

MOULE & POLYZOIDES

ARCHITECTS AND URBANISTS

*1880 Walnut Housing,
1870-1890 E. Walnut Street; 175 N. Greenwood Avenue
Pasadena, CA 91107*

Design Narrative

1: How does the proposed building relate to its site and to its neighbors in terms of setbacks, height, massing, scale, frontage, materiality, open space, landscape, solar orientation, and topography?

The project site is located south of E. Walnut Street and flanked by N. Parkwood Avenue to the west and N. Greenwood Avenue to the east. The area of the site is surrounded by businesses to the north, east, and west as well as single-family houses to the south.

Setback – The City has agreed to convert the existing 10 feet easement along the north-west half of the parcel edge to a uniform 5 feet easement along the entire northern edge of the parcel, along Walnut Street. The building will sit an additional 5 feet from this easement line in order to provide a buffer from Walnut Street for the community room and ground floor units facing north. In other words, the building face will be setback 10 feet from the edge of the existing Walnut Street sidewalk.

The setbacks to the east and west of the parcel increase from north to south to transition into the single family neighborhood due south. They go from 2 feet to 20 feet on the east and from 2 feet to 34 feet on the west as shown in the adjoining diagram. We are also proposing a 10 foot setback/easement along the western half of the southern edge of the parcel, to be used for the relocation of a major electrical utility line while also creating enough separation between the single-family house in the adjacent parcel. Setbacks in the eastern half of the parcel along its southern boundary will go from 5 feet to 9 feet. Final setbacks are to be reviewed and approved by the City of Pasadena.

Height, Massing & Scale – The building is designed with varied massing in response to its immediate surroundings. The building is primarily 3 stories high along Walnut Street, a height appropriate to the more commercial and busy side of the project, while setting the tone for future development in the area. Along Parkwood and Greenwood Avenue it is also 3 stories high with attached 2-story frontages. The frontages are set back and dimensioned to relate to the detached houses along both streets. The 4-story portion is located in the center of the parcel with its short face towards Walnut Street. Furthermore, the central mass on Walnut Street is set back an additional 4 feet from the street which serves to break down the overall mass of the building along Walnut Street.



Aerial view of the building showing variation of four, three and two-story massing

Frontage – The building is entered from Walnut Street through two zaguans. Each entry leads into its respective courtyard at the center of the project and the core of the building. The building is raised from the sidewalk by 1.5 feet at the eastern corner, and 2.5 feet at the western corner and designed with a variety of street level frontages that activate the Walnut Street sidewalk. The central community room steps back to create an engaging outdoor space facing the street. The rest of the façade along Walnut Street is rendered with a mixture of doors, large windows, walled front yards, and balconies. A tower at the north-east corner of the site creates a visual terminus as one drives westward on E. Foothill Boulevard. Since the site drops from the north to the south by about 3 feet, the frontages along Parkwood and Greenwood Avenue have raised stoops. The frontage transforms to a raised front yard at the south-western end of the project, as a transition between the proposed building and the single-family neighborhood to the south.



A variety of frontages along Walnut, Greenwood and Parkwood

Materiality – The building will be wood frame construction atop a subterranean concrete garage. It will have a combination of sloping and flat roofs. It will be finished in brick, metal and plaster. Elements like windows, balconies, overhangs, entry doors, etc. will also be a combination of wood and metal to accord an industrial look.

Open Space & Landscape – The building is designed around two shared courtyards in the Pasadena tradition of Courtyard Housing. The courtyards will be activated by various elements such as outdoor fireplaces, trees and rich landscape to create open-to-sky “living rooms” for the residents. The townhouses to the south of the site and will each have their own private yards. Units on the first floor along Walnut Street will have small yards within the front setback as a buffer from a busy street and neighboring industrial uses. Units on the first floor of Parkwood and Greenwood will have open raised terraces in the side setbacks to engage with the street.

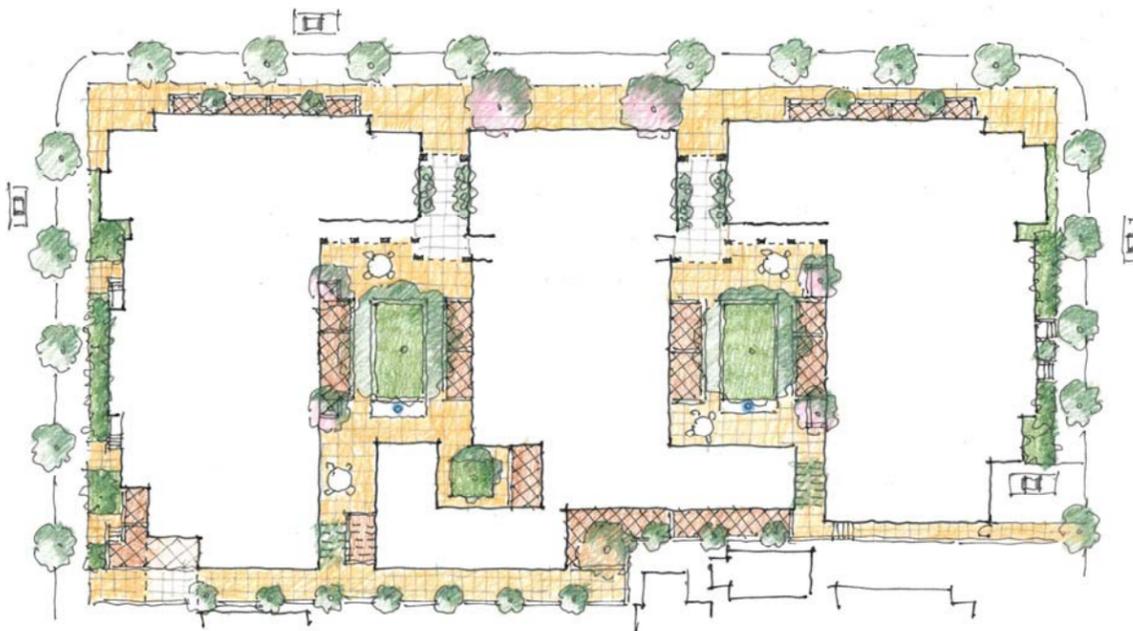


Diagram showing the two courtyards of the project

Solar Orientation – The building massing steps down from 4 and 3 to 2 stories from north to south to allow maximum southern solar exposure into the courtyards. Additionally, the building massing keeps the 4 story portion of the building in the middle of the block, with 3 story masses along the eastern and western edges. This is also a conscious gesture to ensure adequate solar access into the courtyards from the east and west.

Topography – The lot has an approximately 1 foot drop from east to west, the corner of Walnut Street and Parkwood Avenue being the lower point. Subsequently, there is an approximately 4 feet drop from north to south on Parkwood Avenue and an approximately 3 feet drop from north to south on Greenwood Avenue, which is the lowest point on the site. Various stoops attached to the principal volumes of the building mitigate the changes in topography along all three streets surrounding the site.

Parking – Parking is in a subterranean garage entered off of Greenwood Avenue along the southern edge of the lot. The garage is located to sit 1.5 feet above sidewalk level along Walnut Street, to provide privacy for the units facing the busy street.

2: If the proposed building is immediately adjacent to a lower-density zone, what measures have been employed to ensure that the proposed building is appropriate to, and not a visual nuisance to, existing, smaller scale buildings in the lower-density zone?

There are two general plan use designations within our site. “CG” or “low commercial” and “RM-16 PK” or “medium density residential” along the south-west of the site. The CG portion consists of a 3 and 4 story massing stepping down to 2 stories along the southern edge. The RM-16 PK is largely limited to 2 stories. The building not only steps down in height from north to south but also increases its setbacks from the street as it moves south from Walnut. Additionally, the architectural rendition of the building transitions from a three story industrial building to a simple two-story house form to the south. All these moves are conscious gestures to enable a responsible transition into the single-family neighborhood south of the site.



View of building from south-east. Note how the massing is lowered and setbacks increased as the building moves south from Walnut.

3: What style has been chosen for the proposed building and why?

Since this is a large site, with a building length of 295 feet along Walnut Street, the image of the project is conceived as three distinct buildings. The central building along Walnut, clad in brick and metal is inspired by various Southern California industrial loft buildings. Similarly, the other two buildings facing Walnut on the eastern and western side of the central building are also versions of industrial brick clad loft buildings.

The buildings facing Parkwood and Greenwood Avenues revert to a residential imagery – an expression of housing whose scale, distribution of architectural elements, and proportions are of a building fabric more with in conformity with the single-family houses arrayed along these streets –rather than with the commercial and industrial buildings and their messy uses that dominate the East Walnut corridor. The townhouses project a quiet and neutral face to their neighbors to the south. They are of massing, materials, landscape and that is a response to the modest detached house character of the adjoining neighborhood.



Industrial brick clad loft buildings in the Playhouse District in Pasadena

4: What is the design concept or architectural logic of the design presented?

The project is a “hybrid” courtyard housing building. It provides a critique of mainstream housing trends that relentlessly stack as many units as possible on a given lot into a monolithic boxes and then use skin-deep architectural treatment to embellish what is otherwise a homogenous, undifferentiated form. In housing projects like these, every resident is given only one living choice – to enter a unit with light from only one side, and with no cross-ventilation, via a corridor.

In direct contrast to this, our project offers a range of living choices within the site. In the double-loaded portions of the buildings along Walnut Street, Parkwood, and Greenwood Avenue, residents enter units via a corridor. The corridors are opened up in transitional areas to become single loaded loggias overlooking beautiful courtyards, allowing natural light and air to entire the circulation areas and the units. Finally, to the south of the site there are four two-story townhouses that do not have any corridors. These two story units are entered directly from the courtyard, creating the experience of living in single family homes next to a

common courtyard.

The fundamental design of the buildings prioritizes the space between buildings over the building envelope. The courtyards are not just spaces to give the units light and air, but are the very essence of the project. They are meticulously designed – each face of the courtyard is a uniquely composed composition that together creates a beautiful outdoor room. They are programmed and activated with fireplaces, trees, fountains and landscape. This approach to housing is a dramatic contrast to mainstream trends within the residential market.

5: What materials and finishes are proposed and how will they be employed to express the permanence of the building and to reinforce the design concept?

Continuing the finest traditions of Pasadena's industrial buildings, this project will be finished in brick and metal cladding and plaster. Elements of stone and/or concrete may be used strategically as moldings, wall caps, door and window surrounds. Walkways, hardscaped courtyards and exterior circulation will employ the use of brick and modular paving. Security and decorative gates, balconies, windows, roof overhangs, and trellises will be made of steel or a metal material of equal aesthetic value. Flat and sloping metal roofs are proposed. These materials and finishes are in character with some of Southern California's most cherished industrial buildings constructed in the first decades of the twentieth century.

6: What makes the proposed building particular to Pasadena? How does it contribute and respond to Pasadena's architectural legacy and climate?

Both the building's form and architectural character, along with the generous use of exterior rooms and spaces in the form of courtyards and gardens, roots this project specifically to Pasadena's benign climate. The chosen language of this project and its particular definition of unit access to the outdoors, echoes the finest examples of Pasadena's rich garden traditions.

7: If the proposed building is adjacent to a designated or eligible historic resource, what measures have been employed to ensure that the proposed building responds to, or enhances, the historic resource?

Not applicable

8: What green building measures, including passive environmental control strategies and/or active environmental control systems, does the building incorporate into its design?

The proposed building is designed to allow for simple passive cooling. Two of the building corridors have open ends to the weather elements on all floors, providing opportunities for cross ventilation. The many windows are all operable, allowing for the natural cross-ventilation of the building. In addition, the reduction of existing asphalt paving through the addition of planted setbacks, courtyards, patios and backyard gardens will increase natural cooling around the building.

The End