PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT

DATE: AUGUST 11, 2020

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION - NEW CONSTRUCTION OF A FOUR-TO-FIVE STORY MIXED-USE PROJECT WITH 4,500 SQUARE FEET OF COMMERCIAL SPACE AND 227 RESIDENTIAL UNITS AT 452 NORTH LOS ROBLES AVENUE

Project Description:

This proposal is for the development of a new mixed-use project with 227 residential units, approximately 4,500 square feet of commercial space on the ground floor, and two levels of subterranean parking containing 365 parking spaces located at 452 North Los Robles Avenue.

The 113,727 square-foot (2.6 acres) project site is located at the southeast corner of North Los Robles Avenue and East Villa Street, with additional street frontage at the southern end of the site facing North Oakland Avenue. The site has a 10 foot difference in grade from north to south and is current currently developed with a commercial building, medical office and a surface parking lot. None of the existing structures have been identified as historic resources, and all of them are proposed to be demolished as part of the proposed project. A preliminary tree inventory indicates that 13 trees are also proposed to be removed, however none of these trees are protected under the City Trees and Tree Protection Ordinance and they may be removed without a permit.

The project site is located in the CL (Limited Commercial) zoning district and has a General Plan land use designation of Medium Mixed Use. As part of the proposed project, the applicant has applied to change the zoning district of the site to a Planned Development (PD) district. The PD zoning district is intended for sites where an applicant proposes and the City desires to achieve a particular mix of uses, appearance, land use compatibility, or special sensitivity to neighborhood character. Although a PD is proposed, the General Plan land use designation will remain the same. The Medium Mixed Use (0.0-2.25 FAR; 0-87 du/ac) land use designation is intended to support the development of multi-story buildings with a variety of compatible commercial (retail and office) and residential uses. Development in this land use designation is intended to be characterized by shared open spaces, extensive landscaping, small to medium separations between buildings, and shared driveways and parking. Sites with this land use designation may be exclusively commercial or exclusively residential, or with buildings vertically integrating housing with non-residential uses. Where buildings face the street frontage, they shall be designed to enhance pedestrian activity with transparent facades for retail uses and distinctive entries for housing. Parking shall be located below or to the rear of the street.

The surrounding context is mixed. The context to the west, along North Los Robles Avenue is developed with two-story multi-family residential buildings, while the properties facing East Villa Street are predominantly single-story commercial buildings. Diagonally across the corner to the northwest of the site is Villa Parke and the Villa Parke Community Center. Directly adjacent to the east is Stars (Formerly the Lake Avenue Community Foundation), which is housed in a one-story, Massed Plan vernacular building constructed in 1901. The street context along the North Oakland Avenue frontage, located to the rear of the project site, is predominantly developed with two-story single-family homes in various Craftsman or Period Revival styles, with the exception of the parcel at the corner of North Oakland Avenue and East Villa Street, which is developed with a contemporary 11-story multi-family residential building (Pilgrim Tower). The majority of the project site is also located within a half-mile radius of the Lake Gold Line Station and the General Plan contemplates the gradual development of a "Transit Village" with higher development intensities around this station.

Nearby historic resources include: the David J. McPherson House at 529 North Los Robles Avenue (1885), a Folk Victorian style house; 539 North Los Robles Avenue (1908), a Craftsman Bungalow, Bowen Court at 539 East Villa Street (1911), a Craftsman style Bungalow Court listed in the National Register of Historic Places; and 497 North Madison Avenue (1928), a Spanish Colonial Revival style Bungalow Court listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Other known eligible, but undesignated, resources are also nearby and include a vernacular Modern apartment building at 400 North Los Robles Avenue, a vernacular Modern apartment at 405 North Madison Avenue, and a vernacular Modern apartment at 400 North Madison Avenue.

The proposed site plan and ground floor plan shows four primary building footprints arranged in a generally "U" shaped building mass around a central "L" shaped courtyard, with vehicular access to the subterranean parking located to the south of the southeast building. The site plan also shows 28'-33' wide landscaped setbacks from the west and south property lines of the Stars/Lake Avenue Community Foundation property adjacent to the northeast corner of the project site. An east-west oriented landscaped paseo with a pedestrian walkway open to the sky is also proposed along the entirety of the southern property line, from North Los Robles Avenue to North Oakland Avenue, and widens into a larger recreation area to the south of the vehicular access driveway at the southeast corner. This recreation area is programmed with a walkway, dog run, tot play area, a play lawn and a space for underground utilities. The central courtyard is programmed with an amenity court/pool deck, BBQ area, and fire pit. Covered pedestrian access points are proposed at the northeast corner of the site, from Oakland Avenue, at the north of the site from East Villa Street, and at the northwest corner of the site from North Los Robles Avenue. The ground floor plans also show that the commercial uses, residential lobby, leasing area, mailroom and bicycle parking are located in the northern most buildings and generally oriented toward East Villa Street with the commercial entry portal facing the corner of East Villa Street and North Los Robles Avenue. A private community room is located at the interior of the southeast corner of the site. The ground floor plans also show that many of the ground floor units have entries facing the street or courtyard, or have private patios.

Within the buildings, residents would have the option of using one of three elevators or three stairwells to access the units from the subterranean parking. To get to the unit entryways, a resident would take the elevators or stairwells and travel through double-loaded corridors at each level.

The five-story, flat roofed, “U” shaped building mass is punctuated at the ground floor at various locations by open pedestrian passages. However, the four building footprints are not truly separated as they are connected at the second level at the north, east and west elevations. At the north, the connection consists of open circulation bridges, which are generally light in appearance and provide visual permeability into the site. At the east and west elevations, the pedestrian passages are covered by solid masses programmed with units, although the first half of the depth of these passageways are two-stories, both lower to one-story. The building volumes are substantially physically separated at the interior of the site at south by the fire pit area of the courtyard.

The five-story height of the mass is modulated across the site through the use of roof decks at corners, the open circulation decks at the north elevation, and through the use of varying parapet heights and cornice treatments. Articulation of the facades is achieved by incorporating recessed balconies on all elevations, and the use of the two story covered passageways and to a lesser extent setback modulation at the northern corners. The commercial storefronts are visually distinguished from the residential uses by their double height, clear glazing and horizontal canopies. Transitions in exterior style and architectural treatments across the street facing facades also create a strong visual sense of articulation.

Due to the proximity of several nearby eligible Modern multi-family resources, the chosen architectural style for the development is contemporary, with a Modern influence. This style is reinforced through the design’s strong horizontal emphasis, flat roof overhangs, long uninterrupted horizontal regulating lines, simple subordinate vertical lines, large areas of glazing, visual continuity with open space and landscaping, flat roofs, and simple geometric building forms without a distinguished base. In general, the four primary building masses are separated by a combination of structural breaks and changes in architectural details. The proposed materials, include stucco, horizontal and vertical cladding, sleek metal or wood window trim profiles, and clear glazing.

Applicable Design Guidelines:

- Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan
- Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-family Residential Districts

Previous/Existing Entitlements:

- None

Approvals Needed/Project Scheduling:

- Planned Development Zone Map Amendment and Planned Development Plan (City Council).
- Concept and Final Design Review (Design Commission)
- Building Permits (Building Staff)

CEQA Clearance:

This is preliminary consultation regarding design review and is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Staff Observations:

Applicable Design Guidelines:

The following design guidelines are applicable to the project and should guide further development and study of the project as it moves forward in the design review process:

Design-Related Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan:

4.10: Locate and design buildings to relate to and frame major public streets, open spaces, and cityscape. New development at intersections should consider any number of corner treatments, and should balance safety and accessibility concerns with the vision of the area and the need for buildings to engage the street and create a distinct urban edge.

4.11: Require that development demonstrates a contextual relationship with neighboring structures and sites addressing such elements as building scale, massing, orientation, setbacks, buffering, the arrangement of shared and private open spaces, visibility, privacy, automobile and truck access, impacts of noise and lighting, landscape quality, infrastructure, and aesthetics.

4.12: Transitions in Scale. Require that the scale and massing of new development in higher-density centers and corridors provide appropriate transitions in building height and bulk and are sensitive to the physical and visual character of adjoining lower-density neighborhoods.

7.1: Design each building as a high-quality, long term addition to the City's urban fabric; exterior design and buildings material shall exhibit permanence and quality, minimize maintenance concerns, and extend the life of the building.

7.2: Allow for the development of a diversity of buildings styles. Support innovative and creative design solutions to issues related to context and environmental sustainability.

7.3: Require that new and adaptively re-used buildings are designed to respect and complement the defining built form, massing, scale, modulation, and architectural detailing of their contextual setting.

10.7: Encourage sustainable practices for landscape materials, landscape design, and land development.

21.5: Housing Character and Design. Encourage the renovation of existing housing stock in single- and multi-family neighborhoods. When additions or replacement housing is proposed, these should reflect the unique neighborhood character and qualities, including lot sizes; building form, scale, massing, and relationship to street frontages; architectural design and landscaped setbacks.

23.1: Character and Design. Design and modulate buildings to avoid the sense of "blocky" and undifferentiated building mass, incorporate well-defined entries, and use building

materials, colors, and architectural details complementing the neighborhood, while allowing flexibility for distinguished design solutions.

23.2: Parking Areas and Garages. Minimize the visibility of parking areas and garages.

23.3: Provide appropriate setbacks, consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, along the street frontage and, where there are setbacks, ensure adequate landscaping is provided.

23.4: Development Transitions. Ensure sensitive transitions in building scale between buildings in multi-family residential areas and lower-scale buildings in adjoining residential areas.

23.6: Open Space Amenities. Require that open space is provided on-site, is accessible, and of sufficient size to be usable by residents, in common areas and/or with individual units pursuant to the Zoning Code.

25.4: Require that new development protect community character by providing architecture, landscaping, and urban design of equal or greater quality than existing and by respecting the architectural character and scale of adjacent buildings.

Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-family Residential Districts:

2.2: Activating the street. New multi-family and mixed-use buildings should be designed with frontages that activate the street by providing direct access to their ground floor dwellings and commercial spaces.

2.3: Corner lots. Buildings on corner lots should be designed to acknowledge their particular location. Different frontage types can be used on each of the two street facing facades, the same frontage type can be used on each facade, or a frontage type can wrap around the corner from one facade to the other.

4.2: Window and door size and placement. Windows and doorways should be designed to reflect the character and size of the rooms to which they belong. The composition of street and courtyard- facing elevations should organize these windows, doors, and the space between them into a clear and legible pattern appropriate to both the style of the building and the scale of the street it faces.

6.3: Contexts in transition should receive projects in either a contemporary or traditional style with no limitations, that will help to shape the future character of their surroundings.

7.1: Scale. Buildings should be scaled to respond to their context by sensitively and positively addressing the scale and massing of their adjacent neighbors. This can be accomplished by:

- Matching existing building heights or exceeding them by only one story. Additional stories should be modulated by setbacks.
- Modulating side yard and rear yard volumes to provide as much distance as possible between the facades of a proposed building and existing buildings in order to preserve the privacy of the outdoor spaces of both.
- Orienting the side yards of proposed buildings to face the side yards of adjacent buildings.
- Including elements such as porches, galleries, arcades, etc. to relate the scale of facades to those of existing buildings.

- Reducing building bulk by introducing dwelling space in attic spaces.
- Introducing landscape and/or trees as a screen between existing and new buildings.

7.3: Side and rear windows. The placement and size of windows in side yards and rear yards should respect the privacy and need for light and air of existing buildings.

7.5: On very large lots, the division of projects into two or more separate buildings of different type, density, height, and massing is encouraged.

8.1: Entrances into buildings. New buildings should be entered directly and prominently from the street through a lobby, or indirectly through a covered or uncovered passage. Entrance ways and doorways should be clearly identifiable as prominent points of access into buildings and their form should dominate all other openings.

11.4: Contemporary architecture. Buildings designed in contemporary styles may adhere to a set of rules that is established and followed through by the designer. The design strategy must be described in conformance with Appendix A3 (Preliminary Review).

12.1: Simplicity. Building masses should be organized as simple and well-scaled volumes. Excessive roof breaks and overly complicated hipped or gabled roofs should be avoided.

12.2: Architectural logic. For buildings large enough to be composed of more than one volume, an architectural logic, such as a clear hierarchy of massing, should be evident.

12.4: Proportion. Building masses and building facades should be designed with simple, harmonious proportions. Arbitrary proportions should be avoided.

Potential Design Issues:

1. Continue to study additional ways to incorporate more contextually sensitive massing at transition areas next to the adjacent lower-scaled development through the use of additional upper floor step backs, roof decks, or other appropriate design strategies.

2. Explore introducing additional variation in the roofline, possibly by incorporating additional roof decks or by physically separating the building mass above the pedestrian passages.

   Further articulate or separate the building masse to avoid long uninterrupted façades facing the streets. Solutions could include but are not limited to relocating and enlarging the pedestrian passages at these facades and incorporating open circulation decks above them or leaving them open to the sky. Consider shifting mass from the north and west elevations to the interior of the site and connecting the southern ends of the east and west building volumes, leaving a one-story pedestrian passage at the ground level.

3. Consider additional ground floor amenities, such as outdoor seating areas, at the corner and along the commercial storefronts.

4. As the project site is within a TOD area, continue to further develop and enhance the pedestrian paseos and other linkages to facilitate pedestrian activity and the use of alternative modes of transit. Consider adding a second prominent pedestrian lobby at the southeast corner facing Los Robles Avenue.

5. Explain in future submittals how a bicyclist would enter the site at the southwest corner and navigate the grade difference and the path of travel to arrive at the bicycle parking room.

6. Further study the transition in grade at the southeast corner of the site and consider revising the private patio configuration to add unit entryways to the north, south and east elevations of the building volume at the south east corner of the site, to further enhance the pedestrian oriented design of the project.

7. In future submittals, clearly explain how the massing and architectural character of the development is compatible with the surrounding context and will contribute to the architectural character and legacy of Pasadena.

8. Study how to further enhance the proposed design strategy of using differing architectural details and materials to distinguish the four primary building masses so that each mass is clearly distinguished, with a unique Modern inspired design.

9. Continue to study the path of travel and circulation from the subterranean parking to units above. Incorporate open circulation decks or windows at the ends of the double loaded corridors to allow more light into these interior pathways.

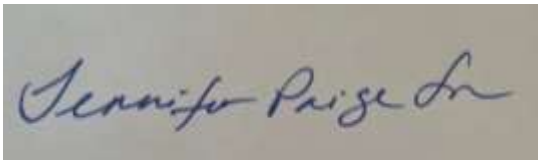
10. In future submittals, clearly explain the site access controls and perimeter fencing.

11. Consider incorporating windows at the ends of circulation corridors, to bring more light into the interior of the buildings.

Project Scheduling/Sequencing:

- Zoning Entitlements/Environmental Review
- Concept and Final Design Review by the Design Commission
- Building Permits

Respectfully Submitted,



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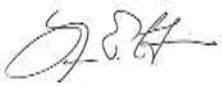

Leon E. White
Principal Planner

Attachments:

A. Current Planning (Zoning) compliance matrix
B. Applicant submittal package