



March 8, 2021

City of Pasadena Design Commission  
Attn: Michi Takeda  
Hale Building  
175 N. Garfield Ave., 2nd Floor  
Pasadena, CA 91101

**Re: 710 N. Fair Oaks Ave.**

Dear Members of the Design Commission:

Pasadena Heritage agrees that the project will bring much needed supportive housing and could help restore a sense of place to a long-neglected intersection. However, we ask that the design language be revised and fine-tuned to better reflect the history and character of the neighborhood. This site one of the most important intersections in this part of Pasadena, and the design should both make a statement and also more clearly relate to the surrounding area.

We ask that the style of the building be more traditional and better reflect the historic nature of the neighborhood. There has been some good mixed-use and multifamily infill in Pasadena in recent years clad in brick, wood, and stucco, which are historic building materials and provide continuity even in combination with some new design elements. Heritage Housing Partners' Summit Grove (corner of Orange Grove Blvd. and Summit Ave.) or Fair Oaks Court (588-608 N. Fair Oaks Ave.) projects or Abode Communities' Orange Grove Gardens (252 E. Orange Grove Blvd.) are all within a few blocks of this project. They too are three-story affordable housing buildings, but fit gracefully into the adjacent community. They should be studied in depth. We believe the contemporary style that is being employed here seems foreign and imported whereas the building could instead feel more a part of the surroundings.

We ask that special attention be paid to the detailing at the top of the building. This building could use some kind of cornice to help balance its composition. Furthermore, it was disappointing to see inspiration images from the Central District being used to guide architecture here, and some of the chosen examples are not good models for ideal Pasadena buildings. What might have been considered appropriate for Walnut Street is much different from what works on Orange Grove Boulevard. We ask that further study be done on the successful architecture and urban forms in the Northwest before looking elsewhere.

Special attention must be paid to the storefronts in particular. Orange Grove Boulevard is dotted with vibrant and successful businesses that offer a variety of goods and services. The businesses create a lively mixed-use neighborhood. Most of them are minority or immigrant owned. The critical aspects in their success is are storefronts that are flexible and can be divided or consolidated depending on the needs of the business. We ask that a certain level of flexibility be built into the retail space, so that Pasadena-based businesses and entrepreneurs become tenants at this prime location. Having a large, inflexible retail space basically guarantees a national chain moves in, just like the Chase Bank, CVS, and Starbucks on the south side of the street. There are at least five separate businesses in each of the buildings to the east and west of this project, with similar frontages on

Orange Grove Blvd., and yet this project envisions a single tenant. We ask that a similar neighborhood storefront granularity be explored. We also believe it wise to move the community room on the southeast corner of the site to Fair Oaks Ave., to free up the Orange Grove frontage for additional retail space. This would help tie three continuous blocks of retail together, creating a sense of place, encouraging pedestrian activity, and benefitting existing small businesses.

We ask that the southwest corner of the building be better accentuated. The current design is timid and fails to address the corner meaningfully. Does a terrace overlooking a highly trafficked intersection even make sense? What sightlines would be available from this location - views of the roof of CVS? There must be a better location for a roof terrace that can give residents views of the mountains to the north or even into its own interior courtyard, rather than views of streets and traffic. Furthermore, the shade structure as indicated looks heavy-handed and uncomfortable above the corner. A stronger building form at this important corner and a better location for a roof terrace should be explored. Similarly, we believe the lobby entrance should be better accentuated, so that the entrance is more clearly delineated.

Finally, there must be more attention paid to shade and solar orientation. Orange Grove Boulevard is exceedingly wide to accommodate car and bus traffic, which leads to unbearably hot conditions in the warmer months. Historic commercial spaces along the north side of Orange Grove Blvd. use large awnings or canopies to provide tenants and pedestrians some relief. The few remaining Craftsman and vernacular bungalows along the street have generous porches and overhanging eaves to provide shade. The proposed building, in contrast, has little protection from the sun. This is a glaring deficiency that needs to be addressed. Special attention must also be paid to landscaping and its cooling effect. Shade trees should be added to the rear parking lot to provide shade and soften the appearance of the lot.

We support the program, general layout, and the general massing of this project, but we hope these design issues can be resolved. We were pleased to see many of these same issues addressed in the Staff Report, and hope the Design Commission can provide strong direction moving forward. We thank you for considering our concerns.

Sincerely,



Susan N. Mossman  
*Executive Director*



Andrew Salimian  
*Preservation Director*