



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: SEPTEMBER 14, 2021

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW
FAÇADE REMODEL AND ADDITION ASSOCIATED WITH THE CONVERSION
OF AN EXISTING THEATER BUILDING INTO A MULTI-TENANT
COMMERCIAL BUILDING
673 EAST COLORADO BOULEVARD

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Design Commission:

Environmental Determination

Find that the project is exempt from further environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code Section 21080(b)(9); Administrative Code, Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 15301, Class 1, pertaining to additions to existing facilities such as the existing theater building and, that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class; and therefore, that there are no unusual circumstances.

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. The applicant shall include an illustrated written response to each condition of approval associated with Concept Design Review in the submittal for Final Design Review. Written responses with accompanying diagrams are required.
2. Alternatives façade treatments for the northern half of the east elevation, including but not limited to mosaic tiles, murals, rooftop planters with hanging vines, or punched windows if possible under the building code, shall be included for consideration in the plans submitted or Final Design Review.
3. The design and mounting details of the decorative screen at the southwest corner facing the intersection shall be further studied and enlarged details for this feature shall be included in the Final Design Review submittal.
4. Enlarged details for the engaged pilasters shall be included in the submittal for Final Design Review, clearly depicting that they are substantial and proud of the adjacent wall surface.
5. The circulation and access to the upper floor outdoor dining including the detailing of secondary stair access points and the connection of the upper floor outdoor dining area to the potential ground floor restaurant space shall be restudied and alternative circulation schemes shall be included in the Final Design Review Submittal.
6. The retention of the large non-historic movie theater sign facing Colorado Boulevard shall be reconsidered in advance of Final Design Review.
7. If coordination with the adjacent property owner is needed to fully execute the intended vision for the redevelopment of the subject property, the applicant shall provide proof of such an agreement with the submittal for Final Design Review or revise the plans to more clearly depict that all proposed improvements are solely on the subject property.
8. The applicant shall comply with all comments/conditions from the Departments of Transportation and Public Works, as specified in Attachment B.

BACKGROUND:

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: High Mixed Use (0 – 3.00 FAR)
- Zoning: CD-4 (Central Plan Specific Plan, Pasadena Playhouse sub-district)
- Design Guidelines: The applicable design guidelines are the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the Private Realm Design Guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan and the Pasadena Playhouse Sub-district Design Guidelines of the Central District Specific Plan.

- Site: The site consists of one parcel that is a 24,420 square-foot rectangular shaped corner lot located at the northeast corner of the intersection of East Colorado Boulevard and El Molino Avenue.
- Surroundings: The surrounding context includes four-to-five story contemporary mixed-use developments to the north, south, and west, and a two-story contemporary commercial development to the east. The Pasadena Playhouse Historic District is located one block to the west. The building occupies nearly the entirety of the site, and is built to the north, south and west property lines. The property is directly adjacent to an existing open pedestrian alleyway that serves the commercial building to the east (Vromans bookstore). Currently there is no open space on the property and no protected trees.
- Project Description: The project scope consists of an addition and façade remodel to the existing one-story (with mezzanine) 24,985 square-foot theater building as part of the conversion of the building into a 32,275 square-foot multi-tenant commercial building for office, retail and restaurant use. The scope includes the demolition of a portion of the existing building to create a central courtyard accessible from the Vromans Paseo and from within the building, and the build-out of the existing mezzanine into a full second floor. The facades are proposed to be remodeled with contemporary storefronts, and the parapet height facing Colorado Boulevard, El Molino Avenue and the alley is proposed to be increased to align with the existing parapet height facing the Vromans paseo.
- Site Design: The existing building occupies nearly the entirety of the rectangular site, with the building walls facing the north and west built to the property lines and the majority of the lengths of the building walls facing east and south also extending to the property lines. The proposed site design generally maintains this configuration, but introduces a ground floor courtyard accessible from the easterly side of the site, connecting to an existing paseo serving the adjacent bookstore. The courtyard would be enclosed on three sides, with storefront entrances at the ground floor directly facing the new courtyard. The courtyard itself would be programmed with a central fountain and seating. A roof deck patio (second floor) and trellis are proposed at the easterly side overlooking the paseo and the new courtyard and exterior stairs in the center of the courtyard would provide exterior access to the second floor units and outdoor seating area.
- Architectural Style: Contemporary
- Developer: GD Realty Group
- Architects: McKentley Malak Architects
- Landscape Architect: McKentley Malak Architects

ANALYSIS:

Design Commission Comments from Preliminary Consultation

On April 27, 2021, 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 incorporated into the narrative response and set of plans included in Attachment A.

Commissioner Comments, April 27, 2021	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>1. Continue to explore incorporating additional architectural treatments, such as, murals, architectural reveals, or landscaping at the northeasterly portion of the façade facing the existing paseo, the new exterior stairs in the courtyard and the northwesterly portion of the north elevation facing the alley to alleviate the blank wall conditions found at these locations</p>	<p>Treatments and elements have been added to the project:</p> <p>Per the request of some of the Commissioners, the existing Laemmle blade sign on Colorado has been kept and integrated into the corner restaurant building and dining terrace.</p> <p>A patterned tile wall facing at the exterior stair has been added along with an integrated tile bench.</p> <p>We are proposing that the vines on the wall facing the Vromans Courtyard remain and be encouraged as they will help provide a break from the harder surfaces. This wall sits on the property line and the ability to make modifications is limited.</p> <p>The raised corner tower at Blaze Pizza will have a decorative metal screen that will sit above the entry doors and integrated with the fascia.</p>	<p>The proposed design has been revised to incorporate additional appropriate design strategies, such as landscaping and decorative tiles, to alleviate the prior substantial blank wall conditions.</p> <p>However, the landscape planter area at the easterly property line is on a separate property from the subject site and it is unclear how landscaping on an adjacent parcel outside of the applicants control will be appropriately maintained.</p> <p>In order to ensure that the significant blank wall conditions are alleviated in the event that the landscaping dies or is removed, staff recommends a condition of approval that alternatives, such as mosaic tiles, murals, rooftop planters with hanging vines, or punched windows (if possible under the building code) be included for review in the plans submitted or Final Design Review.</p> <p>As conditioned, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>2. The southwest corner of the proposed building is not proposed to change as part of the façade remodel. However, this corner is the most publicly visible portion of the entire building and should be treated/remodeled consistent with the proposed vision for the rest of the building. Consider providing more height at this location, as well as appropriately</p>	<p>The existing curved wall at the corner has been expanded into a raised tower element incorporating a curved metal screen set in the upper portion of the corner above the entry doors. The increased massing will help balance the raised area and deck on the easterly half of the Colorado elevation.</p>	<p>The applicant has responded appropriately by incorporating windows into the elevated façade behind the corner and by raising the overall height of the curved tower. Additionally, as mentioned in the response to #1, the tower element has also been revised to include a decorative metal screen within the curved portion of the tower facing the intersection.</p> <p>Because the screen will be a visually prominent feature at the intersection, staff recommends a condition of</p>

Commissioner Comments, April 27, 2021	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
treating the second floor elevations behind this corner. The rounded tower is not encouraged.		<p>approval that the design and mounting details of the decorative screen be further studied and that enlarged details of this feature be included in the Final Design Review submittal.</p> <p>As conditioned, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily addressed.</p>
3. Consider recessing all of the ground floor entries, and in particular, the entries facing the courtyard, to provide for additional sheltered transitional space from the semi-public courtyard to the private interior spaces within the building and to provide for further articulation of the ground floors	The entry doors surrounding the courtyard space have been recessed.	The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.
4. More clearly explain the logic behind the proposed vertical fins/engaged pilasters facing El Molino Avenue. Consider maintaining consistency between the height of these elements and the height of the parapets and roof edge treatments.	The vertical “fin” elements along the El Molino façade have been introduced to continue the vertical rhythm of the arcade to the north and the “art deco” building across Colorado to the south, as well as providing a sense verticality relative to the much higher mixed-use building across El Molino.	<p>The applicant has more clearly explained that these architectural features are intended to provide for visual consistency with the vertical rhythm of the prominent architectural features found in the immediate context.</p> <p>To ensure that these features reflect the sense of quality and permanence expected in the Central District Staff recommends a condition of approval that that enlarged details for these pilasters be included in the submittal for Final Design Review, clearly depicting that they are substantially proud of the adjacent wall surface.</p> <p>As conditioned, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily addressed.</p>
5. Future submittals shall more clearly describe the programming of the proposed courtyard. The courtyard should include	The Courtyard has been further defined with this submittal and will include a fountain with seating, tables and umbrellas for dining and	Additional details show that the newly introduced courtyard and open space will be actively programed so that they are engaging pedestrian oriented spaces that are well

Commissioner Comments, April 27, 2021	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>on-site planting, furniture, lighting and site details so that it is a comfortable space for human activity and social interaction. Future submittals shall also more clearly explain how the proposed courtyard and other visual cues coordinate with the existing paseo, alley improvements and nearby public art.</p>	<p>planter pots. The paving will be a continuation of the existing diagonal 4 x 4 concrete design set by the existing paseo. A trellis will be located on the south elevation of the two story portion of the building.</p>	<p>coordinated with existing adjacent pedestrian features, such as the paseo.</p> <p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>6. Consider utilizing high quality exterior materials and avoid overusing channelized expansion joints as a prominent design feature of this project.</p>	<p>The larger reveals have been removed. The new Colorado, Paseo and Courtyard elevations will have a smooth plaster finish.</p>	<p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>7. Although signage will be considered at a later stage of the development process, the future Master Sign Plan should encourage and promote creative, diverse, and appropriately scaled signage.</p>	<p>Conceptual signage types are provided in the submittal including: Wall mounted signs, under canopy blade signs, wall mounted blade signs and canopy mounted individual letter signage.</p>	<p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>

Programming and Circulation

The proposed development has no on-site parking, therefore the proposed programming and circulation emphasizes the pedestrian access and experience. Multiple ground level storefronts and entries have been introduced along the Colorado Boulevard and El Molino Avenue frontages, the north elevation facing the alley, and within the proposed courtyard. The proposed courtyard also successfully integrates with the paseo on the property adjacent to the east, which will further promote the pedestrian experience. The proposed courtyard itself also includes amenities, such as seating and shading devices, which will engage pedestrians and provide comfortable outdoor spaces.

The primary vertical circulation for the site is proposed to be an open stairway accessed from the courtyard and an interior elevator within an indoor common area adjacent to the restrooms, both of which lead to an open corridor at the second level that provides access to suites C.1 through C.6. Secondary stairwells are also provided, including an interior stairwell providing required secondary and emergency access to the El Molino frontage and an additional stairwell from suite B.1 at the southeast corner of the site leads up the second level outdoor dining.

In general, the programming of the building and site is consistent with the applicable design guidelines and is responsive to the Commission's Preliminary Consultation comments. However, the circulation and access to the upper floor outdoor dining does not appear to be well resolved or detailed. Staff recommends that this component of the design, including the detailing of secondary stair access points and the connectivity of the upper floor outdoor dining area to the potential ground floor restaurant space be restudied, and that alternative circulation schemes be included in the submittal for Final Design Review.

Orientation

The proposed new building has storefronts and sun-shading devices arranged in a clear pattern on all sides, which improves the buildings physical connection with and visual orientation toward the adjacent streets, alley, paseo and the new courtyard. As proposed, the revised building orientation is consistent with the private realm design guidelines and intent of the Central District Specific Plan.

Height, Massing and Modulation

The overall height of the existing theater building is not proposed to be increased, as the second level would be built out of the existing mezzanine and general building envelope of the existing theater building. The elevation drawings depict the building mass being modulated by the introduction of traditionally inspired storefronts and the use of architectural strategies such as canopies, awnings, engaged pilasters, an interior courtyard and a second level with storefronts and an open circulation corridor. Overall, the modulation depicted in the elevation drawings is appropriate and responsive to the design guidelines and previous comments from the Commission.

Architectural Style and Detailing

The existing theater building is proposed to be remodeled into a Contemporary style multi-tenant commercial building with a simple, flat roofed building form and traditionally inspired storefronts that have large areas of glazing, low knee-walls and transom windows, and a combination of metal and fabric awnings. In general, the proposed architectural design of the proposed remodel is consistent with the design guidelines and will defer to the Final Design Review phase for review and analysis of the specifications and details of the proposed new materials. However, the retention of the large non-historic movie theater sign facing Colorado Boulevard does detract from the effectiveness of the overall architectural style, as it is inconsistent with all other proposed design elements, and staff recommends that retention of the sign be reconsidered in advance of Final Design Review.

Compatibility

The proposed addition and façade remodel would result in a building that more visually compatible with its immediate surrounding than the dated appearance of the existing theater building, and will positively contribute to the pedestrian experience in the area. The revised design submitted for this review coordinates more effectively with the existing adjacent paseo and heavily trafficked pedestrian environment of the Central District than the prior theater design.

Conceptual Landscape Design

The building occupies nearly the entirety of the site except for the newly introduced courtyard. As such, the proposed remodel does not include an extensive amount of new landscaping. The proposed courtyard includes decorative paving, landscape pots, and hardscaping such as benches, tables, chairs, fire pits and a large fountain. Further, although not clearly specified on the plans, the material sheet appears to indicate the introductions of suspension string lights. As noted previously, although the applicant indicates that landscaping on an adjacent site is intended to soften the blank wall conditions on the east elevation, maintenance and use of the area is not within the purview of the subject property's ownership. Therefore, staff recommends a condition of approval that if coordination with the adjacent property owner is needed to fully execute the intended vision for the redevelopment of the subject property, the applicant provide proof of such an agreement with the submittal for Final Design Review or, revise the plans to more clearly depict that all proposed improvements are solely on the subject property.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

Staff routed the project for comment to several City departments, including the Public Works, Transportation, Fire and Housing Departments as well as 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. Recommended conditions from the Departments of Public Works and Transportation are included in Attachment B.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The project is exempt from further environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code Section 21080(b)(9); Administrative Code, Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 15301, Class 1, pertaining to additions to existing facilities such as the existing theater building, and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class; and therefore, that there are no unusual circumstances.

CONCLUSION:

The project design has satisfactorily addressed the comments provided during Preliminary Consultation and is consistent with the design guidelines in the Central Specific Plan. Staff recommends approval of the application for Concept Design Review for the project with conditions related to the refinement of the circulation, architectural details and materials to be addressed at Final Design Review.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Community Development

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Attachments:

- A. Current plans & elevations
- B. Comments and Conditions from the Departments of Transportation and Public Works