



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: JULY 14, 2020

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW
NEW CONSTRUCTION OF A 90-UNIT, SIX-STORY, MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT WITH TWO LEVELS OF SUBTERRANEAN PARKING
253 SOUTH LOS ROBLES AVENUE

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Design Commission:

Environmental Determination

Find that the application for Concept Design Review was subject to environmental review in the Categorical Exemption adopted by the City Council for a previously approved Affordable Housing Concession Permit #11869 for the same project on February 10, 2020, and that there are no changed circumstances or new information that would require further environmental review.

Findings for Compliance with the Tree Protection Ordinance

1. Acknowledge that a tree inventory submitted for the project identifies removal of one private protected tree (Tree #6).
2. Find that the removal of Tree #6, upon implementation of the conditions of approval, meets finding # 6 of the Tree Protection Ordinance (PMC Section 8.52.075.A): (6) which states that *"the project, as defined in Section 17.12.020, includes a landscape design plan that emphasizes a tree canopy that is sustainable over the long term by adhering to the replacement matrix adopted by resolution of the city council and included in the associated administrative guidelines"*.
3. Approve the removal of Tree #6.

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 and the Design Guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan; and
2. Based on these findings, approve the application for Concept Design Review as illustrated in Attachment A be subject to the following conditions, which will be further reviewed during Final Design Review:

Conditions

1. Incorporate steps/walkways to the patios of the south-facing dwelling units to encourage residents to walk through the main courtyard. In addition, relocate the Camphor tree toward the center of the garden, introduce permanent planter wall seating around it, and create an additional pathway along the northerly edge of the driveway that connects the sidewalk to the water feature and the Camphor tree to encourage active use of the open spaces and provide multiple paths that offer different experiences from the sidewalk to the building entrance.
2. The landscaping plans shall demonstrate careful selection and placement of landscaping elements that will preserve views from the courtyard-facing dwelling units and amenity spaces to the street.
3. Replace the solid patio walls of the north-facing dwelling units with additional low-height landscaping elements to preserve views from the units to the north garden. Incorporate paving to provide access from the patios to the garden spaces.
4. Relocate the porch steps of the ground level street-facing units so that they are oriented toward the sidewalk to enhance their connection with the street level.
5. Reconfigure the arrangement of window bays and structural projecting walls at the ground level of the east elevation fronting the courtyard to provide a sense of alignment with features above and visually ground the metal screening elements.
6. Refine the fenestration along the base of the south elevations, and incorporate additional openings on the upper levels to enhance the solid and flat appearance of the facades. The application of the cladding materials shall also be refined to create subtle wall plane variation, enhanced dimensionality, varying textures, and visually break down the scale of the building volumes to minimize the vertical and horizontal spans of the cladding systems.
7. The hardscape designs within the courtyard shall be further enhanced and integrated to the overall building design by refining the transition of stone paving to concrete pathways, including the nuances in paver unit colors, textures, sizes, and pattern.
8. A walkway with landscaping and hardscape elements consistent with designs of the north and east open spaces shall be incorporated into the southerly edge of the site so that the project is more responsive to the neighborhood context.

9. Further articulate the recessed easterly portion of the south elevation by incorporating balconies to create a strong visual connection between the dwelling units and the site and to provide more dimensionality and enhance the overall appearance of the façade.
10. The quantity, size, location, and configuration of window openings along the north elevation shall be refined to improve the visual rhythm of the openings and projecting elements. In addition, the balconies on the southerly and northerly elevations shall be further articulated with implementation of overhangs at the topmost balconies, wall plane variation, and metal sunscreen devices similar to those currently proposed on the balconies located above the main entrance to enhance the flat appearance of the facades.
11. The overhang and glass railing located above Unit No.316 (as labeled in the floor plan) shall extend over the balcony of Unit No.315 to maintain the architectural language of the balconies similar those on the other sides of the building and to create a visual break in the horizontal span of the façade.
12. Modify the porch widths of the street-facing ground-level units to have similar proportions and be vertically aligned with the balconies directly above. In addition, incorporate screening elements to these balconies with designs similar to those on the southerly portion of the east elevation.
13. The proportions and scale of individual panels for each cladding system proposed shall ensure that the in-plane transition of the cladding materials exhibit a well-integrated design. The alignment and widths of control joints/reveals, and nuances in the material colors shall contribute to the integration of the cladding systems.
14. Refine the window openings along the southerly edge of the west elevation to be more consistent with the proportions of those on the opposite side of the façade.
15. The wing walls of the west-facing balconies shall be clad in more than one material to enhance the solid and flat appearance of the walls and provide greater visual interest along the balcony ends.
16. The plans submitted for Final Design Review shall include enlarged detail drawings showing the application of plaster and concrete materials onto the building base and demonstrating their compatibility with the overall building design.
17. To ensure all landscaped areas within the site maintain a cohesive design, the landscape plans shall demonstrate that the existing patio area consists of landscaping/hardscape elements that are compatible with the design of the new garden areas and open spaces; and that permanent amenities such as seating, trellises, or dining areas are incorporated to its design.
18. The applicant shall include an illustrated written response to each condition of approval associated with Concept Design Review. Brief written responses without accompanying diagrams are not acceptable.
19. The project shall comply with conditions of approval associated with Affordable Housing Concession Permit #11869 to the satisfaction of said departments.

BACKGROUND:

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: Medium Mixed Use (0 – 2.25 FAR)
- Zoning: CD-2 (Central District Specific Plan, Civic Center/Midtown Sub-district)
- 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 35,502-square-foot lot on the west side of South Los Robles Avenue between Cordova Street and East Del Mar Boulevard. The site is roughly square in shape and is currently developed with a vacant commercial building, surface parking spaces, and an outdoor patio area. A tree inventory provided with the application identifies six trees on site, one of which is a protected specimen tree.
- Surroundings: Surrounding properties include a new three-story multi-family residential development under construction on the south side of the subject site, an existing eight-story mixed-use building north of the project site, and a three-story parking structure and multi-family residential building west of the subject property. The site is also surrounded by multi-story commercial buildings to the east, across South Los Robles Avenue.
- Project Description: The project involves the demolition of all existing site improvements and the new construction of a six-story 90-unit multi-family residential building with two levels of subterranean parking. One protected specimen tree is proposed to be removed to accommodate the project.
- Site Design: The new building is proposed to be centrally located on the site and consists of an L-shape floor plan with a large courtyard fronting the street, located at the southeast corner of the site. Varying setbacks are proposed along each frontage ranging between 6 and 54 feet from the site boundaries. Vehicular access is proposed from Los Robles Avenue on the southern end of the site.
- Architectural Style: Contemporary
- Developer: Zhuang & Zhong Los Robles, LLC – Robert Artura
- Architects: Tyler and Kelly Architecture, Inc.
- Landscape Architect: Tyler and Kelly Architecture, Inc.

ANALYSIS:

Design Commission Comments from Preliminary Consultation

On June 13, 2017, 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 set of plans in Attachment A.

Commissioner Comments, June 13, 2017	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>1. The conceptual building design is compatible with the surrounding context and responds strongly to the design guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan. The proposed building will provide an appropriate transition both in height and building setback along the Los Robles Avenue frontage, between the existing office building to the north and the approved residential project located to the south of the development site. The proposed building elevations illustrate a variety of visually interesting elements including simple projecting and recessed building volumes; punched openings, trellises, recessed and cantilevered balconies, and roof overhangs. The recessed open space adjacent to the entry lobby area, along with the patio stoops of the ground floor units provide a pedestrian scale experience along the Los Robles Avenue frontage.</p>	<p>“No directives offered with this comment.”</p>	<p>The proposed modifications to the building massing involve the removal and replacement of dwelling units with an open roof terrace on the southerly portion of the sixth-floor level, which reduce the building height along the southerly portion and enhance the transition between the existing taller building to the north and the lower development south of the project site.</p> <p>The site design, general massing and architectural design continue to represent an appropriate transition from the larger scaled building to the north to the lower scaled development to the south. Additional comments related to the execution of architectural details are incorporated into the following responses and the Architectural Style and Detailing section below.</p> <p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>2. Continue to study the location of the walls and the programming within the open space adjacent to</p>	<p>“The design team feels strongly that the ground floor programming is suitable for this location.</p>	<p>The plans do not clearly illustrate how the open spaces within the courtyard can be usable for the residents and the public. The design</p>

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<p>Los Robles Avenue. Consider re-thinking the location of some of the internal walls and landscape hedges in an effort to ensure that the open space is usable to the residents and/or public. Consider the elimination of the low walls adjacent to the driveway that extends to sidewalk. Reconsider the location of the water feature to allow a direct connection between the private/public open space and the ground floor amenity space.</p>	<p>Pedestrian activity will link the street to the project foyer, passing through the garden. The balance of the ground floor space fronting the garden may be a gym, lounge, we-work, or other amenity. This amenity space faces the garden directly. Water is introduced as a symbolic element through which one passes between the public and private realms, providing also a moving reflection of the landscape as viewed from inside toward the garden. The Courtyard garden is envisioned to have an asymmetrical layering effect, using the hedges as a layering feature. This layering provides a variety of open or intimate spaces within the garden, becoming increasingly private as one nears the building.”</p>	<p>attempts to create a layering effect by providing rows of landscaping elements and low seat walls parallel to the street. A single unobstructed walkway leads to the main lobby entrance of the building and connects to the in-between spaces of the landscaping and seat wall features. This results in fewer opportunities for the open spaces to be usable by the residents or the public.</p> <p>In order to ensure the garden space is meaningfully activated and serves as a functional and visually appropriate transition from the public to the ground floor and primary dwelling units staff recommends several conditions of approval. Staff recommends incorporating steps/walkways to the patios of the south-facing dwelling units facing the courtyard to have a more meaningful connection and encourage residents to walk through it.</p> <p>In addition, staff recommends that the Camphor tree be relocated toward the center of the garden, with permanent planter wall seating installed around it, and an additional pathway along the northerly edge of the driveway that connects the sidewalk to the water feature and the Camphor tree to encourage active use of this space. Staff recommends another condition of approval, which would require careful selection, and placement of landscaping elements to successfully frame views from the garden-facing dwelling units and amenity space to the street.</p> <p>Upon implementation of the recommended conditions of approval, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily resolved.</p>
<p>3. Ensure that the patios of the ground floor units</p>	<p>“These porches are intended to function as</p>	<p>The patios of the ground floor units facing north appear be enclosed by</p>

Commissioner Comments, June 13, 2017	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>(north elevation) are engaging the street. Study the depth of the porches so that they are usable and allow for resident personalization.</p>	<p>street entries, not patios. Proximity to the sidewalk makes a more ‘furnished’ porch problematic.”</p>	<p>tall solid walls and intended to be separated from the north garden. Although the units are not facing directly toward the street, there are opportunities for the patios to better engage with the north garden and enhance the pedestrian experience to and through the site, and encourage use of the open spaces, which may foster resident interaction. Therefore, staff recommends a condition of approval that requires replacement of the solid patio walls with additional landscaping elements that would preserve views from the dwelling units to the north garden and paving to provide access from the patios to the garden spaces.</p> <p>Upon implementation of the recommended condition of approval, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily resolved.</p>
<p>4. Regarding the southern portion of the building, the abstract screen feature is visually successful. Consider bringing the screening feature down to ground level. The entry to the garage and the adjacent blank wall need further resolution. Consider visually softening the south elevations of the northern and southern portions of the building.</p>	<p>“The abstract Screen feature is intended to float above the more transparent ground floor recessed deeply below it. Additional structural elements have been added to visually bring the screen to the ground. Dark-colored rainscreen system adds texture and softness to the background mass behind and left of the screen feature. This finish wraps the SE corner and engages the South building elevation.”</p>	<p>The structural elements proposed at the ground level merely appear for structural purposes as they do not project beyond the line of the facade to exhibit a clear connection with the design of screening feature located at the upper levels. The arrangement and design of these projecting walls shall be further explored to be more responsive and integrated with the screening elements above. Staff recommends that window bays and projecting structural walls on the ground level be modified in a logical fashion to create alignment with the vertically oriented components of the screening elements above and visually ground them.</p> <p>The south elevation includes large spans of solid wall areas that lack dimensionality. This is because the upper levels of the south elevation are entirely clad in a single material. In order to visually soften the appearance of the south building elevations, staff recommends a</p>

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		<p>condition of approval to refine the fenestration along the base of the building by rearranging the openings to align with those above and create additional openings on the upper levels to improve their solid-to-void proportions and flat appearance.</p> <p>In addition, staff recommends a condition of approval that the plans submitted for Final Design Review depict refined cladding strategy that will create subtle wall plane variation, enhanced dimensionality, varying textures, and visually break down the scale of the building volumes by minimizing the vertical and horizontal spans of the cladding systems.</p> <p>Upon implementation of the recommended conditions of approval, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily resolved.</p>
<p>5. Consider incorporating a stone pattern or textured stone within the first 20 feet of the front building setback.</p>	<p>“The courtyard stone patterns respond to the layering effect discussed in item 2, alternating stone and concrete as one passes through each layer between the sidewalk & entry. Additionally, stone cladding has been added to the first floor walls closest to the street.”</p>	<p>The proposed stone material and pattern is not clearly depicted on the site plan or on the elevations. Stone materials shown on the site plan consist of irregular masonry units with significantly different geometries to the majority of exterior building and site features, which consist of rectilinear forms.</p> <p>Since the details and specifications related to hardscape are addressed at Final Design Review, staff recommends a condition of approval to require that the hardscape designs within the courtyard be further enhanced and integrated to the overall building design by refining the transition of stone paving to concrete pathways, including the nuances in paver unit colors, textures, sizes, and pattern.</p> <p>Upon implementation of the recommended condition of approval, the comment from Preliminary</p>

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		Consultation will be satisfactorily resolved.
<p>6. In general, be more responsive to the neighborhood context. Explore opportunities to create pedestrian linkages with the neighboring properties with the use of common paths and open space. The use of pedestrian cross-throughs can also strengthen the connection between neighboring properties. Enhance how the open space relates to street facing façade.</p>	<p>“Strong pedestrian linkages, open spaces, and paths are proposed between the project and the developments to the North and West.”</p>	<p>To promote consistency in design throughout the site, the “layering effect” concept should be extended to the walkway located along the southerly boundary to be more responsive to the adjoining property.</p> <p>This area represents opportunities to create a series of communal open/intimate spaces and “nodes”, similar to the spaces designed within the north garden and within the courtyard. Staff recommends a condition of approval to incorporate private patios with low walls to the south-facing units at the ground level to help create pockets of communal spaces as opposed to a linear path from the street to the rear yard.</p> <p>Staff also recommends a condition of approval requiring that a walkway with landscaping and hardscape elements consistent with designs of the north and east open spaces be incorporated into the site design so that the project is more responsive to the neighborhood context.</p> <p>Upon implementation of the recommended condition of approval, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily resolved.</p>
<p>7. Consider flipping the floor plan of the 2-5 floors (northern portion of the building) to reduce the number units that will face the existing office building located to the north.</p>	<p>“The design team seeks to privatize and differentiate our primary building entry courtyard from the 245 project to our North. Additionally, the SE exposure of this area maximizes the sun angle for this garden.”</p>	<p>The proposed floor plan provides for an efficient circulation and programming. Additionally, the projecting balconies along the north façade would have minimal direct sunlight throughout the day, and are likely to be highly utilized. Therefore, staff concurs with the intention of the design.</p> <p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>8. Consider modifying the floor plan of the units</p>	<p>“The units referenced have been deleted.”</p>	<p>The replacement of dwelling units with an outdoor terrace improves the</p>

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<p>located behind the penthouse structure at the roof to allow articulation of the south facing building wall at this location.</p>		<p>overall composition of the building massing and minimizes the height impact on the adjoining building to the south and the significant height difference between the development to the south and north. In addition, the penthouse has been moved away from the edge of the building, which allows for a well-articulated façade.</p> <p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>9. Further enhance the successful visual contrast created by the projecting balconies on the north portion of the building and the recessed balconies on the south portion of the building.</p>	<p>“All elevations have been re-worked.”</p>	<p>The revisions to the east elevation are successful in providing a combination of projecting and recessed balconies and punched openings, which create a more dynamic but harmonious appearance. The size, location, and vertical/horizontal composition of the punched openings are carefully located along the edges of the facades, overhangs are also incorporated specifically above the balcony openings, clearly distinguishing the balconies within the overall building massing. This level of architectural treatment shall be consistent throughout all other sides of the building.</p> <p>The west elevation is also consistent with the east elevation. The elevation includes projecting and recessed balconies, punched openings, and a long overhang at the top of the building that extends over the three bays of recessed balconies to articulate the overall projecting wall volume.</p> <p>However, the prior visual contrast between the north and south portions of the east elevation have not been successfully carried forward to the current designs of the north and south facades, including the wing walls of the west facing balconies, which exhibit large spans of flat and</p>

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		<p>solid areas which necessitate greater attention to maintain a consistent level of articulation and dimensionality shown on the east elevation. The absence of balcony overhangs at the topmost portion of the building, recessed balconies, wall plane variation, and screening elements also contrast in a negative manner with the more successful east elevation.</p> <p>Staff recommends a condition of approval that requires further modifications to the quantity, size, location, and configuration of the window openings to improve the visual rhythm created by the fenestration patterns and projecting balconies.</p> <p>Staff recommends another condition of approval, which would require that the balconies located along the southerly and northerly elevation of the building be further articulated with the introduction of overhangs at topmost balconies and the introduction of metal sunscreen devices similar to those shown on the balconies located above the main entrance.</p> <p>Staff also recommends a condition of approval that requires that the overhang and glass railing located above Unit No. 316 (as labeled in the floor plan) to be extended over the balcony of Unit No. 315 to maintain the architectural treatment consistent with the balconies on the other sides of the building.</p> <p>Upon implementation of the recommended condition of approval, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily resolved.</p>
10. Further restudy the projecting canopies located along the northern portion	“The design team feels that the upper balcony and roof at this location responds	The projecting canopies provide dimensionality to the relatively flat appearance of the northerly portion

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<p>(Los Robles frontage) of the building. As proposed, the canopies dilute the visually strong aesthetic along this building elevation.</p>	<p>well to the interior programming which benefits greatly from having these outdoor covered spaces. Additionally, the subject elevation now follows a tripartite design logic.”</p>	<p>of the façade. However, the projecting balconies could have a greater connection with the southerly portion of the east elevation by incorporating metal screen elements that respond to those used on the southerly portion.</p> <p>The northerly portion of the east elevation could also benefit from additional treatment to further unify the design of street-facing ground-level units and those directly above by modifying the porch elements to have similar proportions and vertically align with the balconies on the upper levels.</p> <p>Staff recommends a condition of approval, which requires that the porch widths of the ground level units be modified to have similar proportions and be vertically aligned with the balconies directly above, and the addition of screening elements to the balconies with designs similar to the screens on the southerly portion.</p> <p>Upon implementation of the recommended condition of approval, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily resolved.</p>
<p>11. Reconsider/restudy the proposed "fish scale texture" illustrated on the north portion of the building that has frontage on South Los Robles Avenue.</p>	<p>“The Cembrit rainscreen system is a high-quality exterior finish material, and the joint pattern should be celebrated. Our intention is to substantially differentiate this building mass from the building base and Southerly mass by using a larger, vertically-oriented system where the Southerly pattern is finer and horizontal.”</p>	<p>The overall building design exhibits a base, middle, and top portions through the changes in exterior materials. The design guidelines encourage the application of heavier materials at the bottom and lighter materials on the upper portions of a building. The proposed building design appears to follow this design logic. Aluminum panels and fiber cement boards are proposed on the upper portions of the building, with concrete and stucco along the base.</p> <p>The elevations shown in the plans do not clearly depict the pattern and detailing of the cladding systems to</p>

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		<p>demonstrate that they reinforce the use of the horizontal composition of the rainscreen system on the southerly mass contrasting with the vertically-oriented system proposed on the northerly mass to effectively respond to the transition of building heights along the blockface.</p> <p>Because the details related to cladding materials are addressed at Final Design Review, staff recommends a condition of approval, which would require enlarged detail drawings showing the in-plane transition of the cladding materials, the alignment and widths of control joints/reveals, and nuances in the material colors to ensure they exhibit a well-integrated design.</p> <p>Upon implementation of the recommended condition of approval, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily resolved.</p>

Programming and Circulation

The proposed building occupies the majority of the site, excluding the required setbacks and a landscaped courtyard at the southeast corner of the site. The proposed building design consists of an L-shape floor plan with a wing that spans east-west near the northerly portion of the site and the second wing spanning north-south, situated closer to westerly portion of the site. At the ground level, a large courtyard and water features are located in front of the building at the southeast portion of the site. The interior of the building is configured with fourteen residential dwelling units along its perimeter, including a gymnasium and the main entrance, which face the front courtyard area. With the exception of the south-facing units, the majority of the units are proposed to have private patio areas. Each of the second through fifth floor levels consist of seventeen dwelling units with identical floor plans, which include units stacked directly above the ground floor dwellings and interior double-loaded hallways. The northerly portion of the sixth-floor level would consist of eight dwelling units, which are also proposed to be stacked directly above those in the levels below. An open garden with a pergola, fireplace, outdoor seating and dining amenities is proposed on the southerly portion of the floor level. Mechanical rooftop equipment and a staircase penthouse would be located behind the garden area along the westerly building edge and screened with a solid wall. The flat roof design would accommodate additional mechanical equipment, an elevator shaft overrun, and floor space for future solar panel equipment.

As part of the development, two subterranean levels are proposed to accommodate 125 parking spaces, storage and mechanical/electrical facilities. Pedestrian access to the entrance lobby occurs along the Los Robles Avenue frontage through the main courtyard area. A continuous walkway is proposed to accommodate pedestrian access to the ancillary building entrances located along the northerly and southerly elevations of the building and to the common open spaces located throughout the site.

Vehicular access to the subterranean parking garage is proposed via a portal within the building near the southern end of the east elevation. Vertical circulation between all floor levels is also proposed via an elevator core that would be centrally located within the building and additional staircases located at the southwest and northeast corners of the building.

Overall, the programming of the building and site is consistent with the applicable design guidelines and is responsive to the Commission's Preliminary Consultation comments. As noted above, the conditions of approval will ensure that the pedestrian walkways along the side yard setback areas and the front courtyard are responsive to the adjacent developments and better integrated with each other to provide continuous circulation throughout the site while providing pockets of communal areas.

Orientation

The proposed new building has massing, articulation, windows and balconies that are arranged in a clear pattern on all sides. The main lobby, gymnasium, and a rooftop garden have a strong orientation toward the east facing a courtyard and Los Robles Avenue. As noted above in the response to Preliminary Consultation comments, staff recommends a condition of approval, which would require redesigning the walkway and porch steps of the ground level units facing Los Robles Avenue in order to enhance their connection with the street/sidewalk.

Height, Massing and Modulation

The height of the building was established in the previously approved Affordable Housing Concession Permit for the project, and staff of the Current Planning Section has confirmed that the drawings provided are consistent with this previous approval. The overall building mass is composed of a five-story, roughly squared sub-volume and a six-story rectangular volume which responds sensitively to the surrounding context by locating the shorter portion of the building on the southerly end and the taller portion on the northerly end of the site to provide a gradual transition in building heights along the westerly block face. The simple form of the proposed massing and high level of articulation on the facades represent a thoughtful and appropriate transition between the single, massive cubic form of the existing building to the north and the more complex design of the development currently under construction, just south of the project site. Simple modulation of the building mass allows for the projecting sub-volumes to create recessed balconies and subtle roof height variation, which are more apparent on the east and west elevations. Overall, the height, massing, and 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 proposed building is designed in a contemporary architectural style, which is compatible with surrounding context. The design consists of blocky building volumes with flat roofs, offset wall planes on the facades, rectangular punched openings, metal louvers/sun screening devices, recessed and projecting balconies with overhangs, glass railings, and multiple exterior materials including concrete, stucco, fiber cement, and aluminum panel systems, which are all elements typically found in contemporary building designs. In general, the building elevations exhibit a combination of projecting and recessed balconies and punched openings, which create a dynamic but harmonious appearance. However, the design of punched openings on the southerly edge of the westerly façade are significantly different in proportions from the rest of the other punched openings on the same elevation. Staff recommends a condition of approval that requires further refinement of the southerly window openings to be more consistent with the proportions of those on the opposite edge of the façade. As noted in the table above, staff also recommends a condition of approval to require the application of more than one cladding material on the wing walls of the west-facing balconies in order to provide greater visual interest along the balcony ends.

The elevations also specify that plaster and textured concrete walls are proposed at the building base. As depicted on the elevations, it is unclear which walls would be covered with plaster or concrete. Since the details related to cladding materials are addressed at Final Design Review, staff recommends a condition of approval, which would require enlarged detail drawings to show the application of plaster and concrete onto the building base.

The porch designs of the east (street-facing) units could also be modified to better engage the street and be more in keeping with architectural language on the upper portion of the façade. In order to enhance the connection between the units and the sidewalk, staff recommends a condition of approval, which requires the steps located on the porch sides to be replaced with porch steps fronting the street/sidewalk directly.

The balconies along the north elevation will face a tall building (existing) and lack views to the larger communal open spaces within the site and to the street. However, additional balconies can be added along the recessed eastern half of the south elevation to provide a connection to the upper floor garden, front garden area and the street, contributing the larger communal open space of the site. This particular portion of the building would receive direct sunlight approximately half of the day and any open space would also likely be highly utilized. The addition of balconies would also improve the predominantly solid and flat appearance of this portion of the building. Staff recommends a condition of approval requiring the incorporation of additional balconies along the recessed eastern half of the south elevation to create a stronger visual connection between the dwelling units and the site and to provide more dimensionality and enhance the overall appearance of the facade.

As discussed in the table above, staff has recommended conditions of approval to further improve the detailing of the proposed architectural style by refining the proportions of solid wall areas and openings, dimensionality of the facades, and addition of sunscreen devices to balconies.

Compatibility

The proposed new building is generally compatible with its immediate surroundings in terms of height, massing, setbacks and architectural design. The lower portion of the building is located at the southerly portion of the site and the taller and larger portion of the building is situated on the northerly portion of the property, sensitively responding to the scale and height of the adjacent developments. As noted previously, staff has also recommended a series of conditions of approval to further ensure consistency with the proposed contemporary architectural style.

Conceptual Landscape Design

The submitted conceptual landscape plans outline an extensive amount of landscaping that would soften the building at the street edge and enhance the network of pathways and open spaces within the project site. A large number of new trees in combination with low ground cover are proposed at the north, south and east edges of the site. A large box size Camphor tree and water feature fronting the building will serve as the primary focus of the front courtyard area. A mix of low and tall landscaping elements and seating walls are also proposed within the front courtyard to encourage its use by residents and the public. A series of low planter walls are proposed in between the trees lining the northerly edge of the site, and additional landscaping is proposed to obscure the low patio walls of the northerly units. The landscape plans also show an existing patio area located at the northwest corner of the site. An open garden is proposed on the sixth-floor level. The garden space would include a fireplace, water feature, and a pergola to provide shade for the outdoor dining area. The plans also show landscaping along the south and easterly edge of the garden and large number of tables and seating throughout the garden space.

In general, the proposed landscape, hardscape and common area amenity plans are appropriate for the use and scale of the proposed building and ensure usability of the provided open spaces. To ensure all landscaped areas of the site maintain a cohesive design, revised landscape plans shall be submitted during Final Design Review to demonstrate that the existing northwest patio features are compatible with the design of the new garden areas and open spaces, and that permanent amenities such as seating, trellises, or dining areas are incorporated into its design.

Protected Tree Removals

The application includes a tree inventory that identifies the removal of one protected specimen tree (Tree #6, a Canary Island Pine tree with diameter-at-breast-height (“dbh”) of 26”). The tree is documented as being generally in good or fair condition; however, it is situated within the footprint of the proposed development. The submitted plans show a large number of trees are proposed to be planted in conjunction with the project, including four, 36-inch box specimen tree species (Chinese Flame tree). The number of proposed trees is consistent with the adopted Tree Replacement Matrix, which requires four 36-inch box specimen trees be planted when replacing a one specimen tree with a 26-in dbh.

Therefore, staff recommends approval of the proposed private tree removal pursuant to Section 8.52.075 of the Tree Protection Ordinance, which states, “the project, as defined in Section 17.12.020, includes a landscape design plan that emphasizes a tree canopy that is sustainable over the long term by adhering to the replacement matrix adopted by resolution of the City Council and included in the associated administrative guidelines.”

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS & ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The City Council, as part of the approval process for AHCP#11869, found that the project is exempt from environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Public Resources Code Section 21080(b)(9); Administrative Code, Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 15332, Class 32, In-Fill Development Projects, and there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class; therefore, there are no unusual circumstances.

Section 15332 specifically exempts from environmental review infill development where: 1) the project is consistent with the applicable general plan designation and all applicable general plan policies as well as with applicable zoning designation and regulations; 2) the proposed development occurs within city limits on a project site of no more than five acres substantially surrounded by urban uses; 3) the project site has no value as habitat for endangered, rare or threatened species; 4) approval of the project would not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality; and 5) the site can be adequately served by all required utilities and public services.

As the project is largely consistent with the previously approved entitlements, no additional environmental review is required in conjunction with this application.

As part of the approval process for AHCP#11869 comments from other departments, such as the Public Works, Transportation, Fire and Housing Departments, as well as other divisions of the Planning & Community Development Department, were incorporated into the conditions of approval for the project. No additional conditions of approval from other departments are proposed as part of this review. Staff of the Current Planning Section has verified that the plans submitted for Concept Design Review are consistent with those approved through the Affordable Housing Concession Permit process. However, staff has included a condition of approval as part of this review to reinforce that the Conditions of Approval of AHCP#11869 continue to apply and will be enforced as the project moves forward through the review process.

CONCLUSION:

The project design has been modified to satisfactorily address 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 generally requiring modifications to further enhance the articulation of the facades and integration of exterior materials to fully exhibit the array of building elements that characterize the proposed contemporary architectural style.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Reviewed by:



Leon E. White
Principal Planner

Attachment:

- A. Current plans, elevations, and narrative response to Preliminary Consultation comments from applicant
- B. Tree inventory and exhibit; Private Tree Removal application
- C. Decision letter for AHCP #11869