



**PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT**

DATE: SEPTEMBER 14, 2021
TO: DESIGN COMMISSION
FROM: DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR, PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION - NEW CONSTRUCTION OF TWO-TO-FIVE-STORY RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITY WITH SUBTERRANEAN PARKING
80 SOUTH OAKLAND AVENUE/550 EAST GREEN STREET

Project Description:

This proposal is for the construction of two-to-five story, residential care facility for seniors at 80 S. Oakland Avenue/550 East Green Street on what is currently the surface parking lot of the First Church of Christ, Scientist. The site is within the CD-4 (Pasadena Playhouse sub-district, Central District Specific Plan) and has a Land Use Designation of MMU (Medium Mixed-Use, 0.0-2.25 FAR, 0-82 du/acre). The 117,636 square-foot building would contain 131 residential units and include a mix of studio, one and two- bedroom units and programmed amenity spaces such as a fitness center, courtyard with pool, screening room, town hall, and eating areas. Two levels of subterranean parking for employees, visitors, residents and members of the church are also proposed.

The site is located on the north side of El Dorado Street and occupies the entirety of the blockface between South Oakland Avenue and South Madison Avenue. The total lot area is 87,549 square feet and the proposed project would divide the site into two parcels. The proposed residential care facility would be constructed on the new approximately 56,000 square foot parcel that is currently a surface parking lot. Although there are trees on and around the site, a tree inventory was not provided with the application, therefore staff cannot determine whether any of the existing trees qualify for protection or require a Tree Removal Permit. Given the proposed subterranean parking, it is likely that all of the parking lot trees will need to be removed during construction.

Surrounding properties include commercial, institutional and residential buildings ranging between one and five stories in height. To the north of the project site is the existing First Church of Christ building, the Reading Room, the Reading Garden, and the Art and Science Café and parking lot, and a two-story commercial building at the southwest corner of Green Street and South Madison Avenue. To the west is a five-story institutional complex that is part of the Kaiser Medical School campus. To the east are one-to-three story office buildings and surface parking lots. To the south are two-story commercial structures and a two-story residential structure at the southeast corner of Oakland Avenue and El Dorado Street.

Currently, the northerly half of the site is located within the Pasadena Playhouse Historic District, which extends to the north, east, west and south of the site. After the subdivision, the proposed development would be directly adjacent to the Pasadena Playhouse Historic District. Within the Pasadena Playhouse Historic District, the two closest resources are the Neoclassical Revival style First Church of Christ, Scientist at 550 E. Green Street (Franklin P. Bunham (1908) and Marston & Van Pelt (1933)) which is part of the current site, and the Beaux Arts style Home Telegraph & Telephone Co. Building (John and Donald Parkinson 1925). The Central District and Old Pasadena Historic Districts are located several blocks to the west of the site.

The figure field drawing included in the submittal depicts that the general lot coverage of the proposed development is comparable to the siting, setbacks, and arrangement of open space to other similar sized developments in the general vicinity. A ground floor courtyard is centrally located along the northern property line and the proposed building surrounds it in a shallow “U” shape configuration. At the northwest corner of the site, the building is more significantly setback, which will maintain some visual continuity of the large open lawn area at the southwest corner of the First Church of Christ, Scientist building. Aside from that deep setback, the proposed building maintains a generally consistent street edge, similar to the buildings to the north, east and west.

The primary vehicular access is proposed to be from South Oakland Avenue, at the northwest corner of the site adjacent to the First Church of Christ, Scientist. A secondary loading dock is located on the east side of the site, accessible from South Madison Avenue. A large covered vehicular drop-off and the main pedestrian entrance is centrally located mid-block along the southern property line, accessible from El Dorado Street. Pedestrian access for the church and to the care facility is described in the circulation diagram. The church circulation is centered on a stairwell and elevator from the subterranean parking to the northwest corner of the site. From there, pedestrians would be able to walk to several of the church entries and, to South Oakland Avenue. It appears that there is an east-west oriented paseo that could connect pedestrians to South Madison Avenue. Residents and employees of the residential care facility will have access from the subterranean parking to two additional vertical circulation cores. Pedestrian access appears possible from the courtyard to the east-west paseo, although it is not called out in the submittal.

The proposed architectural style is a Contemporary design composed of significantly articulated cubic volumes and sub-volumes with regimented fenestration consisting of punched windows with significant mullions and recessed balconies. The regimented fenestration visually ties into to the composition of the columns of the neoclassical design of the adjacent church. The design also includes open balconies and rooftop terraces with arbors and canopies, with the majority of the rooftop balconies and open terraces facing north or toward the courtyard. The building design takes into account the sensitive adjacent historic resource and responds by utilizing graduated massing that transitions in height from two stories at the northwest corner of the site, closest to the church, to five stories at the center of the site and then back down to four stories facing South Madison Avenue. At no point is the building taller than the adjacent historic church.

Applicable Design Guidelines:

- Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan

- Central District Specific Plan Private Realm Design Guidelines Of the
- Central District Specific Plan Sub-District Design Guidelines: Pasadena Playhouse

Previous/Existing Entitlements:

- None

Approvals Needed/Project Scheduling Sequencing:

- Zoning entitlements (Hearing Officer)
- Concept and Final Design Review (Design Commission)
- Building Permits (Building Staff)

CEQA Clearance:

This is preliminary consultation regarding design review and is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Staff Observations:

Applicable Design Guidelines:

The following design guidelines are applicable to the project and should guide further development and study of the project as it moves forward in the design review process:

Design-Related Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan:

- 4.10: Locate and design buildings to relate to and frame major public streets, open spaces, and cityscape. New development at intersections should consider any number of corner treatments, and should balance safety and accessibility concerns with the vision of the area and the need for buildings to engage the street and create a distinct urban edge.
- 4.11: Require that development demonstrates a contextual relationship with neighboring structures and sites addressing such elements as building scale, massing, orientation, setbacks, buffering, the arrangement of shared and private open spaces, visibility, privacy, automobile and truck access, impacts of noise and lighting, landscape quality, infrastructure, and aesthetics.
- 7.1: Design each building as a high-quality, long term addition to the City's urban fabric; exterior design and buildings material shall exhibit permanence and quality, minimize maintenance concerns, and extend the life of the building.
- 7.2: Allow for the development of a diversity of buildings styles. Support innovative and creative design solutions to issues related to context and environmental sustainability.
- 7.3: Require that new and adaptively re-used buildings are designed to respect and complement the defining built form, massing, scale, modulation, and architectural detailing of their contextual setting.
- 10.7: Encourage sustainable practices for landscape materials, landscape design, and land development.

- 23.3: Provide appropriate setbacks, consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, along the street frontage and, where there are setbacks, ensure adequate landscaping is provided.
- 25.4: Require that new development protect community character by providing architecture, landscaping, and urban design of equal or greater quality than existing and by respecting the architectural character and scale of adjacent buildings.

Private Realm Design Guidelines for the Central District Specific Plan:

- SP1.1 Provide for the functional and visual integration of building, services, vehicular access and parking, and “outdoor rooms” such as plazas, fore-courts, interior courtyards, and passages.
- SP1.4 Establish clear pedestrian connections on-site that are well- marked and gracious; direct pedestrians from surface or structured parking to buildings, streets, and public spaces.
- SP1.5 Buffer adjacent sensitive land uses from undesirable impacts that may originate from a site; buffers may be landscape and/or architectural in character.
- SP2.1 Locate and orient buildings to positively define public streets and civic spaces, such as public plazas; maintain a continuous building street wall and in general limit spatial gaps to those necessary to accommodate vehicular and pedestrian access.
- SP3.1 Encourage the presence of well-defined outdoor space, such as on-site plazas, interior courtyards, patios, terraces and gardens; these are especially encouraged in association with major developments.
- SP3.2 Site outdoor spaces in accordance with the location and scale of adjacent streets, buildings, and uses; for instance, on-site plazas should not unduly interrupt the retail continuity of a street.
- SP6.5 Screen views of automobiles from public view and adjacent sensitive land uses, including adequate screening for parking garages; dense planting is often an effective screen for surface parking.
- BD1.1 Design visually attractive buildings that add richness and variety to the Downtown environment, including creative contemporary architectural solutions.
- BD1.2 Integrate new development with its surroundings, emphasizing functional and visual continuity while admitting individual expression.
- BD1.3 Establish a harmonious transition between newer and older buildings; compatible design should respect the scale, massing and materials of adjacent buildings and landscape.
- BD1.4 Complement the architectural character of an adjacent historic building or area; however, imitation of historical styles is discouraged.

- BD2.1 Design building volumes to maintain a compatible scale with their surroundings; in general, break down the scale and massing of larger buildings.
- BD2.4 Employ simple, yet varied masses, and emphasize deep openings that create shadow lines and provide visual relief; discourage monolithic vertical extrusions of a maximum building footprint.
- BD2.5 Use articulated sub-volumes as a transition in size to adjacent historic or residential structures that are smaller in scale.
- BD2.6 Vary three dimensional character as a building rises skyward; in general, differentiate between the base, middle and top levels of a building.
- BD3.5 Provide a clear pattern of building openings; fenestration should unify a building's street wall and add considerably to a facade's three-dimensional quality.
- BD3.6 Avoid uninterrupted blank wall surfaces along all building facades; the use of opaque and highly reflective glass is also discouraged.
- BD3.7 Encourage the use of recessed windows that create shadow lines and suggest solidity.
- UR1.2 Limit breaks in the building street wall to those necessary to accommodate vehicular and pedestrian access, or to establish a visual connection with communal open space areas.
- UR1.3 Employ simple and strong, yet varied massing, that places strong visual emphasis on the street; articulated sub-volumes and horizontal regulating lines should provide a visual transition to adjacent structures that are smaller in scale.

Pasadena Playhouse Sub-District Design Guidelines of the Central District Specific Plan:

Sub-District Character Guideline 2: Infill Underutilized Parcels. There are a number of underutilized parcels and surface parking lots that detract from the appearance of the area. Rely on infill development to create a street-oriented environment that encourages sidewalk activity.

Sub-District Character Recommendation 2: Encourage infill developments that close gaps in the street wall, and provide for pedestrian-oriented uses along streets and public spaces.

Site Planning Guideline 3: Introduce Courtyards and Passages. Construct a network of creative and inviting outdoor spaces that includes intimate courts and passages. Penetrate blocks to provide enclosed places that are memorable and pleasing to occupy.

Site Planning Recommendation 3: Situate building volumes to clearly define, connect, and activate outdoor courts and passages; in general, outdoor spaces should be intimate, contained spaces, and function as an extension of interior space.

Site Planning Recommendation 4: Establish visual and physical connections between streets, alleys, courts, and outdoor spaces; provide mid-block and off-street paseos and walks.

Building Design Guideline 1: Support Progressive Design. Sophisticated, progressive designs will communicate the arts and cultural identity of the area. These will also build upon the Sub-district's unique design eclecticism.

Building Design Guideline 2: Reference Historic Structures. Although contemporary design solutions are encouraged, significant and noteworthy buildings in the area have qualities worthy of emulation. The scale, massing, and degree of facade articulation of new structures should be respectful of historical buildings.

Building Design Guideline 3: Add Rich Visual Detail. An amiable pedestrian character requires buildings with human-scale design elements and decorative detail that modulate the light and invite attention. Nonetheless, details must provide evidence of artistry and craftsmanship.

Building Design Recommendation 2: Provide for contemporary, progressive and innovative design throughout the area; designs should respect their context, but not mimic historic styles.

Building Design Recommendation 3: Respect the scale, massing, and articulation of adjacent historic buildings; massing should not overwhelm or diminish historic structures.

Potential Design Issues:

Staff reviewed the submitted plans for consistency with the above referenced design guidelines and noted the following:

1. The incorporation of a pedestrian paseo at the northwest boundary of the site is a strong contribution to the pedestrian experience and reflects the City of Pasadena's development history and the Pasadena Playhouse Historic District. The concept should be further studied to determine if it is appropriate to extend the paseo all the way to South Madison Avenue to the east.
2. The detailing of the east-west paseo, including the fencing, paving, landscaping, lighting and blank wall conditions of the easterly most building volume facing north, shall be further studied and refined to ensure the building volumes and fencing design clearly define, connect, and activate the outdoor space and paseo.
3. The location of the subterranean parking access ramp is directly adjacent to a large open space area that is part of the environmental setting of the adjacent church and may require the removal of several street trees. The location should be further studied and relocated to the east, if possible. If it remains in the current location, this choice should be more clearly explained in future submittals to clarify why it cannot be re-located to the east facing South Madison Avenue and how pedestrians will be safely buffered from the vehicular traffic. Explore the historic variance process to determine if it is appropriate to use to waive the loading space requirement and relocate the parking access ramp to the east elevation.
4. The design of the loading dock facing South Madison Avenue appears to starkly contrast from the rest of the building. Consider bringing the upper floor walls down to the ground on

the southerly side of the loading dock, so the garage door doesn't terminate into the wall of the adjacent projecting brick clad volume.

5. The design of the passenger loading on the south elevation, accessed from El Dorado Street, including the paving, covered entryway and lighting, should be clarified in future submittals and appropriately detailed to ensure that the pedestrian experience is safe and welcoming.
6. The composition of the central portion of the south elevation containing the passenger loading area up to the rooftop should be reviewed, and revised if necessary, so that it maintains consistency in the delineation of the base/middle/top configuration, or more clearly explains the breaks in the street wall. In particular, re-study the transition between the ground floor to the second floor to the west of the passenger drop off, and the design and detailing of the squared entry portal at the fifth level open terrace.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Attachments:

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