



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: July 13, 2021

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: CONTINUATION OF A CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW APPLICATION FOR A NEW TWO-TO-THREE STORY, 13-UNIT MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
439 NORTH HILL AVENUE

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Design 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 Section 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

1. Acknowledge that a tree inventory (Attachment B) indicates that no protected trees are proposed to be removed as part of the proposed project.

Findings for Alternative At-Grade Parking Location

1. Acknowledge that the proposed at-grade parking is located in front of the rear 40 percent of the lot.
2. Acknowledge that, pursuant to Section 17.46.020.K.1, parking at-grade shall be located in the rear 40 percent of the site and that through the Design Review process, at-grade parking may be located beyond the rear 40 percent of the site, but shall not be located within the front yard setback.
3. Approve the request for at-grade parking as part of this Design Review process, as the proposed design is a superior design solution and fully responds to the comments from the Design Commission.

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, and the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts;
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 plans shall comply with the conditions provided by the Departments of Public Works and Transportation in Attachment B, to the satisfaction of said departments.
2. The new residential units shall incorporate into their design air filtration systems with a minimum MERV 13 rating. Filter replacement shall be conducted as recommended by the manufacturer and the manufacturer's recommendations and records of filter replacement shall be maintained on-site for inspection by the City.
3. The residential building air intakes shall be installed on the façade furthest away from the 210 Freeway.
4. The project features and actions indicated on the plans demonstrating consistency with the City of Pasadena Climate Action Plan shall be clearly incorporated into and shown on the plans submitted for Final Design Review.

BACKGROUND:

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: High Density Residential
- Zoning: RM-48, HL 36 (Multi-family residential, 0-48 Units per acre, Height Limit Overlay of 36 feet)

- Design Guidelines: The applicable design guidelines are the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan and the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts.
- Site: The 11,580 square-foot project site is a rectangular shaped lot located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Hill Avenue and Tyler Alley, between East Villa and Maple Streets. The project site is currently developed with one non-historic, single-family residence built in 1912 by architect/developer Henry C. Deming and a garage built in 1938, all of which are proposed to be demolished. There are also six trees on the site, three of which are proposed to be removed. All the trees to be removed are small fruit trees, which are not protected under the Tree Protection Ordinance.
- Surroundings: The surrounding context is in transition. The surrounding properties include single- and multi-family residential buildings ranging between one and three stories in height. The property directly adjacent to the west is zoned RM-48, HL-36 and is developed with a three-story multi-family residential building; the properties to the south are zoned the same and are developed with two, two-story multi-family residential buildings with a large carport structure at the front; at the north, is Tyler Alley and garages, open parking, trash bins and fenced backyards serving the RS-6 zoned residential properties fronting on Villa Street. The Holliston Avenue Landmark District, consisting largely of Craftsman style single-family houses, is located two blocks to the northwest of the project site. A Vernacular hipped cottage built in 1904 at 401 N. Chester Ave. (two blocks to the west of the site) was determined to be eligible for city designation as an individual landmark.
- Project Description: This proposal is for the construction of a two-to-three-story, 13-unit apartment building with at grade parking. The building itself features cubic massing with gabled roofs that vary in height from two to three stories and graduates from east to west. The front portion of the building consists of a two-story volume with flats on each floor. The rear portion of the building consists of two-stories of flats atop a surface parking garage.
- Site Design: The building is proposed to be sited around a roughly rectangular shaped open space area that consists of the main garden. This garden is attached to the front yard by a short walkway. The footprint of the proposed building is generally rectangular, with a recessed portion at the southeastern portion facing the southern interior property line to accommodate the proposed main garden area. This configuration of open space is intended to protect and provide visual emphasis of two existing mature trees that are proposed to be retained as part of this project: a Guava tree located at the southeast corner of the property and an Ash tree located near the southern property line, both with a diameter-at-breast-height (DBH) of 30.”
- Architectural Style: Contemporary Craftsman
- Architect: Garo Minassian
- Landscape Architect: None listed

ANALYSIS:

The application for Concept Design Review was initially considered by the Design Commission on February 9, 2021. At that public hearing, the Commission decided to continue the item to allow the applicant additional time to revise the project. The Commission’s comments from that meeting, along 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, February 9, 2021	Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>1. The applicant shall prepare a submittal that responds, visually and in writing, to all of the proposed conditions of approval listed in the staff report dated February 9, 2021.</p>	<p>Responses included in attached in document.</p>	<p>The applicant has provided a brief narrative response and revised plans, which address all of the previously proposed conditions of approval. The applicant has made an effort to address each comment with meaningful alterations to the design, resulting in a simplified design that more appropriately integrates Craftsman style architectural details, resulting in a more successful project that is generally consistent with the applicable design guidelines.</p>
<p>2. In order for the Design Commission to support the request for the parking exception, meaningful revisions to the design of the project and an overall significant improvement in the quality of the design will need to be demonstrated. In addition to addressing all of the proposed conditions of approval in the published staff report, the following shall be clearly addressed in the revised submittal package:</p> <p>a. Finesse the ground floor plan by omitting or</p>	<p>The exercise room has been omitted and replaced with one additional garage to allow for the relocation of the second exit from the podium and the trash area. The bicycle storage is located there as well.</p> <p>The unit plans and circulation has been revised to achieve better circulation and visibility. The relocation of the second exit has eliminated the long walkway passage along the North side of units 205, 206 & 207.</p> <p>The craftsman style has been further refined and the front unit has been opened up to the sidewalk by eliminating the 42” high fence along the property</p>	<p>The applicant has addressed all of the specific comments provided by the Design Commission. The revised design is more successful in representing the Craftsman design traditions and creating a comfortable and usable environment that residents can easily access from the various parking areas and the sidewalk as they travel to their individual units.</p> <p>However, the individual garages containing parking spaces 10-14 and the location of the utility room and exterior staircase to the upper levels results in a significant solid blank wall condition facing the main garden. Staff recommends a condition of approval that the condition be treated by enlarging the fountain area, having the proposed freestanding trellis/arbor be engaged with the exterior walls, installing</p>

Commissioner Comments, February 9, 2021	Design Team Response	Staff Comments
<p>reconfiguring the exercise room and shift the parking to improve the overall circulation.</p> <p>b. The trash may not be removed through the main garden.</p> <p>c. Revise and customize the second and third level unit layouts in order to achieve improved circulation.</p> <p>d. Focus more extensively on improving the front façade and yard to better reflect authentic Craftsman design traditions and connect the project to the public realm.</p> <p>e. The submittal shall include revised and enlarged details that clearly reflect high quality Craftsman details throughout the project.</p>	<p>line. The inspiration for the style and color scheme is from a quality craftsman house (picture attached).</p> <p>Sheet A4.1 has been added to show details of the water feature, garden trellis, south property line fence and various building elements.</p>	<p>additional decorative tilework to the walls, install additional planters with engaged bench seats and planted with climbing vines or tall shrubs be installed adjacent to the walls, or use any other appropriate means to alleviate the blank wall conditions facing the main garden.</p> <p>Staff also recommends a condition of approval that the freestanding arbor, if not attached to the building, be enlarged to the extent possible to provide for more sheltered open space.</p>

As noted above, the proposed design has been revised to respond to all of the previously recommended conditions of approval and the Design Commissions Comments. Although it is still apparent that the design is driven by the goal to maximize the number of units and the proposed at-grade parking, the revised design is more successful at integrating the required garden space, and architectural features with the desired unit count and configuration in a more appropriate and consistent manner with the applicable design guidelines and RM City of Gardens development standards.

With the proposed revisions, the programming and circulation, orientation, height, massing and modulation, architectural style and detailing, compatibility and conceptual landscape design.

Staff recommends that the previously noted conditions of approval related to department comments and environmental analysis at the initial hearing (Attachment B) be incorporated into this decision.

Parking Location

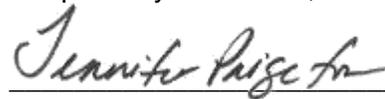
Pursuant to Section 17.46.020.K.1, parking at grade shall be located in the rear 40 percent of the site. Through the Design Review process, at grade parking may be located beyond the rear 40 percent of the site but shall not be located within the front yard setback. Staff of the zoning section reviewed the proposed plans for consistency with the applicable development standards and noted that the proposed at-grade parking is not contained to entirely to the rear 40 percent of the site and that Design Review approval is necessary for this configuration. If the location is not approved through the Design Review process, the parking, and any other associated aspects of the design tied to the provision of the parking, shall be revised to comply with the applicable requirements.

Typically, a request to allow parking in front of the rear 40 percent of the site is granted through the Design Review process upon demonstration of a superior design that appropriately integrates the parking into the overall design, clearly addresses the comments from Preliminary Consultation, and follows all of the applicable design guidelines. As noted in the table above, the proposed design responds to the Design Commissions prior direction. Therefore, staff recommends that the Commission approve the request to allow parking in front of the rear 40 percent of the site.

CONCLUSION:

As conditioned the project design will satisfactorily addressed the comments provided during Preliminary Consultation and will be consistent with the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial & Multi-Family Residential Districts. Staff recommends approval of the application for Concept Design Review for the project with conditions to further refine the design to reinforce the chosen architectural style and improve circulation within the site and ensure compliance with conditions from other departments.

Respectfully Submitted,



For
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Attachments:

- A. Revised plans and elevations, project narrative
- B. Staff report and attachments dated February 9, 2021