



**PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT**

DATE: MARCH 8, 2022
TO: DESIGN COMMISSION
FROM: DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR, PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: ADVISORY REVIEW – PROPOSED PLANNED DEVELOPMENT #40
206-UNIT RESIDENTIAL PROJECT
444 N. FAIR OAKS AVENUE & 425 N. RAYMOND AVENUE

Background:

The purpose of this review, pursuant to Zoning Code Section 17.61.030.I.5.b, is to provide “recommendations to the Commission and Council on aesthetic and urban design issues related to architecture, landscaping, site plan, and related aesthetic issues, as well as historic preservation” related to a proposed Planned Development. In addition, because the project is proposing an increase in residential density over what is allowed by the General Plan Land Use Diagram for the Raymond Avenue portion of the site, Zoning Code Section 17.26.020.C.3.d(1)(a) requires the Design Commission to review the project prior to its consideration by the Planning Commission to “advise the Commission as to whether the architectural design of the proposed PD is contextual and of a high-quality.” The proposal is for the construction of a new two-to-five-story, approximately 213,826-square-foot, 206-unit residential project at 444 N. Fair Oaks Avenue and 425 N. Raymond Avenue. The site is at the southeast corner of N. Fair Oaks Avenue and E. Villa Street, with a portion extending easterly to N. Raymond Avenue, approximately mid-block between E. Villa Street and E. Maple Street. The project area is approximately 2.09 acres in size.

The Fair Oaks Avenue portion of the project site is currently zoned FGSP-C-3B (Fair Oaks/Orange Grove Specific Plan - Limited Commercial District 3, Subdistrict "B") and the Raymond Avenue portion of the project site is zoned RM-12 (Multi-Family Residential, 2 units per lot). The applicant is proposing a zone change to create a Planned Development (PD) District for the site to accommodate the proposed project.

Surrounding properties include commercial, industrial and office buildings ranging between one and three stories in height along Fair Oaks Avenue and residential buildings between one and two stories in height along Raymond Avenue, with the exception of the four-story Villa Raymond building at the southwest corner of E. Villa Street and N. Raymond Avenue. A one-and-one-half-story church building with corner tower element sits at the northwest corner of E. Villa Street and N. Raymond Avenue. Nearby designated historic resources include the Raymond-Summit Historic District immediately east of the project site. The Raymond Villa building has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

A Preliminary Consultation was conducted for the project on November 12, 2019 and the comments that the Commission provided at that time are in Attachment B. Since that time, the project has been substantially redesigned, including, at the Fair Oaks Avenue portion of the project. Changes include placement of all parking underground, breaking up of the building massing into distinct components, articulation of lower-scaled volumes adjacent to lower-scaled adjacent development, consolidation and relocation of open space to the interior of the property and associated creation of a more defined street wall, and other general architectural refinements including responses to corner and street termination conditions of the surrounding context. The Raymond Avenue portion of the project has also been redesigned to a courtyard housing typology with the scale of the building being reduced from four stories to two, and the architecture being refined in response to the immediate context, particularly the Herkimer Arms Apartments. The revised plans, including before and after imagery, narrative responses to Preliminary Consultation comments and context and architectural style reference exhibits, are in Attachment A.

The buildings along Fair Oaks Avenue are designed in a contemporary interpretation of the Main Street Commercial style with flat roofs, elevated ground floors, some with storefront-type glazing, a regular, repeating pattern of fenestration, punched openings, recessed and projecting balconies, and projecting frame elements. The buildings along Raymond Avenue are designed in a restrained contemporary style intended to respond primarily to the nearby Herkimer Arms building and other features of the Raymond Avenue residential context, including flat roofs, large, multi-light openings, walled front porches with pergola-covered balconies above, highly glazed front doors and shallowly articulated repeating volumes with alternating materiality (siding and stucco) along the side and courtyard elevations.

Applicable Design Guidelines:

- 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 & Multi-Family Residential Districts

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:

- 1.1: Accommodate growth that is consistent with community values and that complements the scale and character of Pasadena's unique residential neighborhoods, business districts, and open spaces.
- 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.
- 4.12: Require that the scale and massing of new development in higher-density centers and corridors provide appropriate transitions in building height and bulk and are sensitive to the physical and visual character of adjoining lower-density neighborhoods.
- 4.13: Incentivize high-quality, contextual, architectural design in Planned Developments through a discretionary process by allowing for an increase in the allowable Floor Area Ratio for a project, not to exceed a total of 3.0 , and an increase in the allowable residential density not to exceed 87 dwelling units per acre.
- 5.2: Require buildings in the Central District, Transit Villages, Neighborhood Villages, and along corridors specified by the adopted specific plans to be located along the street/sidewalk and designed to promote pedestrian activity. This can be accomplished by incorporating transparent facades, small plazas, and dining areas; while locating parking to the rear or underground and placing primary entries on the street.
- 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.
- 6.2: Preserve, protect, and enhance established residential neighborhoods by providing appropriate transitions between these and adjoining areas. Require new development to complement and respond to the existing physical characteristics that contribute to the overall character and livability of the neighborhood.
- 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.
- 18.6: Require that building entrances or access ways be oriented toward transit stops when located adjacent to these facilities.
- 23.1: Design and modulate buildings to avoid the sense of “blocky” and undifferentiated building mass, incorporate well-defined entries, and use building materials, colors, and architectural details complementing the neighborhood, while allowing flexibility for distinguished design solutions.
- 23.3: Provide appropriate setbacks, consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, along the street frontage and, where there are setbacks, ensure adequate landscaping is provided.

- 23.4: Ensure sensitive transitions in building scale between buildings in multi-family residential areas and lower-scale buildings in adjoining residential areas.
- 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.
- 34.3: Require that the types of uses, densities, building massing and heights, and design development along Fair Oaks Avenue and Orange Grove Boulevard assure compatibility and accessibility with adjoining residential neighborhoods.

Fair Oaks/Orange Grove Specific Plan:

The western portion of the project site, with frontage on Fair Oaks Avenue, is within the Renaissance Commercial District (District 3) of the Fair Oaks/Orange Grove Specific Plan. This subdistrict encourages “a pedestrian-oriented commercial and residential district with a compact, urban character.”

Section 5.8: Private Realm Design Guidelines:

5.8.1 General

- The existing site conditions, such as mature trees, natural drainage courses, and historic structures should be incorporated into a project on any site.
- Buildings should be oriented toward the major street to strengthen the street edge and to promote an interesting pedestrian environment.

5.8.2 Architectural Character

- All projects, both smaller infill projects and large projects should be designed to be compatible with the scale, materials and architectural character of the block.
- Larger projects that involve lot consolidation or redevelopment of an entire block should support the creation of a “village” atmosphere by featuring varied and articulated facades, individual openings to stores and offices, and appropriately scaled signs.
- Buildings should be designed to be attractive from all directions. Where rear or sides of buildings are visible from adjacent streets, these facades should receive equal design treatment as the front or main façade.
- To avoid large blocky facades, building should be articulated in form using techniques such as step-back of second and upper floors, stepped terraces, changes in plane, and articulated roof lines. Building facades should be articulated with appropriate details such as detailing around windows, doors, base and at the cornice.

- Buildings on corner lots should incorporate architectural elements which emphasize the corner, such as a curved or angled façade, and entrance off the corner, a tower element or other treatment.

Section 5.8.5: Walls and Fences

- Walls and fences are discouraged unless needed for screening, to create a sense of street edge, or for security purposes.
- Fencing should be set back a minimum of 5 feet from the front property line, with landscaping in the setback area.

Section 5.9: New Development

5.9.1 New Residential Development

- In the development of new residential structures, careful consideration should be given to predominant architectural styles and features as well as materials, textures and colors present in the neighborhood.
- For new residential structures, to achieve a scale compatible with adjacent structures, architectural features present on existing adjacent structures such as porches, balconies and window and door details should be complemented by elements in new construction that are similar in shape, size and configuration.
- Through the wall venting visible from the public right-of-way should not be used. All venting should be routed through the roof and not be visible from public elevations.

Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-family Residential Districts (non-repetitive guidelines):

- 2.2: Activating the street. New multi-family and mixed-use buildings should be designed with frontages that activate the street by providing direct access to their ground floor dwellings and commercial spaces.
- 2.3: Corner lots. Buildings on corner lots should be designed to acknowledge their particular location. Different frontage types can be used on each of the two street facing facades, the same frontage type can be used on each facade, or a frontage type can wrap around the corner from one facade to the other.
- 3.3: Street terminations. The massing of new buildings at street terminations should be designed to acknowledge, through their form, the centrality of their placement relative to the right of way. They should be either placed on the street's center line, or positioned in a manner that convincingly shows that they were not meant to be centered.
- 4.1: Room orientation. For as many dwellings as possible, formal rooms should be designed to face onto the public street with windows and doorways appropriate to both the building type and the building style.
- 4.2: Window and door size and placement. Windows and doorways should be designed to reflect the character and size of the rooms to which they belong. The composition of

street and courtyard- facing elevations should organize these windows, doors, and the space between them into a clear and legible pattern appropriate to both the style of the building and the scale of the street it faces.

- 6.3: Contexts in transition should receive projects in either a contemporary or traditional style with no limitations, that will help to shape the future character of their surroundings.
- 7.1: Scale. Buildings should be scaled to respond to their context by sensitively and positively addressing the scale and massing of their adjacent neighbors. This can be accomplished by:
- Matching existing building heights or exceeding them by only one story. Additional stories should be modulated by setbacks.
 - Modulating side yard and rear yard volumes to provide as much distance as possible between the facades of a proposed building and existing buildings in order to preserve the privacy of the outdoor spaces of both.
 - Orienting the side yards of proposed buildings to face the side yards of adjacent buildings.
 - Including elements such as porches, galleries, arcades, etc. to relate the scale of facades to those of existing buildings.
 - Reducing building bulk by introducing dwelling space in attic spaces.
 - Introducing landscape and/or trees as a screen between existing and new buildings.
- 7.3 Side and rear windows. The placement and size of windows in side yards and rear yards should respect the privacy and need for light and air of existing buildings.
- 7.4: Existing site features. Unique natural characteristics, such as mature trees and topography, on both the project site and adjacent sites should be respected and taken into account in new building design.
- 7.5: On very large lots, the division of projects into two or more separate buildings of different type, density, height, and massing is encouraged.
- 8.1: Entrances into buildings. New buildings should be entered directly and prominently from the street through a lobby, or indirectly through a covered or uncovered passage.
- Entrance ways and doorways should be clearly identifiable as prominent points of access into buildings and their form should dominate all other openings.
- 11.4: Contemporary architecture. Buildings designed in contemporary styles may adhere to a set of rules that is established and followed through by the designer. The design strategy must be described in conformance with Appendix A3 (Preliminary Review).
- 12.1: Simplicity. Building masses should be organized as simple and well-scaled volumes. Excessive roof breaks and overly complicated hipped or gabled roofs should be avoided.
- 12.2: Architectural logic. For buildings large enough to be composed of more than one volume, an architectural logic, such as a clear hierarchy of massing, should be evident.

12.4: Proportion. Building masses and building facades should be designed with simple, harmonious proportions. Arbitrary proportions should be avoided.

Recommended Advisory Comments on Proposed PD:

- Staff is supportive of the establishment of a Planned Development at this location that would provide a number of units that would equate to a maximum density of 87 units per acre on the western (Fair Oaks Avenue) portion of the site (total of 162 units); consistent with the maximum residential density allowed in the General Plan Land Use Diagram for the Medium Mixed Use category. As proposed, the western portion of the project site is within the Medium Mixed Use category and proposes an overall density of 107 units per acre (199 dwelling units), exceeding the density established in the General Plan Land Use Diagram.
- The current site design is responsive to the Commission’s Preliminary Consultation comments and more appropriately addresses the adjoining streets. Further study the site design to reduce the larger setback areas along Fair Oaks Avenue, provide entry stoops to the proposed ground-level residences, and eliminate the need for the proposed grade change and ramp along the street edge. The setbacks proposed should be consistent with the recommendations in the draft Fair Oaks/Orange Grove Specific Plan (maximum 10’ over 75% of the building frontage) and should be sufficient to balance the building height and incorporate landscaping and mature trees into the setback areas.
- Building heights should more closely correspond to the recommendations in the draft Fair Oaks/Orange Grove Specific Plan by incorporating substantial upper-story step-backs where the buildings exceed 51’ in height.
- Refine and integrate the differentiated storefront treatment at the ground-level amenity spaces along Fair Oaks Avenue and Villa Street to provide a more cohesive ground-level expression to the respective buildings. Alternatively, consider additional massing articulation to create cohesive building forms at the storefront locations.
- Further develop the architectural expression of the Fair Oaks Avenue buildings to achieve a residential character that is more consistent with the Main Street Commercial style inspiration. As designed, some of the elevations have an institutional or office building character that should be softened for the proposed residential use.
- Explore the possibility of eliminating bridges across the central pedestrian entry point along Fair Oaks Avenue to maintain an open view corridor to the open space area in the interior of the site.
- The courtyard at the Raymond Avenue portion of the site should be designed to provide usable outdoor space and amenities for the residents of those buildings, in addition to continuing to provide pedestrian access to the proposed units and retaining the proposed barbeque area toward the rear. Explore massing strategies that would allow

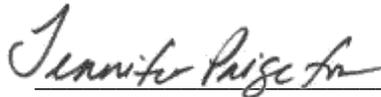
for this to be created within the courtyard, with a minimum 20' dimension in both directions.

- Although some minor massing articulation has been incorporated into the Raymond Avenue buildings, further explore ways to relieve the long, relatively unbroken side and courtyard-facing facades and ensure that courtyard-facing entries are articulated with frontage elements.
- Further study the three-story elevation at the westerly terminus of the Raymond Avenue courtyard to incorporate human-scaled elements and ensure an attractive and inviting termination of the view from Raymond Avenue.
- Consider whether the Herkimer Arms building is an appropriate design inspiration for the Raymond Avenue buildings, given that it is starkly different in character from the rest of the block, and was not originally in this location. A sloping roof form with a projecting one-story front porch and without street-facing balconies may be a more appropriate expression in response to these features that appear in multiple buildings within the context on the block. If a flat-roofed design is maintained as proposed, further study the proportions of the massing and of solids-to-voids to ensure they are simple and harmonious.
- High-quality materials should be utilized in the design. On the Fair Oaks Avenue building, a high-quality and durable base material that creates texture at the pedestrian level should be employed.

Project Scheduling/Sequencing:

- Zoning Entitlements (Planned Development) review by the Planning Commission and City Council
- Concept and Final Design Review by the Design Commission
- Building Permits

Respectfully Submitted,



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Attachments:

- A. Applicant submittal package
- B. Preliminary Consultation comments, November 12, 2019