



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: AUGUST 11, 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. For Final Design Review, provide detailed drawings of all proposed site improvements,

including those described to the Design Commission at the July 14, 2020 public hearing at the pedestrian access point at the corner of Arroyo Parkway and Green Street.

2. 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 Previous Comments

On January 29, 2019, the Design Commission reviewed an application for Preliminary Consultation for a similar 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 reviewed the new design team's proposal at a public hearing on July 14, 2020 and requested that the design team provide a design evolution exhibit to demonstrate designs that were considered and rejected as part of the development of the proposed design. In addition, the Commission recommended that the design team restudy the scale of the openings and repetition. The design team has provided a design evolution exhibit that demonstrates the extensive array of design studies that were conducted as part of their design process, including multiple different opening scales, as well as the criteria that were used to evaluate the studies and select the proposed design. The design team is proposing for the Commission's consideration the same design that was presented for its consideration at the July 14, 2020 meeting.

In its discussion on July 14, 2020, the Commission also suggested that the current design team provide reasons for rejecting the previous design team's proposals. The previous team likely developed its design based on different, unknown criteria and did not present an analysis of the existing building condition with respect to the constructability of their proposed design. As such, rather than requiring the applicant to respond to these previous designs, staff has provided in Attachment B imagery provided by the previous design team as a reminder of the previous design process, but recommends that the Commission consider the design and use criteria from the current design team, in addition to the applicable design guidelines, in evaluating the current proposal. In particular, the following design guidelines from the Central District Specific Plan are most applicable to the project:

- SP 1.4 Establish clear pedestrian connections on-site that are well- marked and gracious; direct pedestrians from surface or structured parking to buildings, streets, and public spaces.
- BD 3.1 Establish a building's overall appearance on a clear and pleasing set of proportions; a building should exhibit a sense of order.
- BD 3.2 Utilize a hierarchy of vertical and horizontal expression; facade articulation should reflect changes in building form.
- BD 3.5 Provide a clear pattern of building openings; fenestration should unify a building's street wall and add considerably to a facade's three-dimensional quality.

- BD 3.6 Avoid uninterrupted blank wall surfaces along all building facades; the use of opaque and highly reflective glass is also discouraged.
- BD 3.7 Encourage the use of recessed windows that create shadow lines and suggest solidity.
- BD 4.6 Restrict the use of reflective, opaque, and highly tinted glass, especially at street level; storefront doors also tend to be more inviting when they are transparent glass.
- BD 6.1 Consider each building as a high-quality, long-term addition to Downtown; exterior design and building materials should exhibit permanence and quality appropriate to an urban setting.
- BD 6.2 Use materials, colors, and details to unify a building's appearance; buildings and structures should be built of compatible materials on all sides.
- BD 6.6 Limit the number of materials and colors used on the exterior of an individual building so that there is visual simplicity and harmony; intense color should be used only as an accent or as part of a carefully executed and balanced color scheme.
- BD 7.1 Distinguish the ground level of a building from the upper levels of a building, especially where a building orients to the street and/or defines public space.

The staff report prepared for the July 14, 2020 meeting is included (without attachments) as Attachment C to this report. Staff finds that the proposed design is consistent with the applicable design guidelines listed above. While BD 3.7 encourages use of recessed windows to create shadow lines and suggest solidity, staff finds that the use of projecting, framed windows would achieve the same result.

Staff's recommended conditions of approval have been slightly modified since the previous review. As the pedestrian access improvements that were presented to the Commission at the July 14, 2020 meeting are not included in the current set of drawings, staff recommends a condition requiring details of this scheme, with which the Commission expressed agreement, be provided for review during Final Design Review. In addition, staff has removed a previously recommended condition requiring consideration of alternative exterior cladding materials as the proposed GFRC material, designed to give a similar appearance as the existing travertine cladding, is high quality, durable and consistent with the applicable design guidelines. Staff continues to recommend a condition requiring further refinement of the window divisions to align closely with the patterning of the new building cladding material.

Please refer to the previous staff report in Attachment C for further details of staff's analysis of the proposed design and the environmental determination.

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, and provision of details of proposed improvements to the northwest pedestrian access stair.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Attachments:

- A. Applicant submittal package
- B. Design schemes presented by the previous design team
- C. Staff report from July 14, 2020 Design Commission meeting (without attachments)