



## PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

### STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** OCTOBER 13, 2020

**TO:** DESIGN COMMISSION

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

**SUBJECT:** APPLICATION FOR FINAL DESIGN REVIEW  
NEW ONE-TO-SIX-STORY, MIXED-USE PROJECT WITH 2,002 SQUARE FEET OF GROUND FLOOR COMMERCIAL SPACE, 59 RESIDENTIAL UNITS AND ON-SITE PARKING (AT GRADE AND SUBTERRANEAN).  
254 EAST UNION STREET

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#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

The staff recommends that the Commission:

#### **Environmental Determination**

Find that the application for Final Design Review was subject to environmental review in the Mitigated Negative Declaration and associated Addendum adopted by the Board of Zoning Appeals for a previously approved application for Affordable Housing Concession Permit #11870 for the same project on October 30, 2019, and that there are no changed circumstances or new information that would require further environmental review.

#### **Findings for Compliance with the Tree Protection Ordinance**

Acknowledge that the Hearing Officer approved the removal of two protected trees in conjunction with its approval of Affordable Housing Concession Permit #11870 for the same project on October 30, 2019 and that this application for Final Design Review is consistent with that approval.

#### **Findings for Final Design Approval**

1. Find that the project, upon implementation of the conditions of Final Design Review approval, will comply with the conditions of Concept Design Review;
2. Find that the project, upon implementation of the conditions of Final Design Review approval, will be consistent with the purposes of design review, 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; and,

3. Based on these findings, approve the application for Final Design Review subject to the following conditions, which shall be subject to staff review and approval prior to issuance of a building permit:

**Conditions:**

1. The base colors proposed on the north elevation shall wrap to the west façade, north of the stair tower.
2. Study the placement of the windows on the west elevation of the stair tower to be more consistent with the similar windows on the southeast corner tower.
3. The floor plans and window schedule in the plans submitted for building plan check shall clearly indicate that the operable windows are all casement operation.
4. The proposed fiber-cement panels below windows shall be painted to match as closely as possible the dark bronze window frame color.
5. The proposed plaster covering over high-density foam detailing shall be changed to a higher-quality precast concrete or stone finish. All precast concrete elements shall be unpainted and shall have an integral color consistent with the paint color proposed for these elements.
6. An articulated precast concrete trim shall be installed at the transition from the precast concrete wainscoting to the plaster walls above. Precast concrete corners shall be mitered to avoid visible exposed edges.
7. Plaster control joints shall be painted to match the adjoining plaster wall surfaces.
8. Study the possibility of routing to the west elevation the mechanical vents proposed at the north end of the east elevation facing the courtyard and Union Street. All mechanical vent covers (both round and louvered) shall be painted to match the adjoining wall surfaces.
9. Provide additional head and jamb details of the windows that are proposed to include trim elements.
10. No scuppers for drainage of outdoor spaces or balconies surrounded by solid walls shall penetrate the exterior building wall. All overflow drainage shall be routed within building walls to discharge at the base of the building to the greatest extent allowed by the Building Code.
11. The project shall comply with all requirements of Affordable Housing Concession Permit #11870 and all applicable requirements of the Zoning Code.

12. The project shall comply with the Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance and any changes to the proposed landscape design that may be required shall be reviewed and approved by staff prior to issuance of a building permit.
13. A copy of this decision letter, including written responses to each condition indicating how and where they are addressed, shall be included in the plans submitted for building permit plan check.
14. The lighting temperature specified on the final plans shall not rise above 3,000 Kelvin for all proposed exterior fixtures. Replacement lighting elements should be regulated by maintenance staff in the future.
15. An 8' x 8' minimum mock-up panel of the building finishes shall be provided and reviewed by staff prior to construction and installation of finishes.
16. Prior to issuance of a building permit, submit to staff written confirmation from utility providers (Pasadena Water & Power and The Gas Company) that the utility equipment shown on the plans are sufficient to meet the demands of the project and that the locations shown in the plans are approved.
17. This project will be subject to 50%, 75%, and 100% inspection points and sign-off by staff of the Design & Historic Preservation section to ensure that the project is constructed as indicated and specified in the decision letter and that all work is performed consistent with the approved plans.

## **BACKGROUND:**

On May 12, 2020, the Design Commission approved an application for Concept Design Review for construction of a new one-to-six-story mixed-use project at 254 E. Union Street. This application is for Final Design Review of the same project.

## **Project Overview**

- General Plan Designation: Medium Mixed Use (0 – 2.25 FAR)
- Zoning: CD-2 (Central District Specific Plan, Civic Center/Midtown Sub-district)
- 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 21,780-square-foot lot on the south side of East Union Street between North Marengo and Garfield Avenues. The site is roughly square in shape and is currently developed with a surface parking lot, associated attendant kiosk, and a carport structure. A tree inventory provided with the application identifies three trees on site, two of which are protected specimen trees.

- **Surroundings:** Surrounding properties include commercial, mixed-use, office and institutional buildings ranging between one and 11 stories in height. The site is surrounded by historic district boundaries, including the Pasadena Civic Center Historic District to the north and east and the Civic Center Financial Historic District to the west. The U.S. Post Office building (1914, Oscar Wenderoth; 1939 addition along Union Street, Sylvanus Marston) adjoins the site to the east, the Pasadena YWCA (1922, Julia Morgan) is across Union Street to the north, and City Hall (1927, Bakewell & Brown) is northeast of the site. The adjoining southerly properties are not historic. The site is also surrounded on three sides by public alleys.
- **Project Description:** The project involves construction of a one-to-six-story mixed-use building with 2,002 square feet of ground-floor commercial space and 59 residential units. Two protected specimen trees, as well as one non-protected tree, are proposed to be removed to accommodate the project. Parking would be provided at ground level behind the commercial space, leasing office and bicycle parking rooms and in two and one half subterranean levels.
- **Site Design:** The new building is proposed to cover the entire site with a 3’ setback from the Union Street property line and 5’ setbacks from all other property lines, with additional setbacks at the southeast and southwest corners. Vehicular access is proposed from Skillen Alley on the eastern end of the site.
- **Architectural Style:** Mediterranean
- **Developer:** DC Union Holdings, LLC – James Li
- **Architects:** Lim Chang Rohling & Associates
- **Landscape Architect:** Korn Randolph Landscape Architecture

**ANALYSIS:**

**Conditions of Concept Design Review:**

Below are the Commission’s conditions of approval and recommendations from Concept Design Review for the project, as well as the architect’s responses and staff’s comments. See Attachment A for the complete set of revised plans, elevations, wall sections, architectural details and materials specifications and imagery.

Concept Design Review Conditions, May 12, 2020:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
1. Provide additional details of the east elevation canopy depth and design, as well as attachment details of the historic sign to the top edge of the canopy, which shall match the historical details as closely as possible.	“Line-of-site perspective rendering and canopy/attachment details provided.”	The line of sight perspective provided on the cover sheet of the drawings adequately depicts the visibility of the historic sign. The drawings include details of the canopy and state that the attachment of the historic

Concept Design Review Conditions, May 12, 2020:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
<p>Provide line-of-site perspective renderings depicting the visibility of the sign from Union Street and ensure the depth of the canopy allows for the greatest level of sign visibility possible.</p>		<p>sign will match the current attachment detail. This condition has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>2. High-quality materials other than plaster shall be incorporated as a wainscot treatment into the ground floor materiality of the building on all sides, at a height between three and four feet from finish grade.</p>	<p>“Ground floor will have a durable, precast base (3’ to 4’ ht.) on all sides.”</p>	<p>The submitted drawings depict provision of a precast concrete base element in compliance with this condition; however, staff is concerned that the imagery and details provided depict a transition from this material to the plaster wall above consisting of a reglet/control joint. Staff has recommended a condition requiring a higher quality, articulated precast concrete trim element at this transition.</p>
<p>3. Metal screening proposed for the ground-level garage openings shall be high quality and articulated to be responsive to the frequent pedestrian use of the alleyways surrounding the project site.</p>	<p>“We have designed a custom pattern that subtly nods to the iconic roses of Pasadena. The metal screening will be made up of panels with the rose pattern cut out. The decorative panels will provide an enjoyable experience for pedestrians while also providing ventilation and security at the ground floor parking.”</p>	<p>The design of the proposed metal screening panels is high quality and incorporated into all of the ground-level, alley-facing openings at the parking structure. The panels are proposed to be painted black to match all other metalwork on the building. This condition has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>4. Provide fenestration or other means of articulating blank wall conditions at stair towers and at the residential units at the north end of the west elevation.</p>	<p>“The blank wall condition at the northwest stair has been addressed by the addition of three windows. For the residential portion at the northwest corner, the bedroom layout does not allow for windows on two sides. We prioritized the window wall to face Union St.”</p>	<p>The three windows added to the stair tower help to provide articulation at that location; however, the placement of the windows does not appear to align with the placement of similar windows on the south elevation stair tower and, by extension, the other windows on the west elevation of the building. Staff has recommended a condition of approval requiring further study of the</p>

Concept Design Review Conditions, May 12, 2020:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
		<p>alignment of the window placement on the stair tower. Although no windows were added to the west elevation of the residential units at the north end of the west elevation, articulation is proposed in the form of wainscot and banding treatments that continue from the north façade, in addition to landscape proposed in this location. The base coloration proposed on the north elevation is not shown continuing to the west elevation; therefore, staff recommends a condition requiring this treatment to wrap the corner to further articulate this portion of the façade. With these condition implemented, this condition of Concept Design Review approval will be addressed.</p>
<p>5. The depth of window and storefront recesses from the exterior building wall on the building facades that are most visible from Union Street shall be as consistent with surrounding historical buildings as possible. Further study the window detailing throughout and consider diversification of window detailing treatments in different locations on the building, reduction of the application of trim elements and matching the color of window trim that remains to the color of surrounding walls.</p>	<p>“Upper floor window trim that surrounded the entire window has been reduced to trim only at the sill (typical condition).”</p>	<p>Detail 1 on sheet AD-2 depicts a window recess depth of 4 ½”. Details 2 and 3 on this sheet also depict deep window recesses, although they are not dimensioned but appear to match the 4 ½” recess indicated in detail 1. Detail 20 on sheet AD-1 indicates that the commercial storefronts are recessed behind the building wall, although the specific dimension is not provided. Most of the previously proposed window trim has been removed; those windows with Juliet balconies retain a trim element, although a detail of this is not provided. A high-density foam sill covered in plaster is</p>

Concept Design Review Conditions, May 12, 2020:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
		<p>proposed for all of the windows above the second floor. Window detailing proposed in various locations on the building includes recess conditions with precast pilasters and railings, Juliet balconies, articulated base panels, and shutters. Staff recommends a condition requiring a detail of the windows with trim to be provided and, upon implementation, this condition will be satisfactorily addressed. See discussion in “Materials and Colors” section regarding staff’s concerns about the use of plaster-over-foam materials throughout the project.</p>
<p>6. All windows shall be casement operation.</p>	<p>“All operable windows will have casement operation.”</p>	<p>The windows appear in the elevations to be casement operation; however, the window schedule and floor plans do not clearly indicate this; therefore, staff recommends a condition of approval requiring this to be specified more clearly in the drawings submitted for building plan check. With this condition implemented, this Concept Design Review condition will be addressed.</p>
<p>7. The project shall comply with all requirements of Affordable Housing Concession Permit #11870 and all applicable requirements of the Zoning Code.</p>	<p>“The project will comply with all requirements of Affordable Housing Concession Permit #11870 and all applicable requirements of the Zoning Code.”</p>	<p>Staff of the Current Planning Section has reviewed the submitted plans and determined that there are a few minor outstanding inconsistencies between the submitted Final Design Review plans and the approved AHCP and the Zoning Code, which are described in the body of the report below. As such, staff recommends that this condition be repeated in this decision.</p>

Concept Design Review Recommendations, May 12, 2020:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
<p>1. Consider incorporating spandrel glass into the second floor window openings at the west end of the north elevation such that glazing extends to fill the entire framed openings.</p>	<p>“Spandrel glass has been incorporated at the second floor window openings at the west end of the north elevation to provide a visual extension from the ground floor.”</p>	<p>This recommendation has been implemented in the design, on the north elevation only. The change is a substantial improvement and the design would be improved if this condition was carried to the other second-floor windows on the east and west elevations where there are stucco wall areas surrounding the second floor windows within the framed openings. However, as this was a recommendation by the Commission, rather than a condition, and was limited to the north elevation only, staff does not recommend a condition requiring this to be provided throughout the building.</p>
<p>2. Simplify the color palette of the building, particularly at the two-story base on the alley elevations.</p>	<p>“The color palette of the building has been simplified with a focus of distinguishing the two-story base on the alley elevations.”</p>	<p>This recommendation has been implemented in the design.</p>
<p>3. Re-evaluate the design of the window shutters.</p>	<p>“Details and photos have been provided to better clarify and explain the design of the shutters at the upper floor window conditions. The windows at the sixth floor sit above a decorative panel to combine for a larger recessed area - to which the shutters are sized in relation.”</p>	<p>The proposed shutters are a simple design and appear to be proportionally sized in relation to the width of the window openings. While the lower portion of the shutters aligns with a solid panel below the windows and, therefore, would not traditionally be incorporated as an element of functional shutters, the proportions are pleasing and acceptable on a contemporary interpretation of a traditional architectural style, such as is proposed for this project. As such, staff recommends approval of the limited use of shutters as proposed.</p>

**Materials & Colors:**

The building exterior is proposed to be coated in smooth finish cement plaster with the exception of a precast concrete base element. The upper four floors are proposed to be painted Benjamin Moore “Sand Dunes,” a light beige color, and the two-story base is proposed to be painted Benjamin Moore “Arizona Tan,” a slightly darker beige from the upper floors. In addition to the previously mentioned precast concrete base, an image of which is provided on sheet A-2.1 along with detail 11 on sheet AD-1, this material is also proposed to be used at ground- and second-level trim elements, columns, and cupola arches. Upper-level molding bands are proposed at the base of the third and sixth floor windows, which, in addition to window sills, are proposed to be made of high-density foam covered in plaster. The precast and plaster-over-foam elements are all proposed to be painted Benjamin Moore “Clay,” a darker beige from the others proposed. Concrete barrel tiles by Boral in “Goldenrod” color (a traditional red color) are proposed to cover the roofs and dark bronze-finish center-glazed aluminum storefronts by CRL Aluminum are proposed to be used at the ground floor and second floor north, west and south elevations. Vinyl windows and sliding doors by VPI Windows, also in dark bronze finish, are proposed at the third through sixth floors and the east elevation of the second floor. Some windows are shown with a solid, recessed panel below, images of which are shown on sheet A-2.0, along with detail 2 on sheet AD-2. This panel is proposed to be made of fiber-cement trim material with a ¾” rounded molding surrounding the plaster wall behind, all painted in a dark bronze color that appears to match the window framing. As this color is not specified in the drawings, staff recommends a condition of approval requiring the color to match the window framing color as closely as possible. Wood shutters painted Benjamin Moore “Alligator Alley” (a medium green) are proposed at the upper-floor windows that have solid panels below them. Dark bronze exposed gutters and downspouts are also proposed; most of the downspouts are positioned at building corners.

Four strategically located wall sections are provided on sheet A-3.1, architectural details are provided on sheets AD-1 and AD-2 and materials and color specifications, including light fixtures, are depicted on sheets AD-3 and CM-1. Staff has reviewed the materials and details provided and determined that they provide a sufficient level of detail at this stage of the design process. The ground-level detailing of the building will be high-quality and consistent with the architectural style of the building, except, as noted previously, staff recommends a condition requiring the detail of the precast wainscoting transition to the plaster walls above be improved with an articulated precast trim detail rather than the proposed control joint transition, as well as to clarify that corners will be mitered to avoid exposed edges. Staff also recommends a condition requiring the proposed plaster-over-foam material proposed for upper-level trim elements, although generally outside of areas where they could come into contact with people and visually further from public views, to be a higher quality material, such as precast concrete over high-density foam, as has been required and successfully used on other projects throughout the City. This will ensure full compatibility with the surrounding highly sensitive historic context of the Civic Center. In addition, precast concrete is traditionally applied with its integral color left unpainted, as is seen on other surrounding buildings and staff recommends that this also be required.

**Mechanical Screening:**

The roof plan on sheet A-1.6 depicts placement of mechanical systems on the roofs of the

building, within a recessed well surrounded by the sloping roof parapet, which gives the appearance of hipped roofs from the ground plane, while screening mechanical equipment from public view. The ground floor plan on sheet A-1.3 depicts the Fire Department connection and backflow devices placed within a small yard area at the northwest corner of the site; the ground-level planting plan on sheet L301 shows planting of a 36"-box Italian Cypress tree and several five-gallon phenomenal lavender shrubs within this area to screen these utilities, which will be visible from Union Street. An interior electrical meter room is proposed within the ground-level parking area at the southwest corner, as well as a transformer room below this on the first basement level. The applicant has indicated that natural gas service is not proposed for the building, except perhaps at the commercial space; therefore, extensive banks of gas meters will not be required.

Minimal mechanical vents are proposed to penetrate the building walls and are shown on the east elevation on sheet A-2.2 and building section A on sheet A-3.0. A circular vent cap is shown on sheet AD-3. The remaining vents are proposed to be routed to the roof of the building. This level of venting is minimal and mostly directed to secondary elevations of the building, with the exception of those shown at the north end of the east elevation facing the courtyard, which will be visible from Union Street. Staff recommends a condition requiring study of the possibility of routing those particular vents to the west elevation of the building, as well as requiring the caps to be painted to match the adjoining building walls (including louvered intake grilles shown in various locations on the building).

The majority of the balconies on the project have metal railings that will allow for overflow drainage to sheet flow off the balcony surface; however, courtyards and other outdoor spaces with solid walls could require overflow drainage to penetrate the building wall and be visible to the exterior. As such, staff has recommended a condition of approval requiring overflow drainage for these spaces to be routed within the building wall to discharge at the base of the building, to the greatest extent allowed by the Building Code, to ensure that there are no drainage scuppers visible on the building exterior.

### **Landscaping:**

Hardscape and landscaping plans have been provided for the project, on sheets L101 through L403 at the back of the plan sets. The site design provides for limited opportunity for landscaping at small setback strips and areas at the northwest and southeast corners of the site. The second floor courtyard is designed in two levels and incorporates specialty paving consisting of sawcut concrete and brick pavers, raised planters and pottery planted with trees and shrubs and amenities including a fire table, gaming table, water feature, outdoor cooking area and seating, all of which is designed with features and materials that are consistent with the design of the building. A small open area near the southwest corner of the second floor incorporates tile paving and seating. A third open space area at the northwest corner of the sixth floor includes tile paving, seating, an outdoor cooking area and fire table. Dark bronze colored light fixtures, including cylindrical ground-mounted fixtures, round step lights, and spot lights are proposed within the landscaped areas and café string lights are proposed at the sixth floor terrace. Staff finds that the landscape and hardscape plan and the proposed amenities are high quality and consistent with the proposed design. As the City has adopted a Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance, the planting plans will require review for compliance during plan check and staff has recommended a condition reinforcing that requirement.

**Lighting:**

Proposed exterior lighting fixtures are depicted on the building elevations and include wall sconces along the exterior ground floor and a hanging fixture within the second floor cupola, which are bronze metal and glass and simple in design. Low-voltage lighting fixtures are discussed in the landscaping section above. Subject to the standard condition regarding lighting temperature not rising above 3,000 Kelvin, the lighting fixtures proposed are high quality and consistent with the design of the building.

**Signage:**

Detailed signage plans are not provided for this review. The conceptual location of one sign for the proposed commercial space is shown on the north elevation, suspended from the soffit at the east end of the façade, as well as an address number sign at the main pedestrian entry to the residential lobby. Images and details of the relocated historic sign attached to a canopy at the north end of the east façade are also provided. Design review will be required for the commercial sign when a specific sign is proposed.

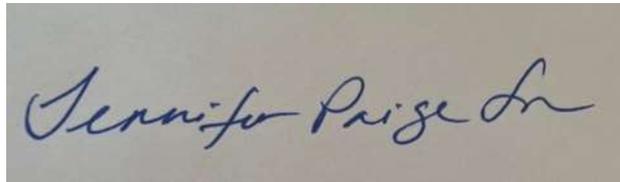
**Comments from Other Departments:**

Interdepartmental review and environmental analysis were conducted during the Affordable Housing Concession Permit process and all resulting conditions of approval are included with the decision that was made at that time. Staff of the Current Planning Section has verified that the plans submitted for Concept Design Review are largely consistent with those approved through the Affordable Housing Concession Permit process, but noted that the parking provided is in excess of the maximum parking limitation, the floor area of the building is slightly over the maximum allowed and that there is a slight discrepancy in the open space calculations in two different locations in the plans. As such, staff has recommended a condition of approval requiring the project to comply with all conditions of the Affordable Housing Concession Permit and all applicable requirements of the Zoning Code, which will be reviewed and confirmed by appropriate staff during the building plan check process. As the project is largely consistent with the previously approved entitlements, no additional environmental review is required in conjunction with this application.

**CONCLUSION:**

Upon implementation of recommended conditions of approval, the project will comply with the conditions of Concept Design Review. The submitted drawings include materials specifications and architectural details that are high-quality and compatible with the overall building design. Staff recommends that the Commission approve the application for Final Design Review with conditions described in this report, which will improve the quality of the materials and detailing of the building in close proximity to highly sensitive historic resources, which would be further reviewed by staff during building plan check.

Respectfully submitted,



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David M. Reyes  
Director of Planning & Community Development  
Department

Prepared by:



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Kevin Johnson, Senior Planner

Reviewed by:



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Leon White, Principal Planner

Attachment:

A. Plans, elevations, details, materials