



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: APRIL 27, 2021

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR MAJOR CHANGES TO AN APPROVED CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW
CHANGE FROM A 232-UNIT RESIDENTIAL PROJECT AND EXTERIOR REMODELING OF AN EXISTING RESTAURANT AND OFFICE BUILDING TO A MIXED-USE PROJECT WITH 5,350 SQUARE FEET OF COMMERCIAL SPACE AND 234 RESIDENTIAL UNITS
3452-3488 E. FOOTHILL BOULEVARD

RECOMMENDATION:

The staff recommends that the Commission:

Environmental Determination

1. Find that the proposed project is consistent with the General Plan designation, with the General Plan goals and policies for the site, and with the applicable zoning designation and regulations; and that the project site has no value as habitat for endangered or threatened species, and can be served by utilities and public services.
2. Find that approval of the project will not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, water quality or cultural resources.
3. Conclude, therefore, that the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under §15332, (Class 32) "in-fill development projects" and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances.

Findings for Compliance with the Tree Protection Ordinance

Acknowledge that the Design Commission approved the removal of one protected tree in conjunction with the approval of Concept Design Review on August 28, 2018 and that the proposed changes are consistent with the previous approval.

Findings for Approval of Major Changes to an Approved Concept Design Review

1. Find that there are changed circumstances sufficient to justify the modification of the original Final Design Review approval, specifically the applicant's request to modify the scope and program of the proposed project; and
2. Find that, upon implementation of the conditions of approval, the proposed major changes will be consistent with the purposes of design review, the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the design guidelines in the East Pasadena Specific Plan and the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts; and
3. Based on these findings, approve the application for Major Changes to an Approved Project subject to the following conditions, to be reviewed by the Design Commission during Final Design Review:

Conditions:

1. Provide design drawings and details depicting the design of the residential entry fencing and gates and the treatment of the pedestrian pathway to Halstead Street/Sierra Madre Villa station to ensure that these features are carefully considered to have a welcoming and inviting appearance that is integrated with the overall project design and encourage and celebrate pedestrian movement and transit access.
2. Specialty paving treatment shall be utilized for the pedestrian pathways proposed along the retail driveway frontage and shall continue alongside the restaurant drop-off zone to the street, as well as across the driveway and west to Halstead Street.
3. Study the incorporation of strategic variation in materiality or color of the residential building facades to reduce the monolithic appearance of the long unbroken facades proposed.
4. Continue to study the overall project materiality to ensure compatibility between the existing and proposed buildings as well as stylistic consistency.
5. Consider ways to further unify the facades of the north building, possibly by incorporating the grid treatment proposed on the west and south elevations onto portions of the east and north sides, using consistent treatment for vertical circulation elements, or other means. In addition, study the incorporation of relief or color patterning, landscape or other features to articulate the solid east-facing wall of this building.
6. Provide further details of graphics proposed to be installed on the north building, which shall be integrated into the building design and shall not be designed as signage.

7. The ground-level residential courtyard shall be carefully studied and programmed to provide usable communal outdoor space for the residents of the project, including seating areas, shade where needed, and amenities.
8. The project design shall continue to incorporate the design features outlined in the Health Risk Assessment prepared by ESA (Attachment D), including MERV 16 filtration, a solid and vegetated barrier along the 210 freeway frontage, and inoperable windows on the south elevation and the east elevation of building B. If any of these measures are determined infeasible or proposed to change at a later date, additional Health Risk Assessment may be necessary to ensure that cancer risks remain below SCAQMD evaluation criteria.
9. The project shall comply with all applicable Zoning Code requirements, as summarized in Attachment E, prior to issuance of a building permit, unless deviation is authorized by a Zoning entitlement. If a Zoning entitlement is requested for the project, it shall be submitted, and the review process completed, prior to the Design Commission's review of an application for Final Design Review. The project shall also comply with the conditions in Attachment E from the Departments of Public Works and Transportation, to the satisfaction of said departments.

BACKGROUND:

On August 28, 2018, the Design Commission approved an application for Concept Design Review for the new construction of a 232-unit residential project and remodeling of the existing commercial and office buildings and removal of one protected tree (Attachment A). An application for Final Design Review was filed on December 10, 2018 and was subsequently deemed incomplete and has been inactive since that time. On March 10, 2020, the Design Commission approved an application for Major Changes to an Approved Project to substantially change the exterior design of and review the construction of two small additions to the existing Panda Inn building (Attachment B). The project applicant has subsequently submitted this request to change the scope of the project to a mixed-use project with 5,350 square feet of commercial space and 234 residential units. The previously approved (March 10, 2020) design for the Panda Inn restaurant is not proposed to be substantially changed. In addition, the previously approved exterior changes to the Gateway Metro Tower building are no longer proposed to be implemented.

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: High Mixed Use (0 – 3.00 FAR)
- Zoning: EPSP-d2-CG & EPSP-d2-CG-B (East Pasadena Specific Plan, Subarea d2, General Commercial)
- Design Guidelines: The applicable design guidelines are the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the Design Guidelines in the East Pasadena Specific Plan and the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts.

- Site: The site is comprised of three adjoining lots totaling 4.3 acres on the south side of E. Foothill Boulevard between N. Halstead Street and N. Rosemead Boulevard. It is irregular in shape and is currently developed with an 11-story office building, a one-story Panda Inn restaurant with surface parking lots between and behind these two buildings. The southern edge of the site adjoins the 210 Freeway. A tree inventory provided with the application identifies 68 trees on site, one of which is a protected mature tree, as well as two street trees.
- Surroundings: Surrounding properties include one- to-three-story commercial, office, and institutional buildings and surface parking lots along East Foothill Boulevard, as well as newer five-story residential buildings and a parking structure adjacent to the Sierra Madre Villa light rail station. The Design Commission previously approved a new six-story, 19-unit residential project adjacent to the site at 170 N. Halstead St., which would share an access driveway with this project from Halstead Street. Nearby historic resources include Fire Station #10 (now #37; 1952, Cecil Rhodes Curtis) at 3430 E. Foothill Boulevard and the Stuart Pharmaceuticals Building (1958, Edward Durrell Stone) at 3360 E. Foothill Boulevard.
- Project Description: The project involves construction of a five-story above-ground parking structure with 5,350 square feet of ground-floor commercial space and three six-story buildings with 234 residential units on the existing surface parking lot behind the Panda Inn restaurant building, as well as major exterior remodeling of the existing Panda Inn building. One protected mature tree, as well as 67 non-protected trees, are proposed to be removed to accommodate the project. In addition to the proposed parking structure, which includes five levels, with rooftop parking above ground and one and one quarter levels below ground, parking for the existing office building would be provided off-site.
- Site Design: The two existing buildings are proposed to remain in their current locations and the parking lot between them is proposed to be reconfigured to become an open space area. The existing driveways flanking the Gateway Metro Center building are proposed to be retained and the existing driveway accessing the existing surface parking area west of the Panda Inn building is proposed to be eliminated. An existing driveway extending from Halstead Street would also remain. The smaller northerly building, which would be used for commercial space and parking, is sited approximately 11' from the south façade of the Panda Inn building and the northernmost residential building is set back 26' from the rear of the northerly building. The northerly building is proposed to have a 2'2" setback from the east property line while the southerly buildings are proposed to have a 10' setback from this line. A 30' setback is proposed at the southern end of the site, adjacent to the 210 freeway.
- Architectural Style: Contemporary (Panda Inn); Contemporary with references to New Formalism and lower-scaled components in Traditional Industrial/Warehouse style (new parking and residential buildings)
- Developer: CFT NV Developments, LLC
- Architects: CallistonRTKL (residential)
Architects Orange (restaurant)
- Landscape Architect: Yael Lir Landscape Architects intended to be engaged

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

The following changes are proposed to be made to the previously approved Concept design to accommodate the proposed changes to the project scope:

- Site plan:
 - The previously proposed surface parking area west of the Panda Inn building is proposed to be changed to an open space/courtyard area with a valet/drop off zone adjacent to the driveway.
 - The north building footprint is proposed to be slightly modified to accommodate the new uses proposed.
 - The south building footprint is proposed to be changed to separate the previous single building and above ground parking structure into three buildings that would surround a larger rectangular courtyard space than was previously proposed.
 - The “town center” space at roughly the center of the site is no longer proposed.
- North Building:
 - The building program is proposed to be changed from leasing office, amenity space, residential units and parking to commercial space (ground level, west side) and parking. The vehicular access location is also proposed to be relocated from the south side to the west, at the southern end of the building.
 - The architectural design of the building is also proposed to change from a residential configuration of punched windows and balconies at the upper floors and solid walls with articulated recesses below to a framed grid of openings infilled with an aluminum grid system on the west and south elevations and the westernmost portion of the north elevation. Ground-floor commercial storefronts are also proposed on the west elevation and the westernmost portion of the north elevation; an elevator tower terminates at the southwest corner of the building. The upper floors of the north elevation are proposed to incorporate a lenticular graphic system with a landscape image; the lower floors behind the Panda Inn building are proposed to be framed solid walls clad in brick matching the material proposed to be used on the Panda Inn building.
- South Building:
 - The previously proposed single residential building and above ground parking structure is proposed to be separated into three buildings, which would all be used for residential units and associated amenity spaces. Building C is the northeastern building and has an L-shaped footprint while building A, at the west edge of the site, and building B at the south, are roughly rectangular in shape. All three buildings are proposed to be six stories high. The westernmost edge of the courtyard space is shown as a fire access lane with a hammerhead turnaround space at the southern edge of the site.
 - The massing of the buildings is proposed to change from a fully six-story mass with articulated sub-volumes to mostly flat five-story masses with an architecturally differentiated sixth floor and lower-scale two- and three-story volumes at the northern end.

- Architecturally, the outer building elevations shown in the submittal package are similar to the previously approved design, but simplified to a configuration of vertically stacked large punched openings, some with projecting balconies, within recessed wall planes and with articulated engaged pilasters with angled capitals between them. The ground floor is articulated with a simple cornice feature and most of the sixth floor consists of floor-to-ceiling glazing with pilasters between, most of which align with the pilasters on the lower mass, with a deep projecting roofline cornice feature. The southern portion of Building A's sixth floor appears similar to the treatment of the floors below, but with larger windows. A roof deck with glass railing is proposed at the southwestern end of Building B and an adjacent interior amenity space east of it projects beyond the rest of the south façade and is more heavily framed to accentuate this important space. The two lower-scaled building volumes at the north end of the building consist of a framed grid of floor-to-ceiling glazing.

ANALYSIS:

The findings required to approve an application for Major Changes to an Approved Project are the same findings required to approve the original application for concept design review (i.e., consistency with the purposes of design review and the applicable design guidelines) as well as the additional finding that there are changed circumstances sufficient to justify the change. In this case, the major changes to the project are necessitated by the property owner's request to change the design and program of the project from a residential project to a mixed-use commercial and residential project and to address other design and cost implications of the previously approved project, particularly the high cost of the previously proposed extensive on-site parking.

The design guidelines in the East Pasadena Specific Plan, as well as the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts, apply to this project. To fully evaluate the project's consistency with these guidelines, the staff analysis is provided below.

Programming and Circulation

North Building:

As previously noted, the north building is proposed to be programmed with ground-floor commercial spaces along the west elevation with the rest of the building used for parking. Vertical pedestrian circulation is provided at each corner of the parking area and a trash zone is provided at the southeast corner of the ground level. Vehicular access is at the southwest corner.

South Buildings:

Fences and gates separate the residential portion of the project from the commercial portion and a residential entry court within these gates provides a location for passenger drop-off. A seven-foot-wide pedestrian pathway adjacent to a 26-foot-wide driveway extends from the northwest corner of the residential block west to Halstead Street.

Building A along the western side of the site is programmed with a ground-level double-height

lobby with a mezzanine office space and a third-floor co-working space at the northern end of the building. The rest of the building consists of residential units accessed via double-loaded interior corridors. A portion of the sixth floor at the northeast corner is set back from the volume below to create accessible deck spaces. Vertical circulation includes stairs at the lobby/amenity space, a stair and double elevator toward the northern end of the residential block and another stair at the southern end.

Building C, an L-shaped building at the northeast corner of the residential block of the site is programmed with a double-height gym space with a storage space and maintenance office at the northwest corner with a six-story block of residential units adjoining the east side of it. The spaces within the two-story block have dedicated vertical circulation stairs; the residential block has a stair near the north end and an elevator near the south end. Bridges connect this building to Building C at the southern end.

Building B is a six-story rectangular building at the southeast corner of the site. It is programmed with residential units accessed via internal double-loaded corridors on each floor, with a roof deck and common interior amenity spaces at the western end of the sixth floor. Vertical circulation is provided via a stair and elevator at the west end of the building and a stair at the northeast corner.

Overall, the proposed programming and circulation are consistent with the applicable design guidelines. The most publicly visible portions of the project at the northern end and along the main driveway appropriately contain the more public/common uses, while the private residential units are located toward the rear of the site and oriented around a large outdoor amenity space. Staff recommends conditions of approval to provide design drawings and details depicting the design of the residential entry fencing and gates and the treatment of the pedestrian pathway to Halstead Street/Sierra Madre Villa Metro station to ensure that these features are carefully considered to have a welcoming appearance that is compatible with the overall project design.

Orientation

The orientation of the buildings has not substantially changed from the previous approval and continues to strongly relate to the Foothill Boulevard frontage and the driveway spine extending south into the site. The addition of commercial spaces along this driveway improves its pedestrian character and the design appropriately incorporates a parkway of trees and a pedestrian path along the frontage of the commercial spaces, which appears in the landscape plan to have differentiated paving from the adjacent driveway, terminating at the drop-off zone adjacent to the restaurant courtyard. Staff recommends a condition requiring this differentiated paving to continue along the east side of the drop-off zone to the street, as well as across the driveway and to Halstead Street to enhance the pedestrian connections from the public realm to the public portions of the site.

Height, Massing and Modulation

The height and massing of the north building has not substantially changed, while the massing of the south buildings is substantially different from the original proposal, including removal of additional above-ground parking, separation into three buildings, and expanding the central courtyard. The height of the buildings is largely the same, with the exception of the two lower-scale volumes at the northwest corner. The modulation of the larger building masses has been

simplified from the previous proposal. Overall, the buildings are similar in scale to the previously approved design, while allowing for a more open feel and height articulation at the residential portion. While there are some long, unbroken building facades, particularly along the east and west sides, which would otherwise be undesirable, these buildings are set toward the rear of the site near the 210 freeway and are not strongly visible from Foothill Boulevard. As such, staff is comfortable with the proposed massing but would recommend a condition that the façade treatment incorporate strategic variation in materiality or color to enhance the articulation proposed and reduce the monolithic appearance of the long, unbroken facades.

Architecture Style and Detailing

North Building:

The north building, which is largely used for parking, is designed to incorporate façade treatments to reduce its appearance as a parking structure, including grid framing, metal grid infill and graphics. However, the different treatments on the north elevation and the proposed solid wall on the east elevation create a somewhat disparate appearance to the building overall. Staff recommends a condition requiring the design team to consider ways to further unify the facades of this building, possibly by incorporating some of the grid treatments proposed on the west and south elevations onto portions of the north side, using consistent treatment for vertical circulation elements, or other means, as well as incorporating coloration, patterning or landscape to articulate the solid east wall of this building. In addition, additional details of the proposed graphic panels should be provided to ensure they are well-integrated into the building design and not designed as signage.

South Buildings:

The proposed architectural style is similar to the previously approved design, but simplified to eliminate boxed and framed elements and create facades composed of recessed wall planes with stacked windows and articulated engaged pilasters between. The ground floor is differentiated by a simple continuous cornice element and most of the sixth floor is strongly differentiated with large panes of glazing, darker colored and thinner pilasters and deeply extended roofline canopies. The lower-scaled volumes are designed in a traditional industrial/warehouse design with a grid pattern, possibly in brick, surrounding large glazing panels. As noted above, staff is concerned that the longer facades of these buildings have a somewhat monolithic appearance and, while the proposed massing may be appropriate at this location, consideration should be given to studying ways to incorporate colors and materials that would reduce this monolithic appearance. In addition, the consistency of materiality between the different buildings overall should be studied to ensure internal compatibility between the existing and proposed buildings, as well as stylistic consistency. With these conditions addressed, the proposed changes will be consistent with the design guidelines and appropriate to the surrounding context.

Compatibility

Overall, the project is similar to the previously approved design in terms of site design, height, massing and architecture with some notable exceptions previously described. The separation of commercial spaces at the north end from residential spaces to the south is an appropriate response to the site configuration and the proposed design, upon implementation of the

recommended conditions of approval outlined above, will be both internally compatible and compatible with the surrounding context.

Conceptual Landscape Design

The proposed landscape design is similar to the previously approved landscape design, except that the previous surface parking lot adjacent to the restaurant is now proposed to be a courtyard space, the “town square” component is no longer proposed and a residential lobby drop-off zone is now proposed. A former dog park at the southern end of the site is also no longer proposed and the central residential courtyard is significantly larger than previously proposed.

The proposed restaurant courtyard, referred to in the plans as “Golden Jubilee Court,” is largely a paved area with a symmetrical configuration of trees and planters and a central water feature, all on axis with the restaurant entry on its west elevation, and cement pavers. A row of trees aligns with the east edge of the main access driveway and planter areas with trees are proposed along the south side of the north building and adjacent to the residential lobby and fitness spaces. There is also a row of trees flanking the east end of the westerly driveway and continuing for its entire length on the south side, in conjunction with the pedestrian pathway leading to Halstead Street and the Sierra Madre Villa Metro light rail station. These landscape features are appropriate to soften the public areas of the site; as discussed previously, staff has recommended a condition requiring continued study of the design of the residential entry zone and pedestrian pathways to ensure they are inviting, integrated with the overall design and encourage and celebrate pedestrian movement and transit access.

Although a larger residential courtyard is provided, the programming and use of the space is undefined in the landscape and architectural plans, other than paving and a central water feature. This space should be carefully studied and programmed to provide usable communal outdoor space for the residents of the project, including seating areas, shade where needed, and amenities. Staff has recommended a condition requiring this space be further studied for review during Final Design Review.

Tree Removal

In conjunction with its approval of Concept Design Review for the originally proposed project, the Design Commission also approved the removal of one protected mature tree at the rear of the site. No replacement trees were required. As such, the proposed changes are consistent with this previous approval.

Time Limit

PMC §17.64.050.D states, “if a major change is approved within three years of the initial approval, the three-year time limit for the entitlement shall start on the date on which the major change was approved. Extensions to the major change may be requested. Any subsequent requests for a major change shall not reset the time limits.” This language does not specifically address the standard time limits for Concept Design Review, which is one year, nor the need to subsequently apply for and receive approval of an application for Final Design Review in order to move forward with construction of the project. As such, the Zoning Administrator has previously determined that granting approval of a Major Change to an approved Concept

Design Review would re-start the one-year time limit for Concept Design Review, which could be extended for one year if an application for Final Design Review is not submitted prior to the end of the one-year time limit.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

Due to the substantial changes proposed to be made to the previously approved project, staff routed the revised plans to other City departments, divisions and sections as is typically done for Concept Design Review applications. Recommended conditions from the Departments of Public Works and Transportation are recommended to be included in this decision, as well as compliance with Zoning Code requirements, which are outlined in comments provided by staff of the Current Planning Section. All comments provided are in Attachment E.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

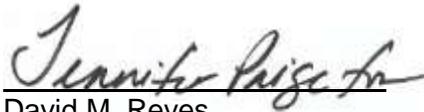
The project will be constructed on a previously developed site in an urbanized area and is consistent with the General Plan, East Pasadena Specific Plan and Zoning designations that apply to the property. Staff engaged ICF International, an environmental consulting firm, to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the previously proposed project scope and determine whether it would meet the required findings for a Categorical Exemption under class 32, “infill development projects.” Based on the documentation that was prepared, the original project would not have the potential to result in significant impacts related to air quality, traffic, noise, water quality or cultural resources and, based on that analysis, the Commission previously determined that the project is Categorically Exempt from CEQA.

The changes to the proposed project will substantially reduce the amount of excavation needed for underground parking, thereby resulting in lesser air quality and noise impacts. The Department of Transportation conducted a revised transportation assessment and did not identify additional associated impacts as a result of the revised proposal. As such, the previously adopted Categorical Exemption remains valid and no additional environmental analysis is required for the project.

CONCLUSION:

The applicant has presented information to support a finding that there are changed circumstances sufficient to justify the proposed changes. Staff finds that, upon implementation of conditions of approval, the changes will be consistent with the applicable design guidelines and recommends that the Commission approve the changes with the conditions noted in the report.

Respectfully submitted,



David M. Reyes
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Department

Prepared by:



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Reviewed by:



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Attachments:

- A. Previously approved plans & elevations - August 28, 2018 Concept Design Review
- B. Previously approved plans & elevations - March 10, 2020 Major Changes (Panda Inn)
- C. Class 32 categorical exemption documentation
- D. Health Risk Assessment
- E. Comments from other City departments
- F. Current proposed plans & elevations