



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: May 11, 2021

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW
FAÇADE REMODEL TO EXISTING COMMERCIAL CENTER CONSISTING OF TWO DETACHED BUILDINGS TOTALING 10,904 SQUARE FEET AT 825-849 N.LAKE AVENUE.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Design Commission:

Environmental Determination

1. Find that the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under §15301, Class 1, for Existing Facilities such as the existing commercial buildings, 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

1. Acknowledge that there are no protected trees on the project site.

Findings for Concept Design Approval

1. Find that the project, upon implementation of the conditions of approval, will comply with the purposes of design review, the design-related goals and policies of the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the Design Guidelines in the North Lake Specific Plan and the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts; and
2. Based on these findings, approve the application for Concept Design Review subject to the following conditions to be further reviewed during Final Design Review:

Conditions

1. All new stucco finishes shall be specified to have, a smooth or fine sand finish.

2. The triangular asphalt area that is a remnant of the proposed new accessible parking space in front of Building-B shall be landscaped with drought-tolerant landscaping including a shade tree. A concrete curb extension shall be constructed to protect and define the enlarged planting bed.
3. The existing parking lot located behind Building-B shall be restriped due to the proposed removal of the existing non-compliant accessible parking space, and to provide adequate back-out space for the far south parking spot, and to provide sufficient room for the new ivy planting beds.
4. Aluminum reveals shall be incorporated onto all façade planes receiving a stucco treatment as controlled expansion joints, and façade patterning.
5. All existing planter beds shall be cleared and replanted with drought-tolerant plantings. All existing site trees shall remain and be protected in place.
6. The proposed stone cladding at the heightened corner elements shall be designed and detailed as load bearing walls, including extending the stonework to the ground to encapsulate a fully protruded volume.
7. The proposed metal canopy awnings shall not exceed the length of their respective storefront location.
8. Additional storefront openings shall be incorporated into the corner tower element of Building-B at the south elevation.

BACKGROUND:

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: Low Commercial
- Zoning: CL SP-1d (North Lake Specific Plan, Subarea 1d)
- 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 North Lake Specific Plan and the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts.
- Site: The site consists of two detached, one-story, multi-tenant commercial buildings. Building-A was constructed in 1990, sits at the southern end of the project site, and has an existing gross square-footage of 4,680 square feet. Building-B was constructed in 1963, sits at the north end of the project site, and has an existing gross square-footage of 6,224 square feet. The total gross square footage of the existing buildings is 10,904 square feet. Both Building-A and Building-B are “L-shaped” with surface parking areas interspersed on the site. The existing buildings are relatively simple in form with flat facades, and minimal architectural detailing. The buildings feature a partial mansard shingle roof along the front facades, which also serve as the canopy for the building’s respective front walkways.

Additionally, both buildings are clad in a rough stucco finish. Building-A contains two existing small storefronts, with rough stucco bulkheads at opposite ends of the building's north elevation and another at the east elevation. The remainder of Building-A's walls consist of blank, windowless stucco. Building-B contains a more rhythmic and continuous layout of storefronts along its east elevation, including a partial wall of brick cladding. On Building-B's north façade, fronting Merret Drive, a part of the façade is composed of square CMU block, topped with a crenelated parapet. The project site consists of four adjoining parcels totaling 25,993 square feet.

- Surroundings: The site is located in the North Lake Specific Plan area, and is located at the southwest corner of North Lake Avenue and Merritt Drive. The surrounding context consists of a mix of different land uses and building types to the north, south, and east of the site, including traditional commercial buildings, strip commercial centers, fast-food restaurants, and a big-box commercial building across North Lake Avenue, which also sits in the Bungalow Heaven Landmark District. Immediately west of the project site is a single-family residential neighborhood.
- Project Description: The project involves a complete façade renovation of the existing buildings. The applicant is proposing to remove the mansard roof and canopy, the rough stucco finish, and the existing storefronts on both buildings. Additionally, on Building-B, the applicant is proposing to remove the brick cladding, reface the CMU portion of the facade, and remove the crenelated parapet. In an effort to modernize the shopping center, the applicant is proposing to update the facades with contemporary architectural motifs. These efforts include the modulation of the façade plane through a mixture of finishes, volumetric protrusions, and new aluminum storefronts. No new square-footage is proposed.
- Site Design: With the exception of minor façade modulations, the proposed project will not increase the footprints of the existing two commercial buildings, or involve the development of any additional buildings. Only minor changes are proposed for the existing design of the developed site, pertaining to accessibility requirements for parking and paths of travel. Small strips of existing asphalt abutting the rear of Building-B are proposed for removal to accommodate the insertion of new, curbed, planting beds for the purposes of growing ivy to screen and soften the rear façade as it sits immediately adjacent to a single-family residential neighborhood.
- Architectural Style: Contemporary
- Developer: Vano Baghdasarian
- Architects: Loosy Davoodian
- Landscape Architect: N/A

ANALYSIS:

Design Commission Comments from Preliminary Consultation

On October 13, 2020, the Design Commission reviewed an application for Preliminary Consultation for this project. The Commission’s comments from that meeting, with excerpts from the design team’s responses, and staff’s comments, are detailed in the table below. The design team’s full responses can be found in Attachment C.

Commissioner Comments: October 13, 2020	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>1. Further explore the relationship of the buildings to their immediate adjacent residential context. Consider the visual impacts of increasing the parapet height to the adjacent single-family residential neighborhood. Also, consider the visual impacts of non-articulated walls facing the residential neighborhood and the use of vegetative screening at the parking lot behind Building B.</p> <p>Consider upgrading the landscaping to coincide with the façade update of the shopping center while providing a vegetative element that satisfactorily screens the parking lots from immediate adjacencies and provides adequate shade tree canopy. Look into the possibility of adding vegetative elements along the façade to soften the building such as climbing vines or espaliers.</p>	<p>“None of the parapet walls adjacent to the residences have been raised. Vegetative screenings are added in the parking area behind Building-B.”</p>	<p><i>Comments will be satisfactorily addressed with recommended conditions of approval.</i></p> <p>The applicant has further refined the modulations of the proposed façade remodel through a coordinated design of new material applications and planar protrusions along the wall planes. The proposed raised parapets are articulated at the building corners through tower-like elements, and this accentuated roofing occurs along the front of the buildings, limiting any direct visual impacts to the abutting residential neighborhood at the back of the property.</p> <p>As recommended, the applicant has softened Building-B through proposed vegetative screening along its rear walls overlooking the rear parking lot, which directly abuts a single-family residential property.</p> <p>Though staff understands the utilitarian nature of the rear facades of the buildings, conditions of approval are recommended to provide further architectural articulation with the use of aluminum reveals in the proposed stucco finish to coordinate with the overall patterning of the building façade remodel.</p>

Commissioner Comments: October 13, 2020	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>2. Design all side and rear walls with the same attention to detail as the primary facades. In particular, explore additional facade modulations and public-oriented fenestrations at the elevations fronting the two street edges and further extend the parapet and cornice treatment and façade materials onto portions of side and rear facades that are visible to the public. Consider utilizing existing features such as service doors or rear entries, and accentuating them in a feasible, yet visually effective way. The secondary facades at the rear can be treated to a lesser extent, but should still convey a sense of unity with the primary facades and provide visual interest.</p>	<p>“The comment has been addressed through the revised elevation drawings.”</p>	<p><i>Comments will be satisfactorily addressed with recommended conditions of approval.</i></p> <p>As stated above, the applicant has further refined the detailing and new material application of the faced planes. Additionally, the applicant has introduced new storefronts along the east elevation of Building-A as it overlooks North Lake Avenue. While it is recommended that additional fenestrations occur along the north elevation of Building-B as it overlooks Merret Drive, staff understands the complexity this imposes on an existing leased tenant space and interior programming, whereas with Building-A, the lease space is currently vacant and easier to modify.</p> <p>Again, as stated above, though the rear facades of the buildings are utilitarian in nature, they can be further articulated through careful detailing. A condition of approval is recommended to provide further architectural articulation with the use of aluminum reveals in the proposed stucco finish to coordinate with the overall patterning of the building façade remodel.</p>
<p>3. Evaluate the application of the materials and their relationship to each other and the modulations of the façade plane. Consider establishing a horizontal hierarchy in the logic of material application along the façade planes that carries through to both buildings</p>	<p>“The comment has been addressed through the revised elevation drawings.”</p>	<p><i>Comment will be satisfactorily addressed with recommended conditions of approval.</i></p> <p>The applicant has revised the proposed façade remodel by implementing a simpler material palette of stucco, stone cladding, metal cornice trim, and metal canopy awnings. The combination of proposed colors, furred out wall planes, and stone cladding is an improvement over the previous iteration presented</p>

Commissioner Comments: October 13, 2020	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
		<p>during Preliminary Consultation. However, the application of the proposed stone cladding is inconsistent with the design guidelines. Staff recommends a condition of approval to require the stone cladding to be detailed as load bearing walls at all heightened corner elements, which would generally require the material to be carried to the ground and to engage the storefronts.</p>
<p>4. Reconsider the proposed use of corrugated metal as a façade material. Proposed materials should be reflective of the surrounding development context. The use of flat metal paneling or other prefinished composite materials may be considered as more appropriate to the surrounding urban context.</p>	<p>“The corrugated metal cladding has been removed.”</p>	<p><i>Comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The applicant has removed metal as a proposed siding element, and has simplified the proposed material palette as stated above.</p>
<p>5. Consider a stone or brick cladding, detailed as a bearing wall, along the base of the façade to establish a baseline hierarchy and order of materials.</p>	<p>“Drawings have been revised.”</p>	<p><i>Through the recommended conditions of approval, the intent of the comment will be satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The applicant has revised the drawings to provide stone cladding along the furred out wall planes at the heightened building corner elements along the primary façades. Staff finds that these are appropriate locations for the material, and add a visual grounding at these key formal locations. However, the application of the stone work at these locations should be further refined. Staff recommends a condition of approval to require all proposed stone cladding at these locations be detailed as load-bearing to represent authenticity and visual weight to the heightened corner locations.</p>

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<p>6. The selected materials should have a proven durability against deterioration. Materials should be authentic, and not applied as thin appliques; therefore, in-plane materials transitions should be avoided and should occur at inside corners. The use of tile may be acceptable provided it is detailed appropriately as a base material that can appear to visually support the weight of the upper façade. Consider an appropriately detailed and full-surround stone wainscot. Carefully consider the selection and application of the materials at the pedestrian level, particularly along the façade elevations fronting Lake Avenue and Merritt Drive.</p>	<p>“The comment has been addressed through the revised elevation drawings.”</p>	<p><i>Comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The applicant has simplified the proposed material palette through a refined selection of materials including new stucco, stone cladding, metal coping trim at the parapet, and metal canopy awnings. These materials are all inherently durable and commonly found on buildings throughout the City.</p>
<p>7. Further study the design logic of the proposed awnings and their relationship with each other in size, mounting height, and detailing to add elegance and clarity.</p>	<p>“Revised.”</p>	<p><i>Through the recommended conditions of approval, the intent of the comment will be satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The applicant has revised the logic of the proposed metal awning canopies, locating them above the new storefronts and within the same datum line along the façade walls. At some locations, the awnings extend beyond the storefronts, which is inconsistent with the guidelines. As a recommended condition of approval, the awnings shall not exceed the length of their respective storefronts.</p>
<p>8. Determine the design of the cornice trim and avoid the potential use of foam trim elements.</p>	<p>“The cornice has been changed to a metal coping.”</p>	<p><i>Comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The applicant has revised the parapet roofing to incorporate decorative tower elements at the prominent building corners, and</p>

Commissioner Comments: October 13, 2020	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
		simple metal coping at the remainder of the parapet roof. Materials and detailing of these elements will be reviewed during Final Design Review.
9. Consider additional hues to the color palette to add visual interest.	"The proposed hues have been modified."	<p><i>Comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The applicant has revised the color and material palette to incorporate a mixture of warm hues consisting of neutral sand-colored stone, and paint. Subtle, yet suitable, accent colors can be found in a golden accent paint, the anodized bronze aluminum of the new storefronts, and the charcoal grey of the metal awning canopies and parapet coping.</p>
10. For Building B, add additional glazing fenestrations and architectural detailing at the south elevation, particularly at the proposed tower element. Additionally, further study the proportions and height along the façade and how they relate to each other.	"Elevations have been revised."	<p><i>Comments will be satisfactorily addressed with recommended conditions of approval.</i></p> <p>The applicant has revised the elevations to provide a complimentary balance of height and rhythm along the primary facades of the building with corner tower elements that visually bookend the building's front façade. However, staff finds the south façade of Building-B requires additional activation such as storefront glazing under the proposed awning at the corner tower. Staff recommends a condition of approval to require the applicant to provide additional storefront glazing along the south elevation of Building-B to address the Preliminary comments.</p>
11. Look into treating tenant space 825 as an architectural end piece that reads as one volume.	"Elevations have been revised."	<p><i>Comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The applicant has revised the elevation of Building-A to incorporate a coordinated rhythm of extruded wall planes,</p>

Commissioner Comments: October 13, 2020	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
		storefronts, corner elements, and centralized accents that allow the building to operate as a multi-tenant space, while also reflecting a unified façade that can read as one lease space.
12. Further study how the façade relates to the hierarchy of the interior tenant partitioning.	"Elevations have been revised."	<p><i>Comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The applicant has revised the elevations to be in rhythm with the interior tenant partitioning with the use of separate storefronts, awning canopies, volumetric wall protrusions, and material and color applications that coincide with the existing interior layout. The applicant is proposing to bookend the buildings with heightened corner elements, while providing a centralized hierarchy in the facades through an additional heightened and protruded wall plane to provide visual demarcation of each central tenant space.</p>
13. Clearly define the accessibility paths of travel and how that relates to the site design and façade remodel.	"The accessible parking space has been relocated."	<p><i>Comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The applicant will be utilizing existing pedestrian and vehicular circulation patterns, which primarily front the building facades. The applicant is proposing to relocate one accessible parking space at the rear of Building-B to a more accessible front parking lot location.</p>

Programming and Circulation

The proposed project involves the façade remodel of the existing commercial shopping center consisting of two existing detached multi-tenant buildings. No new square footage is proposed, and as a result, the applicant is proposing to utilize the existing building footprints and site development including interior programming and circulation patterns. These circulation patterns consist of pedestrian walkways fronting each building, a primary surface parking lot fronting both buildings, and a secondary surface parking lot located at the rear of Building-B. The project

seeks to enhance existing multi-tenant commercial programming, consistent with the land use allowable under the North Lake Specific Plan.

Orientation

The proposed façade remodel will maintain the existing footprints and orientation of the two detached commercial buildings. The accentuated designs of the proposed remodel will introduce façade activation and a human-oriented scale to the façade planes through new storefronts, furred out wall planes, new material applications, and canopy awnings. These proposals will provide an improvement over the existing façade design of the shopping center and generally improve the buildings' street orientations. The proposed new storefronts will provide additional transparency into the structures, while the canopy awnings will provide architectural rhythm and orient patrons to the entries of the tenant spaces.

Height, Massing and Modulation

The proposed façade modulation will provide a rhythmic pattern of depth and protrusions, promoting varied textures and shadows and overall visual interest. Additionally, the parapet is proposed to be raised at areas receiving a furred-out façade plane to provide extended height, and a balanced proportion of architectural hierarchy at key façade points, particularly entries and building corners.

Architectural Style and Detailing

The proposed façade remodel will create an improved commercial experience through a refreshed contemporary design. The applicant is proposing to convert the existing flat facades into activated wall planes through detailing consisting of new architectural elements such as heightened corners, a new and simple material palette, canopy awnings, and new storefronts.

The proposed materials, colors, and overall rhythm of the new façade and roofing design have been thoughtfully designed to provide a logical architectural idiom with a clear hierarchy, datum lines, and volumetric balance. The applicant has worked with staff to address most of the Commission's Preliminary comments. However, staff recommends several conditions of approval, as stated above, to further refine the project in accordance to the Design Guidelines and the Commission's Preliminary comments. Staff recommends a condition to require a smooth or fine sand finish on the stucco facades to complement the proposed contemporary design of the remodel.

Compatibility

The proposed façade remodel is consistent with the immediate transitional commercial context, and sensitive to the existing residential neighborhood abutting the west side of the project site. The applicant has refined the material to exclude non-contextual materials, and incorporate durable materials that are consistent with newer commercial developments in the City. Additionally, the applicant is proposing to retain existing building heights at the rear of the buildings, as they overlook the residential neighborhood, thus reducing any possible increase in visual encroachments. The proposed project will not result in an increase of building square footage.

Conceptual Landscape Design

The applicant is proposing to retain all existing landscaping and planter beds and is proposing to provide additional planter beds for vegetative screening at the rear of Building-B, in response to the Preliminary Consultation comments. These new proposed planting beds will allow for the growth of vines to soften the rear façade of the building as it overlooks the residential neighborhood to the west. Additionally, staff recommends conditions of approval requiring the new planting beds to be protected by new curbs, that the existing planting beds be replanted with drought-tolerant plantings, and that the triangular space of non-usable asphalt adjacent to the relocated accessible parking space loading area be converted into a new planting bed with a new tree planting. With these conditions, the beautification of the proposed project will be further enhanced through refreshed and expanded landscaping.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

Staff routed the project for comment to the Public Works Department and the Current Planning Section of the Planning Division. Their review of the proposed project resulted in no comments or conditions.

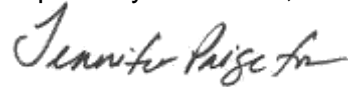
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The project will utilize existing commercial buildings and not result in the expansion of any square footage or intensification of the existing development. Therefore, the proposed project is consistent with the General Plan, and the North Lake Specific Plan Zoning designation that applies to the property. Based on these facts, staff recommends that the Commission determine that the project is Categorical Exempt from CEQA under Class 1, Existing Facilities.

CONCLUSION:

With the implementation of the recommended conditions of approval, the proposed project will satisfactorily address the comments provided during Preliminary Consultation, and it will be consistent with the applicable guidelines, while providing a welcome and thoughtfully designed enhancement to this existing neighborhood commercial center. Therefore, staff is recommending approval of the project's application for Concept Design Review subject to the conditions listed in this report, which will be subject to further review during Final Design Review.

Respectfully Submitted,



David M. Reyes
Director of Planning and
Community Development

Prepared by:



Edwar Sissi
Associate Planner

Reviewed by:



Leon E. White
Principal Planner

Attachments:

- A. Project Plans, Photographs, and Renderings
- B. Applicant Narrative
- C. Applicant Response to Preliminary Consultation Comments