



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
MAJOR EXTERIOR MODIFICATIONS TO EXISTING OFFICE BUILDING AT
101 SOUTH MARENGO AVENUE

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Design Commission:

Environmental Determination

1. Find that the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under Section 15301, (Class 1) "Existing Facilities" and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class; therefore, there are no unusual circumstances.

Findings for Compliance with the Tree Protection Ordinance

Acknowledge that no trees are proposed to be removed in conjunction with this project.

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) subject to the following conditions to be further reviewed during Final Design Review:

Conditions

1. Provide detailed drawings of all proposed site improvements. Study additional means of

making the pedestrian access to the site at the corner of Arroyo Parkway and Green Street more inviting to pedestrians, including the possibility of improving the natural lighting in the daytime, the artificial lighting in the nighttime, and softening the materiality and openness of the corner.

2. Study the proposed replacement cladding to determine whether an alternative material to the proposed matching travertine could provide a more dynamic character to the building.
3. Continue to refine the patterning of the divisions in the glass curtain wall system to ensure compatibility with the proposed building cladding system.

BACKGROUND:

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: High Mixed Use (0 – 3.00 FAR)
- Zoning: CD-1 (Central District Specific Plan, Old Pasadena Sub-district) on the west side of the site & CD-2 (Central District Specific Plan, Civic Center/Midtown Sub-district) on the east side of the site.
- 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 two-acre lot on the entire block on the south side of E. Green Street between S. Marengo Avenue and S. Arroyo Boulevard. It is square in shape and is currently developed with a five-story office building surrounded by an open plaza and with semi-subterranean parking.
- Surroundings: Surrounding properties include the two-story Pasadena Conference Center building and the six-story Paseo Colorado building to the east; a three-to-four-story parking structure to the north; a two-story brick building, vacant lot and the one-to-three-story former Pasadena Winter Garden (now Public Storage) buildings to the west; and a four-story office building and surface parking lot to the south. The project site lies between the Old Pasadena Historic District, the Civic Center Financial Historic District and the Pasadena Civic Center Historic District. Nearby historic buildings, which may be contributing to these historic districts, include the Pasadena Winter Garden (1940, Cyril Bennett) at 171 S. Arroyo Parkway to the west, the Security Pacific Building (1924, Curlett and Beelman) at 230-234 E. Colorado Boulevard to the northeast, the Citizens Savings Building (1914, Parkinson & Bergstrom) at 18 N. Marengo Avenue to the northeast; and the Chamber of Commerce Building (1905, Parkinson & Bergstrom) at 117 E. Colorado Blvd. to the northwest.
- Project Description: The project involves major alterations to the existing office building, including the creation of window openings and re-cladding the building with new travertine material to match the existing travertine as closely as possible.
- Site Design: The building is located at the southwest corner of the site, with an open plaza with brick-framed pebble paving, concrete benches and raised planters, and a large circular

water fountain with tile cladding to the north and east of the building. The existing site design is not proposed to change.

- Architectural Style: Contemporary
- Developer: Atlas Capital Group
- Architect: RCH Studios

ANALYSIS:

Design Commission Comments from Preliminary Consultation

On January 29, 2019, the Design Commission reviewed an application for Preliminary Consultation for this project, presented by a different ownership and design team than the current proposal. Subsequently, on April 23, 2019, the Commission reviewed an Information/Project Update item, also with the previous team, with several design options. The property has since been sold and a new design team has been engaged for the project. The Commission’s comments from the previous meetings, with excerpts from the current design team’s responses, and staff’s comments, are detailed in the charts below. The design team’s full narrative is in Attachment B.

Commissioner Comments, January 29, 2019	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>1. The existing building is an iconic figure in the landscape of downtown Pasadena; the introduction of windows to the building should be viewed as an opportunity to create a bold, iconic, inspired new design. The design team should push the design further, without constraints, and present a new, coherent idea for the building. The preferred scheme from these studies should be presented at the next phase of the design review process; however, multiple design studies should be provided to demonstrate the ideas that were considered, with narrative explaining the reasons the studies were rejected from further</p>	<p>“Our proposed design celebrates the unique travertine monolith of the existing structure and introduces new vertically oriented openings, in a regular pattern, in response to the inspiration we found in the noted precedent projects. The new projected curtain walls span across floors to maintain the singularity of the travertine volume, while introducing daylight into the space. Solid stone cladding is retained at the corners to emphasize the monolithic nature. The new curtain wall panels are intended to have clear glazing. In addition, the façade design reinforces an axial orientation to the building, addressing another Design Commission comment. The east and west</p>	<p>The design team has chosen to pursue a design that retains the iconic monolithic character of the existing building and other buildings design by Edward Durrell Stone & Associates during this period. The positioning of the proposed large curtain wall panels clearly relates to the structural composition of the building and its internal circulation pattern to create a repetition that emphasizes and reinforces the building’s cubic form. For Final Design Review, the design team should continue to refine the divisions of windows within the curtain wall system, considering their relationship to the patterning of the proposed exterior cladding. In addition, given that the exterior cladding is proposed to be fully replaced, the design team should continue to study the proposed materiality of the building to determine if an alternative material</p>

Commissioner Comments, January 29, 2019	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>consideration. Suggestions from Commissioners include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The east façade could recognize the axial orientation of the building entry and fountain. The fenestration could vary on different sides of the building, with a clear logic or hierarchy focused on entrances. • Explore additional materiality within the newly created openings. • Explore introduction of projecting fins. • Study a more random pattern of fenestration, including vertical, diagonal or circular patterns. • Explore cutting away portions of the building to create outdoor spaces and/or landscape within the building. • Explore nighttime lighting effects. 	<p>facades share a regularized pattern of solid stone and projected curtain wall, while the north and south facades maintain a central expanse of solid stone where the existing cores are located. On the north elevation, we have introduced a narrow slot window to give the impression of having carved this opening out of a solid stone block...</p> <p>...Our design...introduces a new 60' x 60' courtyard into the center of the building, bringing light and views of landscape planting deep into the space. Along with the introduction of operable windows on the exterior elevations, the new courtyard allows for ventilation throughout the interior, transforming the existing stone monolith into a "breathing" building."</p>	<p>could be applied to the building to create a more dynamic character.</p>
<p>2. The color of the glazing will be critical to the success of the design and should be as light as possible.</p>	<p>"...The new curtain wall panels are intended to have clear glazing."</p>	<p>Ensuring glazing that is as clear as possible, along with compatible spandrel glazing at the floor plates, will be critical to the success of the proposed design. Glazing specifications are required to be submitted for review during Final Design Review as a matter of course.</p>
<p>3. Consider further enhancements to the site at the pedestrian level, particularly at street corners, stairs and the exposed garage, to make</p>	<p>"...We are introducing a series of planters and seating elements along the north side of the site, creating the experience of walking through a Southern</p>	<p>The submitted plans do not include details of the enhancements described by the design team in its response. Since these enhancements are subject to design review, staff has recommended a</p>

Commissioner Comments, January 29, 2019	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>the building more inviting. The changes to the building should consider all elements of the site as a full composition that works together.</p>	<p>California meadow, that connects pedestrian circulation from both sides of the site to the main north entry to the building. Further, new grab-and-go food and coffee carts are planned for the Plaza, to provide further amenities for both tenants and visitors. Enhancements to the Plaza will also feature a renovation of the existing fountain designed by Ralph Cornell, maintaining its striking iconic form, while transforming it into a living fountain...”</p>	<p>condition of approval requiring a provision of detailed drawings of all proposed site improvements for the Commission’s review during Final Design Review. In addition, staff has recommended a condition specifically requiring further study of enhancements to the northwest corner stair from the corner of Arroyo Parkway and Green Street to make it more inviting to pedestrians.</p>

Commissioner Comments, April 23, 2019	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>1. Building on comments provided during the Preliminary Consultation review, the Commission continued to suggest that the design team explore either a more playful and iconic, less rigid/repetitive design or a design that respects the monolithic, iconic quality of the existing building design. Multiple new design studies should be presented for review during Consolidated Design Review. Suggestions from Commissioners include:</p> <p><u>Playful design</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce repetitive/macro patterning of openings. • Consider “sliver” openings that do not extend from floor to 	<p>See responses above.</p>	<p>See responses above.</p>

Commissioner Comments, April 23, 2019	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
ceiling. <u>Monolithic Design</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain the existing solid building corners and cut fewer, larger openings into the remaining portions of the façade, such as three large squares on the longer east and west elevations. • Consider fewer, smaller, individual punched openings rather than large, continuous groupings. 		
2. Continue to explore further structural and material enhancements to the pedestrian level, particularly at street corners, stairs and the exposed garage, to make the building more inviting. The proposed use of wood was not considered appropriate for an office use, as it has a more residential character. Consider using a similar travertine material at the ground level.	See responses above.	See responses above.
3. Reconsider means of providing light wells at the interior of the building, including the possibility of pushing the building facades out closer to the edges of the plinth on which it sits.	See responses above.	See responses above.

Programming and Circulation

The programming of the building is proposed to be modified on the interior to allow for multi-tenant occupancy and create a central courtyard within the interior of the building while retaining the existing circulation pattern. The location of the main vertical circulation core is proposed to

be retained and expressed on the north elevation building exterior by carving out a tall, narrow, angled recessed window opening into the building wall.

Orientation

The building currently lacks a particular orientation due to the absence of windows on all sides from the second to fifth floors. The proposed design generally creates large, continuous window openings that slightly project from the face of the building in a repeating rhythm on the east and west elevations with similar but fewer openings on the north and south elevations, thus enhancing the building's orientation to the public streets that surround it.

Height, Massing and Modulation

The height and massing of the building are not proposed to change. The building currently lacks modulation with the exception of a recessed, highly glazed ground floor that gives the solid volume above, the appearance of floating. The ground floor condition will be retained and the upper volume will be modulated by the creation of the slightly projecting window openings as described above. Also previously described, the proposed recess on the north elevation will create additional modulation of the building mass.

Architectural Style and Detailing

The building will retain a contemporary design while creating large window openings, including operable windows, for future building tenants. The intent of the window detailing is to give the slight impression of floating on the outside of the building skin, with a thin dark bronze frame surrounding each of the large openings. The applicants have also noted that the existing travertine cladding will need to be removed to accommodate the proposed design and new travertine cladding to match the existing material is proposed to be installed. As indicated previously, staff recommends continued refinement of the patterning of the window divisions within the large openings, considering the relationship to the proposed exterior cladding.

Compatibility

The existing building is a unique, iconic design that stands out in the landscape of downtown Pasadena and the proposed modifications will retain this iconic character while making the building usable for modern office users. The addition of windows will also make the building more compatible with other similar buildings in the vicinity and the City overall.

Conceptual Landscape Design

The submitted plans for the project do not include any changes to the existing landscape/ hardscape plaza surrounding the building. However, the applicant's narrative indicates that some changes are proposed to planters and the existing fountain; therefore, staff has recommended a condition requiring the plans submitted for Final Design Review to include details of all proposed changes to site features of the property.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

As the project does not involve new construction, it has not been routed for comments from other City Departments.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

As the project involves modifications to an existing building, including reduction of square footage, the project qualifies for a Class 1 “Existing Facilities” Categorical Exemption from CEQA. The CEQA Guidelines also state that a Categorical Exemption cannot be used if a project has the potential to result in a significant adverse impact to a historical resource. As previously noted during the Preliminary Consultation, the building was evaluated for potential historical significance in 2015 by Architectural Resources Group, at the request of a prospective buyer, and was found to be ineligible for historic designation (Attachment C). Staff agrees with this assessment and understands that the creation of window openings would be necessary to allow for the use of the building for offices. Previous to this evaluation, staff had evaluated the building as a part of its survey of the Central District Specific Plan area and had assigned a National Register of Historic Places Status Code of 7N, indicating that further evaluation of it was necessary to determine potential historical significance. The plaza surrounding the building was evaluated by staff in 2012 as part of its study of Historic Designed Gardens and was found to be potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and the plaza was subsequently reconstructed in 2014 to match the original design as part of a garage waterproofing repair project. However, the National Park Service did not accept the findings of the City’s Historic Designed Gardens project, primarily because the evaluation did not consider the potential significance of the associated buildings. The 2015 evaluation by Architectural Resources Group holistically evaluates both the building and surrounding plaza and finds both to be ineligible for historical designation. Therefore, the project would not have a significant adverse effect on a historical resource and a Class 1 Categorical Exemption may be used.

CONCLUSION:

The project design has satisfactorily addressed 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 requiring further study of window patterning within the large openings, further study of potential alternative cladding materials and improvements to the northwest pedestrian access stair, as well as provision of details of the proposed site improvements described in the applicant's narrative.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Attachments:

- A. Applicant submittal package
- B. Design team responses to previous Design Commission comments
- C. Architectural Resources Group Historic Resources Evaluation