



**PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT**

DATE: AUGUST 24, 2021
TO: DESIGN COMMISSION
FROM: DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR, PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION – DEMOLITION OF EXISTING ON-SITE STRUCTURES, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW THREE-STORY 17,505 SQUARE-FOOT, 23-UNIT MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL PROJECT WITH ONE LEVEL OF SUBTERRANEAN PARKING.
130-140 N. MAR VISTA AVENUE

Project Description:

The proposal includes the demolition of four (total) residential units including a single-family residence (constructed in 1925) at 130 N. Mar Vista Avenue, a single-family structure (constructed in 1930), and a detached duplex (constructed in 1946) at 140 N. Mar Vista Avenue. The new project will include the construction of a new three-story, 17,505 square-foot, 23-unit multi-family residential project with one level of subterranean parking. The applicant plans to offer 20 units of market-rate housing, and 3 units of very low income housing. The site is located two blocks south of the 210 freeway, at the northeast corner of North Mar Vista Avenue and East Union Street. The project site is comprised of two parcels, with a total site area of 15,426 square-feet, or .35 acres.

A tree inventory submitted with the application indicates that there are three on-site trees, one of which is protected by species and size. Additionally, there are five off-site public street trees located in the parkway fronting the two lots. As part of the proposed project, the applicant is proposing to remove the three on-site trees and protect in place the five public street trees.

The project site sits within a transitional block of varying residential architectural styles, and development periods. Directly west of the project site, across North Mar Vista Avenue, is a multi-family residential project constructed in 2016, in a Mediterranean Revival style. Directly abutting the project site to the east is a two-story, multi-family residential brick vernacular style building, constructed in 1929, which has been determined to be eligible for designation as an individual historic resource. Directly to the north of the project site is another recent multi-family residential development constructed in 2007 and designed in a contemporary style. Directly south of the project site, across Union Street, is a Mid-Century Ranch style two-story apartment building constructed in 1959.

The existing buildings on site are currently not listed in the City's resources database as eligible or designated historic resources. While the existing house at 130 North Mar Vista does appear to be relatively intact, it is not an exemplary example of its Spanish Colonial Revival style, nor

does it appear to be associated with any persons or events of historic significance. The existing residential structures located at 140 North Mar Vista Avenue also do not appear to be of historical significance. The primary structure at this address has been significantly altered with the enclosure of the original front porch and the construction of a new front porch, along with a detached accessory structure constructed in 1940, which now houses the two detached rear units.

The new building will have an approximate 25-foot front yard setback at the west primary frontage along North Mar Vista Avenue. The building is required to have a five-foot interior side yard setback along its north perimeter, with which it complies and exceeds through an undulating façade, to accommodate required light and air separation between the proposed building and the adjacent multi-family residential development to the immediate north. Along the east rear yard, the building is required to have a minimum five-foot setback, with which it complies while also maintaining a 15-foot light and air separation between the proposed building and the eligible historic resource to the east. Along the building's secondary, street side elevation along East Union Street, the proposed project complies with the required 15-foot setback.

The building form consists of an "L"-shaped plan reflective of the rectangular shape of the project site. The main garden is located as a forecourt design within the crook of the "L" of the building, while blending directly into the front and street-side yard landscaped setbacks. The garage access is via a ramp from East Union Street. The ground floor features both residential units and enclosed amenity spaces. The second and third floors feature one and two-bedroom residential units, with the third level also featuring overhead mezzanine levels through a 12-foot height increase allowed as an affordable housing concession.

The residential units are accessed through a central, double-loaded corridor that is partially open. Along the south façade, overlooking the main garden, are projecting balconies for the second and third floor bedrooms, while the floor units along this elevation have private patios.

The subtractive, volumetric design of the proposed building is contemporary in style with simple block forms. Along the primary ends of the building, along North Mar Vista Avenue and East Union Street, the facades feature canted, recessed, fenestrations for the windows. The proposed material palette includes a combination of modern industrial finishes including board-formed concrete, various metal panel designs, CMU block, and stucco. A contemporary style building is generally appropriate within the surrounding transitional context of the developed neighborhood.

Applicable Design Guidelines:

- Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan
- Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-family Residential Districts

Previous Reviews:

- Predevelopment Plan Review (PPR). A PPR comment letter was provided to the applicant on July 22, 2020 and a PPR meeting was held with the applicant on August 6, 2020. The project does not meet the threshold for City Council PPR review.
- Preliminary Consultation. The project, under a previous architect, was reviewed by the Design Commission on September 8, 2020. However, under new architects, the project has changed substantially from the previous design iteration, requiring a new Preliminary Consultation before the Design Commission.

Approvals Needed/Project Scheduling:

- Affordable Housing Concession Permit – may be required dependent on requested concessions (Hearing Officer).
- Concept and Final Design Review (Design Commission).
- Building Permits

CEQA Clearance:

This is preliminary consultation regarding design review and is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Staff Observations:

Applicable Design Guidelines:

The following design guidelines are applicable to the project and should guide further development and study of the project as it moves forward in the design review process:

Design-Related Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan:

- 4.10: Architecture that enhances. Locate and design buildings to relate to and frame major public streets, open spaces, and cityscape. New development at intersections should consider any number of corner treatments, and should balance safety and accessibility concerns with the vision of the area and the need for buildings to engage the street and create a distinct urban edge.
- 4.11: Development that is compatible. Require that development demonstrates a contextual relationship with neighboring structures and sites addressing such elements as building scale, massing, orientation, setbacks, buffering, the arrangement of shared and private open spaces, visibility, privacy, automobile and truck access, impacts of noise and lighting, landscape quality, infrastructure, and aesthetics.

- 10.7: Landscape. Encourage sustainable practices for landscape materials, landscape design, and land development.
- 23.1: Character and Design. Design and modulate buildings to avoid the sense of “blocky” and undifferentiated building mass, incorporate well-defined entries, and use building materials, colors and architectural details complementing the neighborhood, while allowing flexibility for distinguished design solutions.
- 23.3: Provide appropriate setbacks, consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, along the street frontage and, where there are setbacks, ensure adequate landscaping is provided.

Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-family Residential Districts:

- 1.3: Corner Lots. Buildings on corner lots should be designed to positively define and frame the public realm of both streets they front.
- 2.2: Activating the street. New multi-family and mixed-use buildings should be designed with frontages that activate the street by providing direct access to their ground floor dwellings and commercial spaces.
- 5.2: Walls and fences. The introduction of low landscape walls and fences perpendicular to the street, and separating front yards should be minimized.
- 5.3: Berms. The introduction of berms in front yards that are used to screen ground-floor uses should be avoided.
- 7.1: Scale. Buildings should be scaled to respond to their context by sensitively and positively addressing the scale and massing of their adjacent neighbors. This can be accomplished by:
 - Including elements such as porches, galleries, arcades, etc. to relate the scale of facades to those of existing buildings.
 - Introducing landscape and/or trees as a screen between existing and new buildings.
- 7.2: Side and rear elevations. The rear and/or side elevations of new buildings that are visible from the public realm should be design with equal care and quality as the front or principal façade.
- 7.5: Multiple Lot Projects. The massing of projects on combined lots should be broken down into increments that relate to surrounding buildings. On very large lots, the division of projects into two or more separate buildings of different type, density, height, and massing is encouraged.
- 8.1: Entrances into buildings. New buildings should be entered directly and prominently from the street through a lobby, or indirectly through a covered or uncovered passage. Entrance ways and doorways should be clearly identifiable as prominent points of access into buildings and their form should dominate all other openings.
- 9.1: Garage Entrances. Parking garage entrances should be designed and composed as an integral part of the building façade and should not interfere with existing adjacent buildings. The garage entrances should be designed as doorways and be gated or secured by doors scaled in proportion to the overall form of the building.

- Automobile entrances to buildings should be less prominent than pedestrian entrances. This can be accomplished by way of size, massing, or detail variation.
- 13.7: Discoloration of materials. Materials that unintentionally discolor due to weathering or corrosion should be avoided. Materials that discolor naturally, such as copper, are encouraged.
- 13.8: Reflective materials will be allowed only if it can be shown that they will not cause a nuisance to neighboring buildings.
- 15.1: Indoor/outdoor relationships. In response to Pasadena's seasonal climate variations, building massing and landscaping should provide a balance between access to sunlight and to shade. Outdoor spaces should be designed to be inviting and useful places. Building elements such as open air, covered outdoor circulation and balconies should be used to minimize the amount of mechanically heated and cooled space and to expand the building's usable outdoor area.
- 15.2: Passive solar design. Overhangs, shutters, louvers, canopies, and shade trees should be used to minimize solar heat gain. Buildings should be designed to foster the circulation of cooling breezes.
- 16.1: Habitable area. Courtyards and forecourts should be designed to be inviting places that are useful to their occupants. They should provide a central, flat area that is habitable and encourages human activity and interaction. This area may be paved, landscaped with a surface that can be walked on, or a combination of the two and may be raised above surrounding walkways.
- 17.1: Size. Private back or side yard patios or patios within courtyards should be design to be large enough to be occupiable and useful to their occupants.
- 17.2: Balconies and rooftop structures. Balconies should be designed to be large enough to be usable and in a manner that is consistent with the architectural languages of the rest of the building.
- 17.3: Privacy. Private patios, balconies, terraces, roof gardens, and loggias should be designed in a manner that maximizes the privacy of their occupants.

Potential Design Issues:

- Further study the project's relationship to the street edge and the corner to frame and enhance the building's response to the street corner intersection and ensure the project maintains a contextual relationship to the surrounding neighborhood context in massing, siting, setbacks and form.
- Consider the siting and shape of the building form along with internal programming to further activate the two street edges. Design solutions could include but are not limited to shifting the building closer to the required setbacks, providing walk-up terraces, enhanced and enlarged balconies, or step backs in massing for upper-floor terraces.
- Provide additional residential paradigmatic elements such as defined ground floor covered entries and clearly articulated public amenity and circulation spaces.

- Further study the open design of the subterranean garage entry to conceal this feature within the building and ensure the massing of the volume above it appropriately responds to the existing residential neighborhood context and the architectural character of the project overall.
- Consider the double-loaded corridor as an integrated part of the project with equal emphasis on its design and the overall spatial experience of the project's circulation paths. Determine the feasibility of a partially-open central corridor and its comfort for year-round use.
- Study the proposed material and color palette to ensure non-reflectivity, durability, and appropriateness in application for the surrounding residential context.
- The proposed landscape areas, including the main garden appear to have obtrusive barriers such as terraced landscape berms. Carefully consider the landscape design to ensure that it promotes transparency, active and passive programming, sustainability, and street activation.
- Non-street facing elevations should be detailed through materials and overall design as equally as the street-facing façades.
- Consider the addition of architectural features such as awnings, balconies, and other amenities to further enhance the façade planes through programmatic activation and patterning.
- Consider the retention and/or relocation of as many existing trees where feasible, and explore tree preservation incentives. Under PMC Section 8.52.060, a decision may be made through the design review process to waive up to two development standards or accept alternative solutions to assist in the preservation of protected trees. Modifications may include a reduction to garden requirements, guest parking requirements, the location of driveways, building height limits, or other requirements.
- Consider the integration of the transitional spaces between the residential units and the main garden. The majority of the individual residential units should fully engage with the main garden through the use of circulation, balconies, terraces, and façade openings. The use of a double-loaded corridor is efficient for circulation; however, in this application, it severs the north-flanking units' direct connection to the main garden.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Attachments:

- A. Current Planning (Zoning) Compliance Matrix
- B. Project Plans
- C. Project Narrative