



**PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT**

DATE: DECEMBER 14, 2021
TO: DESIGN COMMISSION
FROM: DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR, PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION - NEW CONSTRUCTION OF A FIVE-STORY, 112-UNIT AFFORDABLE SENIOR HOUSING PROJECT
280 RAMONA STREET

Project Description:

This proposal is for the construction of a new five-story, 112-unit affordable senior housing project at 280 Ramona Street. The property is located along the west side of North Garfield Avenue between Holly Street and Ramona Street within the Pasadena Civic Center Historic District and across from City Hall. Located immediately to the west of the property, is the existing YMCA building and to the north of the property, is the former Southern California Gas Company Building, which is now the Pasadena Permit Center/George Ellery Hale Building). South of the property is the existing YWCA building and adjacent surface parking lot and landscaped area west of it. The L-shaped property is a highly prominent location with three street frontages and within one of the most historically significant areas in the City. It currently consists of an undeveloped dirt lot at the west end (often used for parking and staging for temporary filming activities) an open-air, walled-in storage and trash enclosure at the center, and landscaping at the east and south ends. Within the easterly landscaped area is a weather station surrounded by shrubbery.

While legally governed by the General Plan, Central District Specific Plan and Zoning Code, the Civic Center has been the subject of multiple design efforts from its planning and creation in the 1920s through 2019. The project is intended to be in keeping with the surrounding Civic Center buildings and the 1925 Civic Center Plan designed by Bennett, Parsons & Frost (commonly referred to as the "Bennett Plan"). After many years of efforts to rehabilitate and develop the YWCA property to the south of this project, on April 8, 2019, the City Council directed staff to develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) process for the development of the YWCA property.

The intent of this direction was to redevelop and preserve the building as a historic resource, allowing for additional development for the property located east of the YMCA building (and north of YWCA site), utilizing a setback of 45 feet on the east side of both properties, a height limit of 60 feet, and, angled facades with entrances facing Centennial Plaza showing deference to City Hall. This action was the outcome of a presentation to the Council of a plan for development of the Civic Center that was developed by OLIN Partnership. This plan (Attachment C), was referenced in the Request for Proposals (RFP) that was issued for development of both this site and the YWCA site to the south and is based on the principles of

the Bennett Plan, with consideration of the existing conditions of the Civic Center and the need to balance completion of the Civic Center plan with retention of open space. Staff believes that it was the City Council's intent for this plan to be a guide for the siting and massing of the buildings on these sites.

The proposed project is designed as a generally U-shaped building surrounding a central open-air courtyard and with a chamfered southeast corner façade facing Centennial Plaza. The north side of the building is proposed to align with the north property line and the east and chamfered facades of the building are set back 45 feet from the property line. The setback from the south property line is not dimensioned; however, it is shown projecting slightly proud of the south wall of the existing YMCA building to the west. A 10' setback is maintained from the adjacent walls of the existing YMCA building.

Within the chamfered corner façade is proposed an open ground-floor passageway to the central courtyard with communicating exterior stairs and an accessibility ramp within the 45' setback area providing pedestrian access to this passage. The ground floor is programmed with amenity and support office space along the south side and residential units, including a manager's unit, on the north side, accessed by double-loaded interior corridors. A ramp to the subterranean parking garage is located at the west end of this floor, accessed from Ramona Street. Vertical circulation is shown in four locations: a stair near the northwest corner and an elevator south of it, an additional stair at the southwest corner and an elevator at the southeast corner, all of which extend from the subterranean parking structure to the top of the building.

The second floor largely consists of residential units accessed by double- and single-loaded corridors with a lounge seating area at the southeast corner and a roof deck and laundry space centrally located along the west end of the building. A second, smaller roof deck is shown near the southeast corner, projecting into the central courtyard. The third through fifth floors all consist of residential units with a communal seating area at the southeast corner. An additional roof deck is shown at the south side of the fourth floor. The roof includes large areas identified for solar access.

As described by the applicant, the building is designed in "the manner of the Beaux-Arts style, both in planning and in level of detail." It is designed with a monumental five-story massing, a flat roof, fenestration organized into repeating vertical bands of windows, some of which are shallowly arched, articulated banding between the second and third and fourth and fifth floors with horizontal plaster reveals at the double-height base, shallow vertical recesses in the wall planes, articulated surrounds at building entries, and projecting balconies with decorative bases and metal decorative railings. In general, the height, massing and presentation of the building is similar in character to the existing adjacent YMCA building to the west.

Applicable Design Guidelines:

- Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan
- Design Guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan
- Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation
- OLIN Partnership Plan, 2019

Previous/Existing Entitlements:

- None

Approvals Needed/Project Scheduling:

- Concept Design Review (Design Commission)
- 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:

Guiding Principle 2: Pasadena’s historic resources will be preserved. Citywide, new development will be in harmony with and enhance Pasadena’s unique character and sense of place. New construction that could affect the integrity of historic resources will be compatible with, and differentiated from, the existing resource.

- 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.
- 5.2: 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.
- 5.5: Continue to protect the character of the Civic Center as defined by its landscaped open spaces and tree canopy. Locate and design new civic structures to respect this urban form, character, design, functionality, and concepts in the Bennett Plan.
- 5.6: Discourage vehicle driveways on streets with higher pedestrian volumes within the Central District, Transit Villages, and Neighborhood Villages.

- 5.7: Support and enhance the pedestrian experience along public and private pedestrian passages, pathways, courtyards, paseos, alleys, and public walkways with increased connectivity and infrastructure, as well as businesses located along these pedestrian corridors.
- 6.1: Require new development and changes to existing development to be located and designed to respect the defining elements of Pasadena’s character and history such as its grid street pattern, block scale, public realm, courtyards, paseos, alleys, neighborhoods and districts, building massing and heights, significant architecture, and relationship to the mountains and Arroyo Seco.
- 6.4: Recognize and protect significant views of the San Gabriel Mountains, the Arroyo Seco, open spaces along with views of significant structures such as the City Hall cupola, Central Library, and the Civic Auditorium.
- 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.
- 8.5: Promote an architecturally sensitive approach to new construction in Landmark and Historic districts. Demonstrate the proposed project’s contextual relationship with land uses and patterns, spatial organization, visual relationships, cultural and historic values, and relationships in height, massing, modulation, and materials.

Design Guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan:

- 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.
- 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.
- SP2.4: Permit “eroded” building corners at street intersections sufficient to promote visibility and to allow for the comfortable collection of people.
- SP2.5: Allow large developments to pull back from the street edge for plazas or gracious entry fore-courts, provided street continuity is not unduly interrupted along the majority of the block.
- 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.

- SP3.3: Site outdoor spaces to establish a comfortable transition between the exterior and interior of a building.
- SP3.6: Dimension outdoor spaces to human occupation; they should be proportioned to their surroundings and envisioned use.
- SP3.7: Link adjoining outdoor spaces with comfortable paths and walks to create a network of spaces.
- BD1.2: Integrate new development with its surroundings, emphasizing functional and visual continuity while admitting individual expression.
- BD1.4: Complement the architectural character of an adjacent historic building or area; however, imitation of historical styles is discouraged.
- BD1.5: Avoid mimicry of historical architectural styles; new buildings should not appear to have been constructed during a past era, and references to period architecture should be interpreted in a contemporary manner.
- BD1.6: Discourage excessive and overly gratuitous ornamentation that detracts from the visual clarity of Downtown's historic architecture.
- BD1.7: Employ design strategies and incorporate architectural elements that reinforce Downtown's unique qualities; in particular, Downtown's best buildings tend to support an active street life.
- BD2.1 Design building volumes to maintain a compatible scale with their surroundings; in general, break down the scale and massing of larger buildings.
- BD2.2 Rely on building massing and orientation to place strong visual emphasis on the street and other important civic spaces.
- BD2.3 Employ strong building forms such as towers to demarcate important gateways, intersections, and street corners; strong corner massing can function as the visual anchor for a block.
- 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.
- BD 2.6 Vary three dimensional character as a building rises skyward; in general, differentiate between the base, middle and top levels of a building.
- BD2.7 Emphasize the horizontal dimension to make a tall building appear less overwhelming.
- BD3.1 Establish a building's overall appearance on a clear and pleasing set of proportions; a building should exhibit a sense of order.
- BD3.2 Utilize a hierarchy of vertical and horizontal expression; facade articulation should reflect changes in building form.
- 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.
- BD3.7 Encourage the use of recessed windows that create shadow lines and suggest solidity.

- BD4.1 Promote active, pedestrian-oriented uses with a high degree of transparency along the street; uses should be readily discernable to the passer-by.
- BD5.2 Orient main building entrances to directly face the street; buildings that front multiple streets should provide a main entrance along each street.
- BD5.4 Accentuate the entrance(s) to a building's main lobby or interior office space; these main building entrances should be prominent in terms of size, articulation, and use of materials.
- BD5.5 Consider placing the main building entrance at a street corner, where feasible.
- BD5.6 Differentiate a main building entrance from storefront entrances into street level businesses.
- BD5.7 Encourage the use of highly crafted materials or civic art pieces to accentuate the appearance of entrances.
- BD6.1 Consider each building as a high-quality, long-term addition to Downtown; exterior design and building materials should exhibit permanence and quality appropriate to an urban setting.
- BD7.2 Establish a rhythm of vertical elements along the street-level facade; for instance, the regular cadence of display windows and shop entrances enhances the pedestrian experience.
- BD7.4 Give greater attention to detail at the street level of a building to satisfy the pedestrian; emphasize details that modulate the light and provide evidence of artistry and craft.
- BD8.1 Express roofs in a visually interesting manner that complements the composition of the building and the surrounding area; sculpted roof forms are encouraged.
- BD8.3 Use a strong, attractively detailed cornice or parapet in conjunction with a flat roof.

Civic Center/Midtown Subdistrict Design Guidelines:

- Sub-District Character Recommendation 1: Respect the dominance of the principal civic landmarks; buildings and landscape should define streets and contain public space, creating a consistent and unified context for these landmark buildings.
- Sub-District Character Recommendation 2: Protect and enhance views and view corridors focused on monumental civic buildings, especially City Hall, the Central Library, and the Civic Auditorium; City Hall's dome should be the dominant element of the skyline.
- Street Environment Recommendation 4: Maintain historic landscape elements such as ornamental streetlights, paving, and tree lawns; streetscape improvements should reflect the quality and character of these historic elements.
- Site Planning Recommendation 1: Emphasize an elegant, simple landscape design vocabulary.
- Site Planning Recommendation 2: Establish strong physical and visual connections between indoor and outdoor space, and between adjacent outdoor spaces.
- Site Planning Recommendation 3: Encourage the presence of shade trees, lush plantings, warm materials, and fountains in outdoor spaces; fountains are an especially identifiable element within the Civic Center / Midtown area.

Site Planning Recommendation 4: Use open-air passages and block penetrations to breakdown building mass and establish visual connections; openings should not compromise the containment of streets and outdoor space.

Building Design Recommendation 1: Match the permanence and quality of civic buildings in the area; buildings should be designed and built as long-term additions to the area.

Building Design Recommendation 2: Respect the architectural design of historic buildings and protect the monumentality of landmark civic buildings; limit the scale and massing of larger buildings by employing articulated sub-volumes.

Building Design Recommendation 3: Use the palette of materials and colors currently found in the area; masonry (non-brick), stucco, colored concrete, and tile decorative elements are prominent materials, and the use of intense colors should be severely limited.

Building Design Recommendation 4: Maintain stylistic unity for civic buildings, drawing inspiration from classical Italian and Spanish models; this should not prevent contemporary interpretations responsive to the Southern California environment.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:

- 9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
- 10: New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Potential Design Issues:

In general, the proposed project is consistent with the majority of the design guidelines listed above. While the design of the building favors compatibility with the Civic Center over differentiation, in this highly sensitive location, this is an appropriate approach. The project retains the open space areas required by the City Council and maintains all historical view corridors that were envisioned in the Bennett Plan, while providing needed affordable housing and partially completing the original Bennett Plan vision. The comments below are intended to assist the design team in its further development of the project to ensure that it is fully compatible with the high-style design of the historic Civic Center, differentiated as a new building within its surrounding historic context, and finished with high-quality materials.

- The massing presentation of the building is very similar to the adjacent YMCA building, which does not incorporate substantial articulation in its mass. Other buildings in the surrounding context within the Civic Center provide more substantial massing articulation. Although the proposed building is immediately adjacent to the YMCA building, consideration should be given to providing simple massing articulation gestures to ensure consistency with the overall Civic Center and avoid a monolithic appearance of the new building, in conjunction with the relatively monolithic YMCA building. Such articulation could include upper-floor stepbacks or lower-height secondary volumes. Although a 60' height limit is allowed, the building should incorporate articulation in the

massing that would ensure that it appears subordinate to the historical buildings within the Civic Center. One way this could be achieved would be by repositioning the proposed fourth floor roof deck to the southwest corner of the building rather than within the interior courtyard, and relocating the stair at that location, possibly to adjoin with the elevator to the east.

- Consider a greater setback, possibly a usable paseo to the central courtyard, on the west side of the building to create greater separation between the existing YWCA building and the proposed new building. If this is not feasible for the entire length of the rear façade, consider a localized setback increase at the Holly Street side only.
- The entry stairs and accessibility ramp at the southeast corner of the building should be carefully designed and integrated into the building as much as possible. In addition, the south wall of the building should align more closely with the south wall of the YMCA building.
- To ensure differentiation of the building from the historical buildings in the Civic Center, the architectural detailing of the building should be simple in character. The use of high-quality and durable exterior materials on the entire building should be favored over the use of custom detailing and ornamentation that attempts to mimic detailing of the historic buildings in the surrounding context. Consider a stone base to the building rather than a plaster base with reveals.
- The landscape design of the setback areas along Garfield Avenue and Holly Street will be crucially important to the success of the project. As the development of these spaces will likely involve a partnership with the City, the team should work collaboratively to ensure that these spaces are designed to be consistent with the concepts shown in the 1920's civic center plans by Bennett, Parsons & Frost.
- Given the relative lack of signage in the immediate area surrounding the Civic Center, and the lack of commercial development in the project, it is expected that no signage would be proposed for this project; however, if there is a need to identify the building with signage, it should be designed in a manner that is consistent with the civic buildings in the vicinity. This may include such designs as carved signage on the façade, stone plaques or pin-mounted metal lettering, all of which should be non-illuminated. If signage is intended, conceptual locations and design concepts should be presented as early as possible in the design review process.

Project Scheduling/Sequencing:

- Concept & Final Design Review by the Design Commission
- Building Permits

Respectfully Submitted,



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Attachments:

- A. Current Planning (Zoning) compliance matrix
- B. Applicant submittal package
- C. OLIN Partnership Plan, 2019