



September 13, 2021

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

**Re: 80 S. Oakland Ave. (First Church of Christ, Scientist)**

Dear Members of the Design Commission:

Pasadena Heritage believes that the First Church of Christ, Scientist is one of Pasadena's greatest examples of Classical Revival architecture in the region. We believe it should be treated with the utmost respect and that any new construction should be contextual.

We were pleased to meet with GGA a few months ago and provide early feedback, some of which has already been addressed to some degree. We understand that the long term success of the church and its congregation will be supported through this construction. We also must note that the site of the parking lot was once developed with single-family and multi-family homes, before they were razed to accommodate parking. In that respect, this project is a return to the site's original program, although at a much higher density.

We're confident that the Design Commission can guide this project through the design phase. We ask that special attention is paid to the sightlines of the church, so that they are not obstructed by the new building, and that the public space between the church and the new senior housing building is meaningful. A serious issue with the current design is the parking entrance, which we find detracts from semi-public courtyard between the buildings. City Staff seems to echo this concern in their recommendations.

Attached on the following pages are the suggestions we provided to GGA, some of which still should be addressed, and other that have been at least partially addressed. These remain our specific concerns and hope you will take them into account in your review

We thank you for considering our input, and for your continued consideration for Pasadena's historic resources.

Sincerely,

Susan N. Mossman  
Executive Director

Andrew Salimian  
Preservation Director

## Comments Provided to GGA

**Overall approach is good.** The clean, straightforward contemporary design is an acceptable approach. Though the new building is modern, explore ways to relate it more strongly to the church, through volume, form and motif.

**Major entry and auto court** on El Dorado Street is placed in a good location and the formality of it sets the proper tone. Further design development of the canopy element and materials is needed here. Consider lifting the auto court to sidewalk level, which naturally slows cars entering and exiting, and provides a better experience for pedestrians along the El Dorado frontage, many of whom may be mobility-impaired seniors.

**Parking entrance on Oakland** should be reconsidered. An entrance located closer to the current one on Madison Avenue would not break up the pedestrian experience along Oakland leading to the front of the Church. We understand this is being dictated by the Church, but proper signage could alleviate those concerns. The proposed courtyard between the Church and new building does not really work with the driveway located where it is.

**Better integrate the paseo and courtyard**, which at first looks like one big open space, but in reality is divided into two. More thought is needed on how to attractively divide the space, and make each courtyard a real place. Though the senior housing courtyard is private space, and the paseo is semi-public, they should be unified through landscaping, with an appropriate barrier dividing them. Though the barrier should separate the two spaces, it is essential that there is some transparency to connect them visually.

**Materials** – Authenticity should be the watch word. Whatever the materials are, they should be real, high quality, dignified, elegant, not faux anything.

Since our meeting with GGA, the following three recommendations have been partially addressed but can still be further refined as design progresses:

**Reconsider massing along Oakland Avenue** to better relate to the Church and the Shingle Style house to the south. The two-story volume (where church parking pedestrian exit is located) adjacent to the paseo is very undersized in comparison to the Church and appears like an add-on. This is where the Church and new building interact most directly. We recommend making this a stronger statement, consider raising it to three stories to balance the Church and consider more opaque or unified facades. Its height should line up with a logical reference point on the front portico of the Church. On the southwest corner of the property, consider stepping down to three stories, to relate to the Shingle Style house to the south, the lower scale of El Dorado Street buildings in general, and the stepped massing of the Kaiser office building to the west.

**Building break on El Dorado facade is good.** Consider another break further east, separating the Madison corner building from the main building in a physical way, not just color. Strategize where material changes occur to correspond to these breaks, so that building volumes appear independent.

**Explore more direct references to the Classical Revival design of the Church.** Datum lines are very important and will help relate the new building to the historic building. They are a subtle but important element. Consider making the column-like vertical window bays on the new building stronger. They evoke column flutes but can be pushed further.