer of the adjacent easterly project to ensure that the two projects are as integrated as possible. This comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>

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<p>submittals, include the adjacent project's site plan with the proposed site plan for this project.</p>	<p>Estate Group, the developer of the adjacent project to our East. The largest challenge is that as designed and approved, the neighboring project has a large retaining wall which abuts our Eastern property line. This retaining wall will run parallel to our wall and any opening of our wall may be negated by the adjacent retaining wall. We are continuing to discuss and explore ways of potentially opening portions of both walls with open railing without causing significant cost or delays to our neighboring project."</p>	
<p>4. The project courtyards should be designed to include useful amenities and features such as shading devices appropriate to their solar exposure, seating and cooking facilities, water features, etc. The landscape and hardscape design should reflect the local climate and landscape traditions and should relate to the design of the building.</p>	<p>"We have continued to expand upon our initial courtyard design to make it more accessible and functional for all residents. We envision the courtyard as a central meeting point for residents and guests. The area is meant to be a calm and relaxing amenity that acts as a break from the business of daily life. We are proposing an outdoor water feature and additional outdoor benches which can be used by not only first floor residents, but residents who live on all floors. The landscaping is accentuated by a centrally placed native Flowering Cherry tree which adds color and shade to the courtyard and also helps to provide a zen like atmosphere."</p>	<p>The passive design of the ground-level courtyard as described in the applicant's response and submitted drawings is appropriate. The proposed roof deck design includes more active uses, including a barbeque, bar seating, fire pit and gaming table. This comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>

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<p>5. Incorporate fenestration into the building walls surrounding the courtyard to break up blank wall conditions and enliven the outdoor space.</p>	<p>“In order to provide improved fenestration in the courtyard, we decided to focus first on the entry point. We added an open canopy at the entrance which leads pedestrians to the main courtyard. Additionally, in order to break up the stucco walls we changed the material of the fourth and fifth floor balconies from stucco to glass. This subtle change helps the courtyard to feel more open and inviting overall. Furthermore, we changed the balconies on the rear of the property to glass as well in order to better integrate with the overall design of the building.”</p>	<p>The limited open balcony railings surrounding the courtyard are an improvement; however, staff recommends that all of the railings, rather than only those on the upper floors, be changed to glass and that fenestration be incorporated into these walls to further enhance the elevations facing the courtyard. In looking at the floor plans, it appears that clerestory windows could be added in kitchens, as well as sidelights at the entry doors, which could be frosted or fritted to ensure privacy, to improve the elevations and bring additional natural light into the units. Staff has recommended a condition requiring this and, upon implementation, this comment will be satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>6. The mix of materials at the front of the building should be carried throughout all of the facades to ensure a complete, holistic design on all building facades. In particular, the northeast corner has a thin, insubstantial appearance due to the transition of materials at an outside corner, and this should be further studied to ensure that the building exhibits a sense of solidity and permanence. The colors and materiality of the building should also be further studied to lighten the building and relate better to the surrounding context and the City of Pasadena as a whole. Consider the way in which the building responds to the existing</p>	<p>“...we went through several new iterations principally focused on softening the architectural elements of the façade in order to be more cohesive with the surrounding neighborhood... We first selected a lighter fiber cement panel board which carries throughout a larger portion of the project. This color selection was designed to better integrate with the brick veneers which are incorporated in neighboring properties such as St. Andrews Church and Pastoral Center as well as 100 Corson St. This more muted color is better in line with other recently completed projects nearby such as the Theo at 289 N. El Molino Ave.</p> <p>...we have further incorporated the fiber cement panel board and</p>	<p>The change to a lighter material improves the building’s residential character and relationship to the surrounding context and the incorporation of the material on other building elevations beyond the front elevation is an improvement. However, horizontal in-plane transitions from the fiber-cement material to stucco continue to have a thin appearance at the side elevations. Staff has recommended a condition requiring further study of these transitions to ensure a greater sense of mass and permanence. At the south end of the east elevation and the north end of the west elevation, this could be achieved by continuing the material to the large vertical window openings near the current termini, with the material returning within the opening recess. On the north end of the east elevation, the material could continue and wrap to the south-facing courtyard elevation (which could also help to address comment #5).</p>

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brick theme of the area.	metal banding in the rear of the property in order to make the building more distinct and memorable from all angles. The top two floors of the rear facing balconies which overlook Memorial Park where also changed to glass... Finally, we added an additional Window on the fifth floor of the rear unit on the Eastern façade...”	
7. Explore ways to further soften the building with architectural detail and horizontal elements, including at guardrails and pergolas. Consider expanding the roof deck pergola to the edge of the building to soften the transitions at the roofline.	<p>“The revised color scheme for the fiber cement panel board is accompanied with lighter toned metal features and window designs. This lighter silver color is carried throughout all metal features including the guardrails as well as the entry and rooftop pergolas... In order to provide a break between horizontal elements, we replaced portions of the metal banding on the front of the building facing Chestnut St...”</p> <p>We explored different options of extending the rooftop pergola to the edge of building but ultimately decided against this option. One of the central purposes of this roof deck was to provide a break and openness to the Western side of building. When extending out the rooftop pergola, we observed that overall effect of opening this portion of the building was diminished and less impactful.”</p>	Staff finds that the conceptual materials and detailing have satisfactorily addressed this comment, which will be enhanced by the condition proposed in the response to comment #6 above.

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8. If a public art project is proposed for the site, staff of the Cultural Affairs Division and an art consultant should be engaged as soon as possible to avoid delays in the review process.	“We have decided to pay the in lieu fee.”	This comment has been addressed.

Programming and Circulation

The building is proposed to cover the site with the exception of a 5’ setback on the north (street) side, 10’ setbacks on the sides and rear and a covered driveway ramp and open-to-sky courtyard space near the northeast corner. The side setbacks allow for pedestrian access, with the easterly side yard being utilized as the main pedestrian entry to the project, and with the grade at that location aligned with the courtyard grade. A communicating stair is proposed to extend from the courtyard to the upper levels and a second stair and elevator, which extend to the subterranean parking structure, are located near the center of the site. The first through fourth levels each have five residential units and the fifth floor has four units and a roof deck. Each unit also has an outdoor private deck space. The proposed programming and circulation are appropriate and consistent with the design guidelines.

Modification of Required Driveway Location

The Zoning Code requires driveways to be located within 5’ of a side property line and allows the Design Commission to modify this requirement to preserve a street or on-site tree. In this case, the driveway cannot be placed within 5’ of the east side property line due to a 10’-wide easement along the entire east side of the property, which does not allow permanent structures to be placed above or below ground. In addition, an existing street tree near the westerly property line would not allow for sufficient space for a two-way driveway within 5’ of the west property line without requiring removal or relocation of the tree. As such, staff recommends that the Commission approve the proposed driveway location at the east end of the site, 10’ from the east side property line.

Orientation

The proposed new building has windows and balconies arranged in a clear pattern on all sides, along with pedestrian access points along the street, including an enhanced main entry to the site at the northeast corner. Given its high level of visibility from multiple publicly accessible locations, the changes that have been made since the Preliminary Consultation have improved the building’s orientation to those view opportunities.

Height, Massing and Modulation

The height limit at this location is 60’, measured from the lowest point of existing grade (or 75’ with height averaging). The drawings submitted show the maximum height to be 57’4”, in

compliance with the height limit. The floor plans and renderings depict the building masses being modulated by open spaces (courtyard and roof deck) as well as extensive projecting and recessed balconies. Overall, the modulation proposed is appropriate and responsive to the design guidelines and previous comments from the Commission.

Architectural Style and Detailing

The proposed new building is contemporary in design. It has a flat roof, articulated massing, large panels of glazing, including at building corners, glass and stucco balcony railings and a combination of smooth stucco and fiber-cement exterior walls, with metal accents. The surrounding context contains a mix of building types and architectural styles and is not adjacent to any historic resources. As such, a contemporary designed building with compatible massing, form and materiality is appropriate at this location. The materials and their detailing will be reviewed further during Final Design Review; however, staff finds that the glass-and-metal balcony railings impart a lighter appearance to the building overall than the heavier solid stucco railings and recommends a condition requiring all upper-level balconies to have glass-and-metal railings.

Compatibility

The proposed new buildings are generally compatible with their immediate surroundings, particularly recently completed and anticipated future development, in terms of height, massing, setbacks and architectural design. The revised design submitted for this review relates better to surrounding context and presents a more residential character than the previous design reviewed during Preliminary Consultation.

Conceptual Landscape Design

The landscape plans provided outline an extensive program of landscaping that would soften the existing streetscape and enhance the pathways and open spaces within the project site. As noted previously, the common courtyard is proposed as a passive space with a water feature and seating and the fifth floor roof deck is proposed as a more active space with outdoor cooking and eating space, and a gaming table. A total of 44 new 24-inch-box trees and 13 15-gallon trees are proposed to be planted on the ground level, with those along the easterly side yard being planted in natural soil. The proposed landscaping and amenities are appropriate for the site and context.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

Staff routed the project for comment to several City departments, as well as other divisions of the Planning & Community Development Department, including the Public Works, Transportation, Fire and Housing Departments and the Building, Current Planning and Cultural Affairs Divisions of the Planning & Community Development Department. The Building Division and Fire Department provided standard comments related to Building and Fire Code compliance. Cultural Affairs staff indicated that the project is subject to the public art requirement and Housing Department staff indicated that the project is in compliance with inclusionary housing requirements. Current Planning staff identified a few minor areas of non-compliance with Zoning Code requirements, or where compliance cannot be determined, most of which will not affect the design, including driveway and parking stall widths, courtyard minimum dimensions (which will require reduction in projecting deck and stair widths), and

fence transparency along the street. Recommended conditions from the Departments of Public Works and Transportation are included in Attachment A and staff has also recommended a condition requiring compliance with Zoning Code requirements to be confirmed during Final Design Review.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The project will be constructed on a previously developed site in an urbanized area and is consistent with the General Plan, Central District Specific Plan and Zoning designations that apply to the property. Staff engaged ESA, an environmental consulting firm, to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the project and determine whether it would meet the required findings for a Categorical Exemption under class 32, “infill development projects.” Based on the documentation prepared, which are in Attachments D and E, the project would not have the potential to result in significant impacts related to air quality or noise. The project size is below the threshold for requiring a CEQA-level traffic study and, therefore, has been determined to not have the potential to result in significant impacts related to traffic. Standard Code requirements will ensure that the project will not result in significant impacts related to water quality and the previously approved relocation of the existing house has been determined to not result in significant impacts related to cultural resources. Based on this analysis, staff recommends that the Commission determine that the project is Categorically Exempt from CEQA as an “infill development project.” In addition, the applicant has provided documentation indicating that the project will be in compliance with the adopted Climate Action Plan, which will be confirmed during building plan check.

Because the project would place new residential uses adjacent to the 210 Freeway, staff also engaged ESA to prepare a Health Risk Assessment to identify and disclose the potential health risks to the future residents of the project and identify measures to lower those risks (see Attachment F). The report concludes that the project will not pose a health risk to its residents and does not require any specific measures to be taken to protect their health.

CONCLUSION:

The project design has satisfactorily addressed the comments provided during Preliminary Consultation and is consistent with the design guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan. Staff recommends approval of the application for Concept Design Review for the project with conditions to improve the quality and detailing of proposed materials.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Reviewed by:



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Attachments:

- A. Recommended conditions from Departments of Public Works and Transportation
- B. Responses to Preliminary Consultation comments
- C. Current plans, elevations, renderings
- D. Air Quality Study
- E. Noise Study
- F. Health Risk Assessment