



June 22, 2020

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

**Re: 270-282 North Los Robles Ave.**

Dear Members of the Design Commission:

Pasadena Heritage encourages the Design Commission to help refine and improve the project proposed at 270-282 N. Los Robles Avenue, the site of a surface parking lot. Because this project is in the Central District and near the National Register-listed Pasadena Civic Center and Ford Place Historic Districts, we ask that attention be given to the wider context. However, we recognize that this site is not a typical Central District infill site: it is located directly adjacent to the 210 Freeway, which brings its own challenges and opportunities. There are no historic resources on the site, but the new project should take into account the adjacencies of the nearby districts and the scale of nearby existing buildings. In general, we find the concept drawings lack a definitive character, and we ask that there be more creativity brought to the design to make the building more distinctive, elegant, and reflective of Pasadena's architectural traditions of excellence.

The north facing units in this project will certainly face traffic impacts such as sound and pollution, but will also have excellent vistas of the San Gabriel mountains and consistent, diffused natural light due to their northern exposure. In this concept design, their full potential has not been realized. Some units have protruding balconies, others have gabled lofted penthouses, and others have very minimal openings. A more holistic approach would be the study of a façade system that could mitigate the harsher aspects of overlooking a freeway, while allowing for the maximization of views and light. It is also important to note that this north façade will overwhelmingly be viewed by motorists on the freeway and those driving south down Los Robles. We often focus on how a building is viewed by pedestrians, but here it may be just as important to consider how the building will be overwhelmingly viewed by motorists.

On the western exposure of the building, there are some opportunities to create a more pedestrian friendly environment. Los Robles Avenue is a busy arterial at this location, but is still quite walkable and well-serviced by multiple bus lines. The architect's instinct to create a protected courtyard for residents is commendable and makes sense here. This courtyard would provide meaningful respite to residents despite the other aforementioned difficulties of the site. We do, however, suggest that the courtyard or plaza be lowered to better engage the street. A plane break could create some additional seclusion and could reduce traffic noise, but the large set of stairs restricts full accessibility. A more gentle, sloping ramp into a slightly raised courtyard could be more appropriate, or a terraced courtyard with the portion nearest the public right of way at a lower level that is visually and aesthetically accessible to the pedestrian.

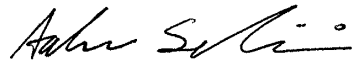
Finally, we believe that the ground level can be a bit subdued. This is not a location where one must meaningfully engage the street, especially on the Corson-facing façade. Other projects along Corson do have doors and windows at ground level, but that does not make it an ideal design. Putting shared amenity spaces here, such as the gym and lounge, may be the simplest solution, while further experimenting with screens or other semi-transparent solutions along Corson is another approach that could be successful along this street frontage.

This housing project is one of several we have seen in recently in an area that is undergoing a lot of change. We believe it shows a promising start, but needs further exploration and refinement. We appreciate the thorough and informational staff report, which allows us to make comments even remotely. We hope you will provide meaningful direction and take into consideration our suggestions.

Sincerely,



Susan N. Mossman  
*Executive Director*



Andrew Salimian  
*Preservation Director*