



## PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** APRIL 13, 2021  
**TO:** DESIGN COMMISSION  
**FROM:** DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR, PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
**SUBJECT:** PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION – FAÇADE REMODEL OF AN EXISTING COMMERCIAL BUILDING  
673 EAST COLORADO BOULEVARD (LAEMMLE THEATER)

---

### **Project Description:**

This proposal is for a contemporary exterior façade remodel of an existing one-story, non-historic, 25,000 square-foot commercial building currently occupied by a movie theater (Laemmle Theater). The exterior remodel is in conjunction with a proposed interior remodel to convert the building into a multi-tenant space for restaurants, office, retail and other services uses.

The existing building is located at the northeast corner of East Colorado Boulevard and El Molino Avenue, within the CD-4 zoning district (Central Plan Specific Plan, Pasadena Playhouse sub-district). The surrounding context includes four-to-five story contemporary mixed-use developments to the north, south, and west, and a two-story contemporary commercial development to the east. The Pasadena Playhouse Historic District is located one block to the west. The building occupies nearly the entirety of the site, and is built to the north, south and west property lines. The property is directly adjacent to an existing open pedestrian alleyway that serves the commercial building to the east (Vromans Bookstore). Currently there is no open space on the property and no protected trees.

The proposed façade remodel includes the demolition of a portion of the building envelope at the easterly side of the site to create a ground floor courtyard, which would connect with the existing pedestrian paseo on the adjacent property to the east. The courtyard would be enclosed on three sides, with storefront entrances at the ground floor directly facing the new courtyard. The courtyard itself would be programmed with a central fountain and seating. A roof deck patio (second floor) and trellis are also proposed at the easterly side overlooking the paseo and the new courtyard.

In addition to the new proposed courtyard and roof deck, other proposed changes include new traditionally composed ground floor storefronts with stem walls and transom windows on the south elevation facing Colorado Boulevard, the west elevation facing El Molino Avenue, and on the north elevation facing the existing alley, as well as upper level glazing on these elevations. Additional façade treatments include suspended canopies, multi-light windows and vertical engaged fins and pilasters. The proposed materials and finishes are consistent with the

proposed contemporary style, and include smooth plaster, tile, brick cladding, and fabric awnings.

**Applicable Design Guidelines:**

- Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan
- Private Realm Design Guidelines of the Central District Specific Plan

**Previous/Existing Entitlements:**

- None

**Approvals Needed/Project Scheduling:**

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

### **Central District Specific Plan Private Realm Design Guidelines**

- SP 2.3: Encourage recessed main building or shop entrances consistent with a traditional “main street” design that is inviting and does not interrupt street and/or retail continuity.
- SP 3.1: Encourage the presence of well-defined outdoor space, such as on-site plazas, interior courtyards, patios, terraces and gardens; these are especially encouraged in association with major developments.
- SP 4.1: Make plazas and courtyards comfortable for human activity and social interaction – standing, sitting, talking, eating.
- SP 4.4: Use plants, furniture and lighting to shape, embellish, enliven and give purpose to outdoor space; lush plants, warm materials and pleasing details are encouraged.
- SP 4.5: Include integrated landscape planters and/or freestanding pots of varying size.
- SP 4.7: Design outdoor space with safety in mind; on-site public plazas should promote visibility from the street, and provide architecturally compatible lighting to enhance nighttime security.
- SP 4.8: Consider adding a focal element, for instance, a sculpture, fountain, or art piece to outdoor space; civic art in outdoor plazas and courtyards is encouraged.
- SP 5.2: Encourage the use of on-site planting, furniture, lighting and site details that respect the landscape character of the immediate area and support the design intentions of the building architecture.
- SP 5.4: Make prudent use of water as a defining element in the landscape; for instance, a fountain may provide the focal point of a courtyard or plaza.
- SP 5.5: Provide opportunities for installation of civic art in the landscape; designer/artist collaborations are encouraged.
- BD 1.6: Discourage excessive and overly gratuitous ornamentation that detracts from the visual clarity of Downtown’s historic architecture.

- BD 1.7: Employ design strategies and incorporate architectural elements that reinforce Downtown's unique qualities; in particular, Downtown's best buildings tend to support an active street life.
- BD 2.3: Employ strong building forms such as towers to demarcate important gateways, intersections, and street corners; strong corner massing can function as the visual anchor for a block.
- BD 2.4: Employ simple, yet varied masses, and emphasize deep openings that create shadow lines and provide visual relief; discourage monolithic vertical extrusions of a maximum building footprint.
- BD 3.5: Provide a clear pattern of building openings; fenestration should unify a building's street wall and add considerably to a facade's three-dimensional quality.
- BD 3.6: Avoid uninterrupted blank wall surfaces along all building facades; the use of opaque and highly reflective glass is also discouraged.
- BD 3.7: Encourage the use of recessed windows that create shadow lines and suggest solidity.
- BD 4.1: Promote active, pedestrian-oriented uses with a high degree of transparency along the street; uses should be readily discernable to the passer-by.
- BD 4.6: Restrict the use of reflective, opaque, and highly tinted glass, especially at street level; storefront doors also tend to be more inviting when they are transparent glass.

**Potential Design Issues:**

- Continue to explore incorporating additional architectural treatments, such as, murals, architectural reveals, or landscaping at the northeasterly portion of façade facing the existing paseo, the new exterior stairs in the courtyard and the northwesterly portion of the north elevation facing the alley to alleviate the blank wall conditions found at these locations.
- The southwest corner of the proposed building is not proposed to change as part of the façade remodel. However, this corner is the most publicly visible portion of the entire building and should be treated/remodeled consistent with the proposed vision for the rest of the building.
- Consider recessing all of the ground floor entries, and in particular, the entries facing the courtyard, to provide for additional sheltered transitional space from the semi-public courtyard to the private interior spaces within the building and to provide for further articulation of the ground floors.
- More clearly explain the logic behind the proposed vertical fins/engaged pilasters facing El Molino Avenue. Consider maintaining consistency between the height of these elements and the height of the parapets and roof edge treatments.

- Future submittals shall more clearly describe the programming of the proposed courtyard. The courtyard should include on-site planting, furniture, lighting and site details so that it is a comfortable space for human activity and social interaction

**Project Scheduling/Sequencing:**

- Concept and Final Design Review by the Design Commission
- Building Permits

Respectfully Submitted,



---

David M. Reyes  
Director of Planning & Community Development Department

Prepared by:



---

Amanda Landry, AICP  
Senior Planner

Reviewed by:



---

Leon E. White  
Principal Planner

**Attachments:**

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