



**PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
STAFF REPORT**

**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 8, 2020  
**TO:** DESIGN COMMISSION  
**FROM:** DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR, PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
**SUBJECT:** PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION – DEMOLITION OF EXISTING ON-SITE STRUCTURES, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW THREE-STORY 28,616 SQUARE-FOOT, 23-UNIT MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL PROJECT WITH ONE LEVEL OF PARTIALLY SUBTERRANEAN PARKING.

130-140 N. MAR VISTA AVENUE

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**Project Description:**

This proposal is for the demolition of all on-site structures, including a single-family residence (constructed in 1925) at 130 N. Mar Vista Avenue, and a single-family structure and a duplex (constructed in 1930) at 140 N. Mar Vista Avenue. A total of four residential units will be demolished. The proposal includes the construction of a new three-story, 28,616 square-foot, 23-unit multi-family residential project with one level of partially subterranean parking. The applicants plan to offer 20 units of market-rate housing, and three units of very low income housing. The site is located two blocks south of the 210 freeway, at the northeast corner of North Mar Vista Avenue and East Union Street. The project site is comprised of two parcels, with a total site area of 15,426 square-feet, or .35 acres.

A tree inventory submitted with the application indicates that there are eight trees on the project site, four of which are protected, and five street trees along the site's street frontages. As part of the proposed project, the applicants are proposing to remove all of the eight private trees, which include three protected specimen trees and one protected mature tree. The existing five street trees fronting the project site are not proposed for removal.

The project site sits within a transitional block of varying residential architectural styles, and development periods. Directly west of the project site, across North Mar Vista Avenue, is a multi-family residential project constructed in 2016, in a Mediterranean Revival style. This project was designed by the same architect as the proposed project. Directly abutting the project site to the east is a two-story, multi-family residential brick vernacular style building, constructed in 1929, which has been determined to be eligible for designation as an individual historic resource. Directly to the north of the project site is another recent multi-family residential development constructed in 2007 and designed in a contemporary style. Directly south of the project site, across Union Street, is a Mid-Century Ranch style two-story apartment building constructed in 1959.

The existing buildings on site are currently not listed in the City's resources database as eligible or designated historic resources. While the existing house at 130 North Mar Vista does appear to be relatively intact, it does not present an exemplary example of its Spanish Colonial Revival style, nor does it appear to be associated with anyone of historic significance. The existing residential structures located at 140 North Mar Vista Avenue also do not appear to be of historical significance. The primary structure at this address has been significantly altered with the enclosure of the original front porch and the construction of a new front porch, along with a detached accessory structure constructed in 1940, which now houses the two detached rear units.

The new building is proposed to have an approximate 25-foot front yard setback at the westerly primary frontage along North Mar Vista Avenue. The building is required to have a five-foot interior side yard setback along its northerly perimeter, with which it complies and exceeds as proposed, to accommodate required light and air separation between the proposed building and the adjacent multi-family residential development to the immediate north. Along the easterly, rear side yard, the building is required to have a minimum five-foot setback. Again, at this location, the building exceeds the minimum requirement with a proposed eight-foot setback, while also exceeding the 15-foot required light and air separation between the proposed building and the eligible historic resource to the immediate east. Along the building's secondary, street side elevation along East Union Street, the proposed setback is 7.5 feet, while the current requirement is 15 feet; the City's affordable housing concession menu offers a 50% reduction of this setback requirement, and the applicant may opt to apply this concession.

The ground floor of the proposed project will sit on a podium over the subterranean parking, which is proposed to provide a total of 31 parking spaces. The ground floor plan also depicts the garage ramp to the subterranean parking, with ingress proposed from North Mar Vista Avenue, along the property's northerly property line. An enclosed main entry and lobby are situated off of this frontage with a singular circulation ramp leading from the sidewalk. The ground floor is also proposed to include internal circulation, seven residential units, and the centralized main garden. An ancillary garden that opens onto East Union Avenue, and is accessed by terraced stairs, is proposed midway through the building. The ancillary garden, along with the main garden, are proposed to be open to the sky. The four ground-level units facing East Union Street are also proposed to have walk-up style entries through terraced entry stoops accessible directly from the sidewalk.

The second level is proposed to include a total of eight residential units, accessed through an exterior walkway that wraps around the interior elevation of the central courtyard. At the third level, an additional eight units are proposed, again accessible by an exterior walkway as found on the second-level. Also at this upper-most level, at the far westerly end, the building is proposed to be stepped back 15 feet from its front façade. The step back in massing is proposed to accommodate additional communal outdoor space as an outdoor terrace located on the flat roof of the second-floor units below.

The proposed building is designed in a contemporary style with flat roofs, a repeating "saw-tooth" façade along the upper two floors, and a grounded "solid" brick base at the first floor level. A contemporary style building is generally appropriate within the surrounding transitional context of the developed neighborhood.

**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 Reviews:**

- Predevelopment Plan Review (PPR). A PPR comment letter was provided to the applicant on July 22, 2020 and a PPR meeting was held with the applicant on August 6, 2020. The project does not meet the threshold for City Council PPR review.

**Approvals Needed/Project Scheduling:**

- Affordable Housing Concession Permit – may be required dependent on requested concessions (Hearing Officer).
- Concept and Final Design Review (Design Commission).
- Building Permits

**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: Architecture that enhances. 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: Development that is compatible. 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.
- 7.1: Architectural Quality. 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.
- 10.7: Landscape. Encourage sustainable practices for landscape materials, landscape design, and land development.

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

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

- 2.1: Consistency. Frontages should be designed consistently within the architectural language chosen for each project, in terms of structural expression, scale, proportions and materials.
- 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 façade, or a frontage type can wrap around the corner from one façade to the other.
- 4.1: Room orientation. For as many dwellings as possible, formal rooms should be designed to face onto the public street with windows and doorways appropriate to both the building type and the building style.
- 5.2: Walls and fences. The introduction of low landscape walls and fences perpendicular to the street, and separating front yards should be minimized.
- 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:
- Including elements such as porches, galleries, arcades, etc. to relate the scale of facades to those of existing buildings.
  - Introducing landscape and/or trees as a screen between existing and new buildings.
- 7.2: Side and rear elevations. The rear and/or side elevations of new buildings that are visible from the public realm should be design with equal care and quality as the front or principal façade.
- 7.5: Multiple Lot Projects. The massing of projects on combined lots should be broken down into increments that relate to surrounding buildings. 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.

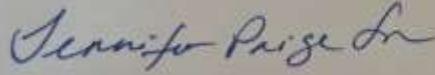
- 8.2: Entrances into courtyards. Courtyards should be visible from the street. The openings to courtyards may be either gated or completely open to the street, but should be unobstructed by garden walls, railings, or other elements that may limit views into the courtyard.
- 12.3: Scale. New multi-family courtyard buildings should be designed as simple assemblies of house-scale forms in a variety of unit combinations and massing compositions.
- 13.9: Masonry and stone veneer walls should be detailed as masonry bearing walls, especially at corners and window and door openings. Brick and cut stone should be laid in true bonding pattern. Mortar joints should be struck.
- 15.1: Indoor/outdoor relationships. In response to Pasadena's seasonal climate variations, building massing and landscaping should provide a balance between access to sunlight and to shade. Outdoor spaces should be designed to be inviting and useful places. Building elements such as open air, covered outdoor circulation and balconies should be used to minimize the amount of mechanically heated and cooled space and to expand the building's usable outdoor area.
- 15.2: Passive solar design. Overhangs, shutters, louvers, canopies, and shade trees should be used to minimize solar heat gain. Buildings should be designed to foster the circulation of cooling breezes.
- 16.1: Habitable area. Courtyards and forecourts should be designed to be inviting places that are useful to their occupants. They should provide a central, flat area that is habitable and encourages human activity and interaction. This area may be paved, landscaped with a surface that can be walked on, or a combination of the two and may be raised above surrounding walkways.
- 16.3: Courtyard and forecourt frontage. Windows and doors of dwelling units that front onto courtyards or forecourts should be designed to maximize the unit's connection to the courtyard or forecourt, without compromising privacy.
- 18.8: Walls visible from the public realm. Garden walls and retaining walls exposed to public view should be considered a part of the principle building.

**Potential Design Issues:**

- Further explore the saw-tooth massing pattern of the façade to capture the richness of the proposed inspiration images. Study how the saw-tooth patterning can activate the façade and provide maximum efficiency at reducing solar heat gain, capturing prevailing breezes, and activating significant view sheds.
- Study the proposed material palette and the overall design to refine the relationships between material applications, massing, patterning, and circulation.
- The proposed brick base appears disconnected from the upper story massing and unresponsive to the street. Explore the integration of the base with the upper floors, and ensure that the massing responds appropriately to the surrounding residential neighborhood.

- The selected materials should have a proven durability against deterioration. Materials should also be authentic, and not thin appliques. It is encouraged that if brick cladding is proposed, it should be detailed as a masonry bearing wall, be of true individual bricks, and have mortar joints that are struck. If wood siding is desired, it should also be authentic in material, and not composed of manufactured materials with a faux wood grain finish to simulate the look of wood.
- Utilize the corner condition of the site through the introduction of architectural gestures that respond to the corner, or programmatic arrangements such as the entrance lobby that are oriented towards the corner.
- Consider the addition of architectural features such as awnings, balconies, and other amenities to further enhance the façade planes through programmatic activation and patterning.
- The proposed setbacks contain seemingly obtrusive barriers such as terraced retaining walls, and railings. Explore the possibility of a site design that allows the building to sit closer to existing grade, closer to the street edge along North Mar Vista Avenue, providing a better opportunity for grounding the building and activating the street edge.
- Apply a respective approach to the eligible historic resource directly to the east of the project and explore compatible relationships of massing, scale, setbacks, volumetric proportions, architectural idioms, and general patterning of materials and fenestration.
- Consider the retention and/or relocation of as many existing trees where feasible, and explore tree preservation incentives. Under PMC Section 8.52.060, a decision may be made through the design review process to waive up to two development standards or accept alternative solutions to assist in the preservation of protected trees. Modifications may include a reduction to garden requirements, guest parking requirements, the location of driveways, and building height limits.
- Evaluate the design of the main garden and all outdoor spaces as usable communal open space for the residents to actively and passively use. Consider the addition of amenity features such as an open recreational lawn, shade, seating, fountains, barbeques, etc.
- Consider the integration of the transitional spatial interaction of the units and the main garden. The individual residential units should fully engage with the main garden through the use of circulation, balconies, terraces, and façade openings, which currently appear to be deficient in the design. The use of continuous open walkways surrounding the main garden as well as bridges that are exposed to public view should be reconsidered, as they serve as physical barriers to the main garden and prevailing views.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Prepared by:



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**Attachments:**

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