

August 11, 2020

Mr. Jose Noel Toro, Chair, Design Commission
Members of the Design Commission
175 N. Garfield Avenue
Pasadena, CA 91101

Subject: 101 S. Marengo Avenue, Concept Design Review

Dear Chair Toro and Design Commissioners:

Given its prominent location along S. Marengo, Green Street and S. Arroyo Boulevard, adjacent to the Pasadena Convention Center and Civic Auditorium, this is one of Pasadena's most visible and important urban buildings. Designed by Edward Durrell Stone, a noted architect of international reputation, it is one of Pasadena's first, and few, iconic commercial buildings of mid-century modern architectural style to come under review for potential rehabilitation. Therefore, the approved design could set the standard and direction for Pasadena's buildings of this era going forward.

The Design Commission's acknowledgment of the building's iconic character and need to preserve that iconic character at its July 2020 meeting was very encouraging. In particular, the discussion of the importance of the solid travertine-clad facades creating the monolithic structure, and the direction to the Applicant to provide design alternatives that kept the original travertine and facades, was very appreciated.

However, I'm disappointed that the Applicant design alternatives and recommendation submitted for today's meeting, do not respond to the Design Commission's direction. Regarding the proposed design submitted for today's meeting, I have the following comments:

- 1) At the July 202 meeting, the Design Commission specifically directed the applicant to look at a design which kept at least the north and east elevations intact and to deliver an "iconic" design of equal quality to that of the existing building. This was not done:
 - a) The applicant says their contractor stated the travertine cannot be repaired/kept due to breakage - but there is no information on who this contractor is or their qualifications in preservation, or what the contractor did to come to this conclusion;
 - b) One of the key directives from Design Commissioners was that the existing building was iconic, and should the applicant seek to renovate the building, it must create a design that would respect the existing building and deliver an iconic design of quality equal to that of the existing building. Design Commission stated the proposed design submitted in July was not iconic and now, the Applicant is merely re-submitting that design proposed at the July meeting, with no substantive exploration of design alternatives consistent with Design Commission's direction;

- c) In its matrix, the applicant identifies costs and “leasability” of various options, but provides no facts upon which they did this analysis, and how they came to their conclusions.
 - i) As this is about design, if for some reason, economics were a valid consideration (although as economics are not part of the Design Commission review and objectives per the city’s municipal code, I question why economics should be a part of this review process), it seems that should there be consideration of any design compromise due to economics (purchase costs, construction costs or revenues), there should be bona-fide third-party reports from qualified professionals as evidence to support these economic conclusions, including identification of a full range of financing options;
- 2) Given the size and prominence of this building, there should be better visuals, such as realistic 3D models showing the design details as well as the entire building in context of the neighborhood;
- 3) The travertine is one of the most significant features of this building. I fear it will be needlessly replaced by lesser quality materials which will in no way convey quality and iconic nature of the existing building; and
- 4) I did not see the proposed treatment of the street level space along S. Arroyo Boulevard. As this is currently parking, there is just dead space almost the full length of the block. There should be significant attention to redesign of this space to create a pedestrian friendly environment.

I realize the great expertise that is required of the developer to make this a successful project. While much work is still needed to achieve the iconic and historic preservation design standards identified by Design Commission, I believe these can be achieved to create a successful project. For this effort and investment on the part of the developer, I am very appreciative.

Finally, though of different scale and use, I’m reminded of the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. Though at first slated to be demolished, with the cooperation between the developer and the many preservation experts here in Southern California, the historic building was preserved. In the process, landmark preservation technologies were discovered, and upon completion the project won international accolades for design and community revitalization <https://www.laconservancy.org/issues/century-plaza-hotel>.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Christine Fedukowski