



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: JUNE 22, 2021

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW
NEW CONSTRUCTION OF A THREE-STORY MIXED-USE PROJECT WITH
2,200 SQUARE FEET OF COMMERCIAL FLEX SPACE AND 70 SUPPORTIVE
HOUSING RESIDENTIAL UNITS
710 NORTH FAIR OAKS AVENUE

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Design Commission:

Environmental Determination

Find that the application for Concept Design Review was subject to environmental review in the Categorical Exemption adopted by the City Council for the approval of the Key Business Terms of Development, Loan and Lease Agreement with BRIDGE Housing, Inc., on May 18, 2020, and that there are no changed circumstances or new information which would require further environmental review.

Findings for Compliance with the Tree Protection Ordinance

Acknowledge that no protected trees are proposed to be removed 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 East Pasadena 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. The landscape plans submitted for Final Design Review shall include clear details and specifications for the fencing, lighting and plant selections adjacent to the Wheeler Lane alleyway.
2. The massing and architectural style of the northerly building facing North Fair Oaks Avenue shall be further refined so that it incorporates the architectural strategies in a more consistent manner with the rest of the development.
3. The massing of the northerly building facing North Fair Oaks Avenue, specifically the chamfered corner shall be re-studied to determine if a more gradual transition in massing with a traditional storefront design consistent with the southerly buildings can be incorporated into the overall elevation of the development facing North Fair Oaks Avenue.
4. The details of the fencing/walls separating the parking lot from the Oak Courtyard shall be more clearly depicted in the plans submitted for Final Design Review and shall be as visually transparent as possible.
5. The use of planter pots along North Fair Oaks Avenue shall be reconsidered in favor of more substantial features such as permanent tree wells to natural soil, or more substantial planters and the proposed trees for the “Palm Court” shall be reconsidered for alternative native shade trees (that are more complementary to the heritage Oak tree be preserved on site) than palm trees, as no subterranean parking is proposed and the planters would lead to natural soil capable of supporting more substantial shade trees.
6. The balcony design and walkway railings be revised to be consistent throughout the development, to ensure greater visual consistency.
7. Enlarged details for the proposed security fencing, including any fencing adjacent to the Wheeler Lane Alley, shall be included in the plans submitted for Final Design Review showing that this fencing will be as light and transparent as possible.
8. Comply with the conditions provided by the Departments of Public Works and Transportation in Attachment B, to the satisfaction of said departments.

BACKGROUND:

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: Medium Mixed Use (0.0-2.25 FAR, 0-87 du/acre)
- Zoning: FGSP-C-3a zoning district Fair Oaks Orange Grove Specific Plan, specifically, within the Limited Commercial District 3, Sub-district "a"
- Design Guidelines: The applicable design guidelines are the Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan, Design Guidelines in the Fair

Oaks/Orange Grove Specific Plan, Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-family Residential Districts

- Site: The 48,462 square-foot project site is located at the northeast corner of North Fair Oaks Avenue and Orange Grove Boulevard. It shares a vehicular access with the Heritage Square North Senior Apartment development, directly adjacent to the north.
- Surroundings: The project site is diagonally across from a one-story shopping center that includes amenities, such as a groceries, restaurants, and banking. To the north is the three-story Heritage Square North Senior Apartments development. To the south is a double height commercial building (CVS) with surface parking. To the east is an alleyway and a two story-mixed use development with retail on the ground and residential above. Directly to the west is a non-descript one-story multi-tenant commercial building with surface parking.
- Project Description: This proposal is for the demolition of all existing non-historic structures (Church's Chicken restaurant) and the construction of a new 109,006 square-foot, three-story mixed use building. The building would contain 70 supportive housing residential units and approximately 2,200 square feet of commercial flex space.
- Site Design: The proposed site design arranges the connected three-story buildings in a "U" shaped configuration around a central private courtyard with a smaller publicly accessible recessed plaza facing Orange Grove Blvd. This plaza separates the ground floor commercial space from ground floor residential space facing South Orange Grove Blvd. Ground floor uses, preliminarily identified as a multi-purpose room, community room, and commercial flex space, are proposed behind a continuous storefront that wraps the corner from South Orange Grove Blvd to North Fair Oaks Avenue. The project will utilize an existing driveway along North Fair Oaks Avenue to access proposed surface parking that is located behind the northwest portion of the building.
- Architectural Style: Contemporary
- Developer: BRIDGE HOUSING
- Architects: KTG Architecture + Planning
- Landscape Architect: EPT Design

ANALYSIS:

Design Commission Comments from Preliminary Consultation

On March 10, 2021, 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 chart below. The design team's full response are incorporated into the set of plans in Attachment A.

Commissioner Comments, March 10, 2021	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>1. The location of the site at the northeast corner of the major intersection of Fair Oaks Avenue and Orange Grove Boulevard is identified as a key focal point in the Specific Plan area. Consider strengthening the southwest corner by exploring other design strategies, such as re-arranging the programming by relocating the open space/roof deck to another site or to the ground floor at the corner, and shifting the location of the retail and community spaces, to ensure the development appropriately engages the corner and intersection.</p>	<p>The roof deck at the corner of Fair Oaks Avenue and Orange Grove Boulevard has been relocated more toward the north side of the project site to take advantage of the mountain views. This allows for a more strengthened architectural expression of the corner massing that will now extend 3 stories in height and emphasize the focal corner at Fair Oaks and Orange Grove.</p>	<p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>2. The project should endeavor to incorporate a wide array of pedestrian oriented design elements to better contribute to a neighborhood feeling, such as appropriate lower scaled and detailed storefronts and a combination of traditional building materials.</p>	<p>Traditional building materials have been added to the retail portion of the building and the storefront areas will be enhanced with awnings and columns to reduce the frontage on the main corner to more of a pedestrian-oriented neighborhood scale.</p>	<p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>3. Consider buffering the ground floor residential spaces adjacent to the alleyway with additional well-lit</p>	<p>A landscape buffer will be provided between the alley-side residential units, as well as vegetation-covered fencing for added privacy and security.</p>	<p>The preliminary landscape plans depict that this area will be landscaped. However, not enough detail was provided to fully evaluate this aspect of the design. Since landscaping and fencing are</p>

Commissioner Comments, March 10, 2021	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>landscaping or other means to create a more comfortable living experience.</p>		<p>reviewed during the Final Design Review stage of the review process, staff recommends a condition of approval that the landscape plans include clear details and specifications for the fencing, lighting and plant selections adjacent to the Wheeler Lane alleyway.</p> <p>As conditioned, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>4. The massing should continue to be refined to promote a village like atmosphere with three visually distinct masses, engage the corner and intersection, further articulate the facades, provide for more visual interest and convey a greater sense of quality and permanence. This may be achieved by articulating the northwest corner more significantly, incorporating more significant setbacks, upper floor step backs, deeply recessed punched windows or the additional use of projecting or recessed balconies protected by overhead shade covers, such as awnings.</p>	<p>The proposed massing has been revised to provide more of a massing separation between the southwest retail corner and the northwest residential lobby/multi-purpose room. Massing articulation has been further enhanced with additional massing plane changes and height variation, as well as the reconfiguration of the lobby stair and elevator programming to provide an enhanced residential lobby entry with views from Fair Oaks to the oak tree that is being preserved on the site.</p>	<p>The proposed massing and building modulation has been further refined so that the buildings are physically distinct from each other and that these buildings include sub volumes and articulated plane breaks, as well canopies and awnings.</p> <p>However, the northerly building containing the residential lobby has a large chamfered corner and vertical column of windows and storefronts that appear to be inconsistent with the composition of the rest of the development. Staff recommends a condition of approval that the massing and the architectural style of this building be further refined so that it incorporates the architectural strategies intended to break up the massing and contribute to an active streetscape in a more consistent manner with the rest of the development.</p>
<p>5. Consider enhancing the village atmosphere by omitting the open circulation corridors</p>	<p>Applicant agrees with staff and the Commissioners that looking for ways to open up the courtyard to the public realm. This will help to</p>	<p>The separation between buildings, the design of residential lobby and security fencing have been refined to provide for better view aperture of</p>

Commissioner Comments, March 10, 2021	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>at the second and third floors of the south elevation, and replacing the enclosed hallway at the south elevation and bridges that connect the two primary building volumes with a simple gate with an open design, so that the passageway is open to the sky and allows greater visibility from the public realm into the central courtyard. Consider also physically separating the northeastern building volume at the lobby and elevator shaft, from the rest of the building or creating a more transparent lobby that provides better views to the Oak tree at the interior of the site. Separating the building northern building volume and introducing transparent fencing will also contribute to a village like feeling.</p>	<p>increase the porosity of the massing and help to connect visually to the public sidewalk while also maintaining the necessary security, privacy, and safety of the residents. The oak tree in the central courtyard is meant to be a prominent design element to the project and opening the vistas to this site feature will enhance the visual connection to it from the public right-of-way. In addition, the pulling apart of the building massing will help reduce the overall length of the main mixed-use massing along Fair Oaks and results in an architecture that is more village-like and more pedestrian friendly to those walking along the Fair Oaks frontage.</p>	<p>the protected Oak tree from the public realm.</p> <p>However, the details in the plans are unclear about the type of fencing proposed along the northern boundaries of the Oak Courtyard, facing the parking lot. Staff recommends a condition of approval that the details of this fencing be clearer in the plans submitted for Final Design Review.</p> <p>As conditioned, the comment from Preliminary Consultation will be satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>6. Consider more significantly distinguishing the appearance of the non-residential ground floor uses from the residential space above through the use of upper floor step backs, materials, colors and</p>	<p>The ground floor retail portions of the building will be distinguished from the residential units above with storefront glazing, enhanced materials, and metal awnings. Above the retail, residential units will be appropriately massed, stepped back, and differentiated from the retail</p>	<p>The proposed architectural strategies appropriately differentiate, but still visually ground and separate the ground floor spaces from the residential units above.</p> <p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>

Commissioner Comments, March 10, 2021	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>other architectural features, while maintaining appropriate proportionality and design cohesiveness that ensures that the upper floors appear to be appropriately grounded. Special care should also be taken to emphasize those aspects of the design that contribute to or will further enhance the pedestrian experience.</p>	<p>ground floor with complimentary, but distinctive materials and architectural accents. In areas above non-retail portions of the ground floor, residential units will be proportionally blended with the ground floor to create a different typology than the southwest retail corner.</p>	
<p>7. The various entries to the development, including the secondary residential lobby facing Fair Oaks Avenue should be more significantly differentiated from the other adjacent storefronts, either by a more distinct recess, or by accentuating them with surface details, canopies, or special lighting features.</p>	<p>The secondary residential lobby facing Fair Oaks Avenue has been further developed to create more of a separation between the northwest portion of the building and the southwest portion of the building. This separation will provide more of a focal entry for residents and allow for a more generous view of the courtyard with the oak tree from the Fair Oaks side of the project.</p>	<p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>
<p>8. Due to the location and solar orientation of the development, the use of awnings and outdoor seating should also be strongly considered as an integral part of the design and incorporated where appropriate.</p>	<p>The retail facades have been enhanced with awnings and generous recesses to provide shading and a more pedestrian oriented ground floor experience along the Fair Oaks Avenue and Orange Grove corner. The corner entry has been reconfigured to allow for a more generous and architecturally energized covered entry for the retail at this prominent location.</p>	<p>The comment from Preliminary Consultation has been satisfactorily addressed.</p>

Commissioner Comments, March 10, 2021	Excerpt from Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>9. Landscaping will pay a critical role in ensuring a successful design at this key focal point location. The specific plan encourages the use of shade giving-street trees, pedestrian scaled lighting, and underground utilities. Although utilities are typically considered during the later stages in the Design Review process, special consideration should be taken early on in the development process to ensure the utilities can be sited and screened so that they are not significantly visible from the public right-of-way. All parking areas should be screened with landscaping and fences, if proposed, should be integrated with the landscaping plan to soften their appearance.</p>	<p>Significant shade trees have been added at the public edges of the project and within the resident courtyard to soften the urban nature of the site as well as help with shade for cooling in the hot summer months. These additions will help to provide a strong character to the project. With respect to utility and parking screening, the new planting plan creates a gradation of plant material of different scales to assist in obscuring these elements from public view.</p>	<p>Landscape design and lighting are reviewed in greater detail in the Final Design Review phase of the review process. However, the plans appear to depict trees in pots along Fair Oaks Avenue, which may not be able to successfully support shade trees.</p> <p>Staff also recommends a condition of approval that the use of planter pots along North Fair Oaks Avenue be reconsidered in favor of more substantial landscape arrangements such as permanent tree wells to natural soil, or planters. Staff also recommends that the proposed trees for the “Palm Court” be reconsidered and that alternative native shade trees (that are more complementary to the heritage Oak tree to be preserved on site) be considered in this open space area rather than palm trees, as no subterranean parking is proposed and the planters would lead to natural soil that is capable of supporting more substantial shade trees.</p>

Programming and Circulation

The proposed site design arranges three, three-story buildings in a “U” shaped configuration around a large central private courtyard with a smaller publicly accessible recessed retail courtyard at the southerly end of the site facing Orange Grove Blvd. This smaller courtyard separates the ground floor commercial space from the ground floor community room at the southeast corner of the development facing South Orange Grove Blvd. Ground floor uses, preliminarily identified as a general retail, commercial flex space, a residential lobby/mailroom and a multi-purpose room are proposed with a continuous ground floor storefront that wraps the corner from South Orange Grove Blvd to North Fair Oaks Avenue.

The project will utilize an existing shared driveway along North Fair Oaks Avenue to access proposed surface parking, which is located to the north of the buildings. Within the interior of the site at the ground floor residential units directly face the landscaped open courtyard. A double loaded corridor in the easterly building volume provides access to additional west facing units that are adjacent to a landscaped area that is also adjacent to the existing alley to the east. The second and third levels of the development consist of residential units stacked directly above the ground floor. The units in the two southerly building volumes are accessed by interior double loaded corridors. These building volumes are connected by two open circulation bridges at their northern and southern ends. The residential units in the second and third levels of the northerly building volume are accessed via another open circulation bridge and an open single loaded corridor on the east elevation, facing the interior courtyard. An open deck and small laundry facility are located at the third level of northeast corner of the development, with a larger laundry facility directly below on the second level. Vertical circulation cores with stairwells and elevators are located at the northwest and southeast corners of the development.

Overall, the programming and circulation for the development is thoughtfully arranged and appropriate for a mixed-use development and is consistent with the applicable design guidelines. As discussed in the table above, the programming and circulation are also responsive to the Commission's Preliminary Consultation comments and will help to ensure the active use of the common areas and promote a pedestrian oriented design.

Orientation

The proposed development is located on a corner lot at the northeast corner of the intersection of North Fair Oaks Avenue and Orange Grove Boulevard and is appropriately designed so that it engages with this prominent intersection and contributes to an active, pedestrian oriented streetscape. The retail, commercial flex space, residential lobby and community room are all located at the ground floor, with a strong visual orientation toward the streets through the use of traditional storefront designs. The residential units above the storefronts also engage with the public realm as they have windows, balconies and sun-shading devices arranged in a clear pattern on all publicly visible sides. Within the site, most units have direct access to the common courtyards or appropriately landscaped yard areas. The interior courtyards are publicly visible through large openings that are enclosed with light metal fencing with an open design, covered only by the open circulation bridges above.

Overall, the proposed orientation is contextually appropriate and the design of the development effectively engages with the two adjacent streetscapes by activating the street through the placement of the non-residential space adjacent to the streets and transparent pedestrian entries to the interior courtyards.

Height, Massing and Modulation

The proposed three-story height of the development is consistent with the applicable development standards, and is compatible with existing one-to-three story development found in the neighborhood context surrounding the site. The design evolution provided in the submittal depicts the original concept of one rectilinear mass. The current proposal for the development now shows the mass as being broken down into three distinct primary volumes, connected by recessed open circulation bridges at the second and third levels. These three primary volumes

are further articulated through the use of varying setbacks depending on the widths of the adjacent streets and sidewalk. The three primary building volumes are further broken down into composed articulated sub volumes through the use of consistent architectural strategies, including the placement of balconies, shade structures, fenestration and materiality. As noted in the table above, the corner massing facing the intersection has been strengthened and the prior open deck at this location was relocated to the northeast corner. This shift both maximizes the ability for residents to enjoy a communal space with a quiet view of the mountains and creates a stronger solid appearance at the corner.

Overall, the modulation depicted in the elevation drawings is appropriate and responsive to the design guidelines and previous comments from the Commission. However, the massing of the northerly building facing Fair Oaks avenue, including the chamfered corner of which provides access to the residential lobby, represents an abrupt transition in massing that is inconsistent with the design of the rest of the development. In addition, as noted in the table above, staff recommends a condition of approval that the massing of this building and the chamfered corner be re-studied to determine if a more gradual transition in massing with a traditional storefront design consistent with the southerly buildings can be incorporated into the overall elevation of the development facing North Fair Oaks Avenue.

Architectural Style and Detailing

The drawings submitted for this review depict a project, which is described by the applicant as an overall Contemporary Modern design. The style is intended to complement, although not replicate, the style of the Heritage Square North Senior Apartment development, as the programming and uses are different for this project. The design incorporates flat roofs, punched windows, balconies, and stucco cladding. The elevations and perspective drawings have been provided showing that the three distinct building masses now have clearer, separate visual identities and that the upper floor residential units are distinct from the ground floor non-residential spaces. All three buildings draw from the same color and materials palette but are distinct in the arrangement and composition of these elements. Additionally, the upper floors of the southwest corner of the development, facing the intersection, as well as other articulated areas with plane breaks, are clad in fiber cement panels. Each building also incorporates traditional storefronts at the ground floor facing the streets. These storefronts have been revised to include higher quality traditional materials such as masonry, generous recesses, metal awnings, transom windows, and columns to help visually ground and support the upper floors in a meaningful way.

Staff has worked with the design team prior to the Design Commission's review to encourage improved responses to the Commission's previous comments and is satisfied that they have been addressed and that the proposed buildings respond well to their surrounding context. As noted in the table above, conditions of approval have been recommended to further resolve the design of the northerly building to ensure it is consistent with the rest of the development while retaining its own distinct visual identity. Further, staff recommends a condition of approval that the balcony designs and walkway railings be revised to be consistent throughout the development, to ensure greater visual consistency.

Compatibility

The proposed new buildings are compatible with their immediate surroundings, particularly the recently completed Heritage Square North Senior Housing development with respect to height, massing, setbacks and architectural design. The revised design submitted for this review relates better to the existing context and the intended vision for this intersection, which is an active, pedestrian oriented streetscape.

Conceptual Landscape Design

The conceptual landscape plans depict a thoughtful and extensive program of landscaping that would promote the active use of the interior open spaces, soften the existing streetscape and enhance the network of pathways and open spaces within the project site. The landscape design concept is generally derived from the site's existing protected Oak tree and broken down into six different areas with three distinct zones that have distinct visual identities and programming. This concept can be found after Sheet A8-3, on a page titled #2. The concept zones are identified as the Oak Courtyard (main courtyard) and Drop off Area at the north end of the site (a shared access easement with the Heritage Square North development), adjacent to the shared driveway. This zone is intended to serve as areas with a purpose to allow people to gather and build community. The next zone is the Palm Court and Commercial/Retail plaza zone, which consists of two open space areas aligned on a north/south axis but separated by a gate. This area is intended to serve as quieter spaces with shaded seating areas. And finally there is the Lobby Arrival and Rooftop Terrace zone, which are intended to be active spaces where people can connect and receive information.

The information provided for the proposed conceptual landscape design is appropriate at this stage of the development review process. As noted in the table above, conditions of approval have been recommended regarding planter details and tree species selection. In addition to those conditions, staff also recommends another condition of approval that enlarged details for the proposed security fencing, including any fencing adjacent to the Wheeler Lane Alley, be included in the plans submitted for Final Design Review showing that this fencing will be as light and transparent as possible.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

Staff routed the project for comment to several City Departments, including the Public Works, Transportation, Fire and Housing Departments as well as other Divisions of the Planning & Community Development Department, such as the Building, Current Planning and Cultural Affairs Divisions. The recommended conditions from the Departments of Public Works and Transportation are included in Attachment B and staff recommends a condition of approval that the applicant comply with these conditions.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

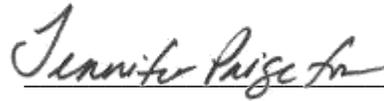
The application for Concept Design Review was subject to environmental review in the Categorical Exemption adopted by the City Council for the approval of the Key Business Terms of Development, Loan and Lease Agreement for this project with BRIDGE Housing, Inc., on

May 18, 2020. There are no changed circumstances or new information, which would require further environmental review.

CONCLUSION:

The project design has satisfactorily addressed the comments provided during Preliminary Consultation. In addition, the project design is consistent with the design guidelines in the Fair Oaks-Orange Grove Specific Plan and the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial & Multi-Family Residential Districts. Staff recommends approval of the application for Concept Design Review for the project with minor conditions to be addressed during Final Design Review.

Respectfully Submitted,



David M. Reyes
Director of Planning and
Community Development

Prepared by:



Amanda Landry, AICP
Senior Planner

Reviewed by:



Leon E. White
Principal Planner

Attachments:

- A. Current plans & elevations
- B. Recommended conditions from Departments of Public Works and Transportation