



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: JULY 12, 2022

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

FROM: JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP, ACTING DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR FINAL DESIGN REVIEW
NEW SIX-STORY 195-ROOM HOTEL WITH 5,000 SQUARE FEET OF
GROUND-LEVEL COMMERCIAL SPACE
550-566 E. COLORADO BOULEVARD

RECOMMENDATION:

The staff recommends that the Commission:

Environmental Determination

Find that the application for Final Design Review was subject to environmental review in the Addendum to the previously certified FSEIR that was prepared for the subject project and adopted by the Planning Commission for CUP #5407 (Modification) on October 27, 2021, 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 there are no protected trees on the site.

Findings for Final Design Approval

1. Find that the project, upon implementation of the conditions of Final Design Review approval, will comply with the conditions of the previously approved Major Changes to an Approved Project;
2. Find that the project, upon implementation of the conditions of Final Design Review approval, will be consistent with the purposes of design review, the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan and the Design Guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan; and

3. Based on these findings, approve the application for Final Design Review subject to the conditions in Attachment A, which shall be subject to staff review and approval prior to issuance of a building permit.

BACKGROUND:

On January 11, 2022, the Design Commission approved an application for Major Changes to an Approved Project for construction of a new 6-story, 195-room hotel with 5,000 square feet of ground floor commercial space at 550-566 E. Colorado Boulevard. This application is for Final Design Review of the same project.

The application presents design revisions in response to the conditions of approval from the previous Major Changes to an Approved Project phase in addition to providing more detailed plans, elevations, sections and color and material information for the project. The current drawings are more fully detailed and present a palette of materials that is consistent with the design of the building. Upon reviewing the drawings in detail, staff recommends approval of the application with the conditions of approval outlined in Attachment A and explained within this report.

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: High Mixed Use (0 – 3.00 FAR)
- Zoning: CD-4 (Central District Specific Plan, Pasadena Playhouse Subdistrict)
- 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 in the Central District Specific Plan.
- Site: The project site is approximately 0.86 acres in sizes and is comprised of three separate lots at the southwest corner of East Colorado Boulevard and South Madison Avenue. The site is currently developed as a surface parking lot with a small kiosk structure and landscaping.
- Surroundings: Surrounding properties include a church (Pasadena Presbyterian Church) located across the street to the north, a 5-level public parking structure serving the surrounding uses to the south, an eight-story professional office building to the west, and a two-story commercial building to the east of the site. There are buildings between 2- to 8-stories located within the immediate vicinity of the project site.
- Project Description: The project involves demolition of the existing surface parking lot and small non-historic parking attendant kiosk and construction of a new six-story, 195-room hotel with 5,000 square feet of commercial space on the ground floor. A small surface parking area is proposed at the rear of the site; the majority of the required parking for the project will be provided off-site.

- Site Design: The proposed L-shaped building is sited at the northeast corner of the site along its two street frontages. It has a zero setback from East Colorado Boulevard (with recessed storefronts) and a 14'-5" setback for most of the South Madison Avenue frontage to ensure protection of existing mature street trees. The portion of the building that adjoins Converse Alley at the southeast corner is set back 3'10" from the property line and the remaining portion of the south elevation is set back approximately 100' from the alley to accommodate an entry court to facilitate guest drop-off and a parking zone. The building is set back 2'-6" from the westerly property line. An open area with some at-grade parking spaces and landscaping at the rear along the alley will accommodate an arrival court for guest check-in/out that is connected to a reception lobby.
- Architectural Style: Contemporary
- Developer: Welcome Pasadena, LLC
- Architect: WATG
- Landscape Architect: LRM

ANALYSIS:

Conditions and Recommendations of Major Changes to an Approved Project:

Below are the Commission's conditions of approval and recommendations from the previously approved Major Changes to an Approved Project, as well as the architect's responses and staff's comments. See Attachment B for the complete set of revised plans, elevations, wall sections, architectural details and materials specifications and imagery.

Changes to an Approved Project Conditions, January 11, 2022:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
<p>1. Further study the south elevation of the building to provide a more balanced solid-to-void proportion, particularly at the eastern end, and to incorporate measure to enhance the ground level vehicular entry experience.</p>	<p>“Utilizing softer color tones for the solid area, green wall solutions, and enhancements to the plaza-like auto court, the overall environment to the guest experience at the ground level is upgraded. The guestroom facades are not within normal view angles so improvements were concentrated in the landscape improvement.”</p>	<p><i>Comment to be addressed with condition of approval no. 11.</i></p> <p>Utilizing colors to treat building façades is an approach to addressing design concerns; however, staff finds that in this case, colors alone do not sufficiently correct the solid-to-void ratio of the eastern portion of the south elevation as identified by the Design Commission. These solid walls are large and span the height of the building. Although this façade is not on the primary street elevations, it is visible when approaching north on S. Madison Avenue. Condition of approval no. 11 requires the applicant to incorporate other design interventions in addition to color to address these blank walls in order to achieve a holistic design treatment among all façades. One possible solution would be to introduce clerestory windows and/or floor-to-ceiling thin vertical fixed windows. For added privacy, fritted glass or similar view obscuring glazing could be used in these openings in lieu of providing window coverings on the interior.</p>

Changes to an Approved Project Conditions, January 11, 2022:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
<p>2. Provide breaks in the landscaping strips along Madison Avenue and Colorado Boulevard to allow for pedestrian access from the public right-to-way to entrances along those streets and an open and accessible corner plaza at the northeast corner of the site.</p>	<p>“Improvements to the landscape design adjusted per City request.”</p>	<p><i>This condition has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>Breaks in the landscape strips along both street fronts have been provided as shown on Sheet L4.01. These openings provide clear access to the building from the public right-of-way. The corner entry is pulled back from the north and east property lines and is open, comfortable and unobstructed to help highlight the primary point of entry into the building. Further, openings in the landscape strips align with double doors into the lobby/lounge area. The landscape break along S. Madison Avenue should be clearly depicted on the all elevations and renderings for consistency as reflected in recommended condition no. 13.</p>

Changes to an Approved Project Conditions, January 11, 2022:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
<p>3. The plans submitted for Final Review shall demonstrate compliance with the height limits and height averaging requirements in the Zoning Code. In particular, building height shall be measured from the lowest point of existing grade to the top of the parapet or tallest ridge/slope at each building volume with different height. Rooftop appurtenances such as the elevator/stair overruns and mechanical equipment enclosures may be excluded from the height averaging calculations, provided they comply with the appurtenance height limitations in PMC Section 17.40.060.D.2.a.</p>	<p>“In discussion with the City, the request to modify the approach to calculating the average height caused us to reduce the overall height of the building and bring the parapets within the limit. The overall section and roof parapets were adjusted to accomplish this target.”</p>	<p><i>This condition has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The height averaging employed by the project has been reconsidered and corrected to comply with the Zoning Code as illustrated on the roof plan.</p>

Consolidated Design Review Recommendations, January 11, 2022:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
<p>1. Simplify the materiality of the building to ensure a timeless quality. While the applicant may propose additional or alternative solutions, suggestions include elimination of the Spanish tile and faux-wood panel materials as well as the projecting box window frames.</p>	<p>“In response to the City recommendations, the design team removed the metal box frames that protruded from the windows. This simplifies the façade and reduces the shadow casted depth. Spanish tiles is utilized in small spaces for personality and reflect the brand image of AC Hotels. The faux wood is a soft material in appearance but durable in life-cycle to bring a contemporary spin as opposed to white plaster exterior ceilings. This will be perceived as an upgraded finish.”</p>	<p><i>Recommendations to be addressed through conditions of approval 7 and 8.</i></p> <p>The overall treatment of the façade is simple, clean, and elegant. The efforts made here through this recommendation help improve the design simplicity further. Finishes that pretend or are treated to look like natural materials lack richness, texture, pattern and color found in authentic finishes. As a general rule, faux materials should be avoided. Therefore, staff recommends condition 7 requiring the faux wood panel to be replaced with an authentic material.</p> <p>The Spanish tiles, while indicated to elevate the brand image, have a traditional motif and pattern that contradicts the hotel's clean, modern appearance. Staff recommends condition no. 8 for replacement of this material.</p>

Consolidated Design Review Recommendations, January 11, 2022:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
<p>2. Carefully study the detailing of the exterior materials to ensure a high-quality appearance to the building. Materials and color transitions should occur at the inside corners and locations of transitions should be designed with intention to accentuate important design elements, such as the corner tower element.</p>	<p>“Authentic materials will be used at high touch areas while alternative materials will contribute to any cost considerations. See revised material boards.”</p>	<p><i>The recommendation has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>Important details and sections are provided in the revised submittal for various features and design elements proposed throughout the building. These details illustrate method of installation, craftsmanship and treatment between different adjoining finishes. The design and treatment of the corner entry element sets off and highlights the building in a sophisticated way with its transparent quality. The darker color and texture of the ground floor anchor the building to its site. The 2nd – 5th floors are intentionally quiet in their appearance. Finally, the top floor is terminated with a playful roofline. The detailing and materials are utilized in various areas throughout the project for a balanced appearance.</p>

Consolidated Design Review Recommendations, January 11, 2022:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
<p>3. The island of six parking spaces along Converse Alley and surrounded by the proposed semicircular driveway shall be converted to open space. Study the possibility of limiting the driveway to one-way traffic in order to narrow its width and expand this open space areas as much as possible. The open space shall be carefully designed to be inviting and useful to the public, including physical separation from the vehicular path of travel.</p>	<p>“The landscape plan at the arrival auto court has removed the center parking stalls and replaced with a large landscaped zone. A signature central tree, walking pavers and layers of landscape will soften the walking experience along the south side of the development along Converse Alley.”</p>	<p><i>The recommendation has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The removal of the parking spaces in the middle of the auto court has resulted in a large landscaped area that will be accented with a specimen tree. This feature creates a welcoming arrival and departure experience for hotel guests since it connects to the reception area and enlivens this portion of Converse Alley. Incorporating benches or seating within this landscape might be a welcoming gesture; however, staff does not recommend that this be required as a condition of approval.</p>

Consolidated Design Review Recommendations, January 11, 2022:	Architect Responses	Staff Comment:
<p>4. Restudy the Colorado Boulevard entrance to the hotel for consistency with the Central District Guidelines that recommend that building entrances be related in size and scale to the height and mass of the building.</p>	<p>The revision to the building corner along Colorado and Madison opens up the connection from building to public realm. The open corner and strong vertical framing element is simple in form but captures and highlights its presence. The removal of the strong horizontal element across the podium and change in material accentuates the vertical expression at the corner massing.”</p>	<p><i>The recommendation has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The Colorado Boulevard entrance has been successfully addressed and is proportional to the building mass and height. This corner piece is elegantly treated to be the focal point of the development through a number of subtle and exaggerated treatments, such as the wide entry/glazing framed within a slightly taller brick base that wraps the corner and integrates with a sign. This same volume is extended upward into larger balconies. The entire assembly appears sculpted and has a three-dimensional appearance capped with a slightly canted roof.</p>
<p>5. Further study the treatment of the northeast corner of the building with the goal of unifying the tower element as it is now proposed so that it is more successfully unified and consistent with the design as a whole rather than carving this vertical element away from the rest of the building massing.</p>	<p>“The podium brick materials are now carried horizontally across the bottom of this vertical corner element to unify the building. This provides consistency at the pedestrian level while still highlighting the open corner at the ground level. Furthermore, the projected roof elements that carry across the Colorado elevation and appears in the SE elevation tie the building massing together.”</p>	<p><i>The recommendation has been successfully addressed.</i></p> <p>The northeast corner, which includes the hotel’s entry tower, has an elevated design through its treatment, finishes and scale. While different, it has a unifying quality that is consistent with the rest of the building. Various design approaches and materiality are carried across to the Colorado Blvd, Madison Ave and alley elevations for a consistent treatment overall and it is punctuated with moments of playfulness and a unique experience.</p>

Materials & Colors:

The building design is supported by a simple and modern material and color palette in neutral tones. The base of the building at the ground floor will be clad in Meridian, MB-R-Salisbury Collection-Cordoba brick with mortar to match and elsewhere on the façade will be painted and Venetian plaster in Greek Villa and Downing Sand colors will be the primary finishes on the building. The details identify EIFS cladding where plaster is proposed, which is not considered a high quality material. Staff recommends condition no. 9 for the removal of EIFS finish and replacement with traditional stucco in a smooth finish. Accent materials include perforated metal panels in a rose pattern, faux wood panels and Spanish tiles. The proposed 7' x 10' faux wood panels are applied on the underside of the balcony covers and side walls in a simulated running bond pattern. This material is not high quality or consistent with the design guidelines and should be removed and replaced with authentic and high quality material as recommended by staff in condition no. 7. The Spanish tile material is incorporated as an accent band on the rear portion of the S. Madison Avenue façade and on a wall of the south alley façade in a stacked bond arrangement. The tiles are sourced from Kerion Neocim Décor Porcelain. As noted above, staff finds that this material contrasts with the modern aesthetic of the building and recommends condition no. 8 for replacement of this material with a high quality material that is consistent with the building design.

The most prominent feature of the design is the corner tower entry, which fronts both Colorado Boulevard and Madison Avenue. This element is finished with clear glazing for the entries and framed by brick. This ground floor proportion is carried upward with balconies enclosed in glass railings and covered with canopies with a faux wood soffit. The entire upper level corner feature is framed with plaster walls and perforated rose-pattern metal panels on the Madison Avenue facade. A clear delineation of this form from the two street-facing facades is observed. Since the vertical accent rose-pattern panel is long and will likely be assembled with multiple pieces stitched together, the seam detail will be important. Staff is recommending condition no. 30 to be provided for review to ensure that the design and pattern match up seamlessly.

The Colorado Boulevard and Madison Avenue elevations are treated similarly. The façades are composed of painted plaster with punched openings of clear glazing in a repeated pattern. There are balconies on both sides, but are arranged differently and at different levels. The roofline along Colorado is interrupted with a break to create a rooftop deck above the fifth floor. The ground floor of these elevations are also similar and feature extensive glazing framed by brick. The Madison Avenue façade contains a ground floor volume dubbed the “Media Salon” and an office that extends to the property line and offers a departure with its form, glazing pattern and a Spanish tile ribbon introduced under the soffit.

The rear or alley elevation is the guest check-in/check-out and reception area. Similar to the other elevations, it is mainly treated with painted and Venetian plaster, brick and glazing. A canted covered entry or porte cochere signifies the entry into the building and reception area. A portion of the ground floor wall east of the canopy will be treated with Spanish tile. As mentioned in the comment table, the tile reflects a traditional motif and a busy pattern that contradicts the simple modern facades. The Commission previously recommended that the applicant

reconsider the use of both the Spanish tile and the faux wood and to replace them with similar, but authentic materials; however, the applicant proposes to retain these materials. Staff agrees with the Commission's previous recommendation and recommends conditions nos. 7 and 8 to require these materials to be replaced with ones that are more consistent with the simple, modern design of the building.

Window and doors utilized throughout the project are aluminum Arcadia Windows T200E series and Generation 4 nanawalls. The ground floor will be treated with an aluminum storefront system. Staff recommends condition no. 17 requiring the color of the door and window frames, glass railing frames and window mullions to be the same color throughout. To achieve added depth on the street-facing facades, a center-glazed storefront system shall be employed for both elevations as reflected in recommended condition no. 18.

A number of wall sections are provided to illustrate the construction method and assembly of various building components and design features. These wall sections are further supported by architectural details to ensure quality and durable construction. Details of the entry canopy, balcony and railing, treatment of the parapet, windows/doors, soffits and cornice treatment, as well as transitions between materials are provided and demonstrate a high-quality and durable application of materials and craftsmanship throughout the project. To that end, window details should specify the depth of recess from the exterior wall and should be a minimum 2 inches in order to achieve adequate relief and definition as reflected in recommended condition no. 18. Further, staff recommends condition no. 10 which requires all brick proposed on the elevations to fully cover and terminate at the base or ground floor of the building and to not transition in plane or onto the upper floor above it. Provision of a detail of the transition cap is also recommended. The transition from brick to Venetian plaster or stucco at the corner also needs to be reconsidered for a more logical stopping point.

Mechanical Screening:

The roof plan identifies three areas for mechanical equipment. Each unit sits away from the edge of the building's edge/parapet and will be screened. If the height of the parapet is not sufficient to screen the units, separate screening shall be required consistent with PMC Section 17.40.150. The screening material is not identified; therefore, staff recommends condition no. 17 to ensure it will be high quality and complement the building design and finishes.

The elevations do not show the locations of mechanical vents/vent caps and drainage. In order to preserve the clean and simple treatment of the facades, the location of these features should be carefully considered. Staff recommends condition no. 22 requiring drainage to be placed internally. Staff also recommends condition no. 21 requiring avoidance of exterior mechanical HVAC vents at each hotel room and, if other mechanical vents/vent caps are required and cannot be routed to the roof, that they be directed to secondary elevations to the greatest extent possible and arranged in a clear and thoughtful pattern, with caps that are high quality and integrated into the building design. Further, careful consideration should also be given to how the roof deck and balconies drain if there are no openings/gaps at the bottom of the glass railing. As such, accommodation for overflow drainage will be necessary to comply with Building Code requirements and staff recommends condition of approval no. 23 requiring careful design of the balcony and deck drainage to ensure that it is integrated into the design of the building and avoids placement of scuppers, or careful integration of them, within the brick façade.

The mechanical, fire prevention, electrical, water heater rooms and similar building support features are located on the ground floor behind the commercial/retail space. The electrical meters and generator are located outside along the rear façade. Gas service and meter locations are not shown, but a standard staff-recommended condition no. 24 requires them to be shown in the final plans and to be screened from public view to the extent allowed by the utility company.

Landscaping:

Much of the project's landscape and hardscape features will be located on the ground floor along the rear alley elevation within the auto court, around the outdoor patio seating area along Madison Avenue, and at the roof deck at the 5th floor. The focal point of the auto court landscape design is a landscape island that features a 96-inch-box Coast Live Oak Tree in the center surrounded by Japanese Boxwood. Under staff recommended condition no. 14, a certified arborist will be required and retained for a minimum of three years to maintain the health of the proposed Coast Live Oak Tree. Along the perimeter of the site and against the building are Indian Laurel, Bouteloua "Blond Ambition", Coast Rosemary, Wild Rye, Cape and Spinyheaded Mat Rush, and two small unidentified ornamental trees. Staff recommends condition no. 25 that the species and size of the two ornamental trees shall be specified in the final landscape plan submitted for plan check. Two 36-inch-box Evergreen Elm Trees are also proposed that appear to be located in the public right-of-way. The correct location of these trees will be verified and if they are located on public property, review by staff of the Department of Public Works will be required. Staff recommended condition no. 26 seeks to clarify that the final design review approval excludes any trees planted in the public right-of-way.

The 5th floor roof deck also features a specimen tree as the focal point of the outdoor space. A European Olive Tree is proposed. Along the edges of the roof deck are Cape Rush and rose trees. Within these areas, the applicant should consider the hardscape design and associated site furnishings to complement the intended use of each area in conjunction with the building design. Paving material and color, pattern, and outdoor furniture shall be durable and of high quality. The paving pattern(s) shall be shown on all landscape plans as recommended by condition no. 4. Staff also recommends condition nos. 2 and 3 for the applicant to provide manufacturer's specifications for all paving materials and site furnishings.

The overall landscape palette is simple and the proposed design offers a layered appearance to complement the building design. The planting at each area will elevate the quality of the outdoor space and guest/visitor experience. The proposed landscape at the outdoor patio along South Madison Avenue and the roof terrace are within planters. Specifications on the planters are not provided on the plans. The applicant should consider Corten steel planters for their simple design and durable quality that will complement the design of the building and outdoor spaces. Staff has recommended condition of approval no. 5 requiring this information to be provided during plan check for staff's review and approval. Additionally, the City has adopted a Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance and a standard recommended condition of approval will require the planting plans to be reviewed for compliance during plan check.

Lighting:

The proposed lighting design includes schemes for the ground floor, roof deck, balconies, and general illumination of the premises. The design is achieved through a variety of light fixtures. The proposal includes bollard lights in and around the auto court along the alley as well as up and downlights to highlight selected features of the building and balconies. Other fixtures include lanterns and wall grazes. Uplighting of public trees along Colorado Boulevard and Madison Avenue is also proposed, which will be subject to review by staff of the Department of Public Works. The lighting level appears appropriate and is intended to highlight certain building features while also ensuring safety in and around the property. The proposed light fixtures are metal and are high quality and consistent with the building design. Staff recommends condition no. 17 requiring all metalwork, such as railings and light fixtures, throughout the proposal to be the same dark bronze color, independent of the different manufacturers' color names. Staff also recommends condition no. 12 requiring the drawings used to illustrate the lighting design to be consistent with the architectural drawings. For example, the site plan showing the illumination scheme reflects the former auto court design as it shows parking spaces in the landscape island. The parking spaces have been removed in later iterations of the design. As recommended under standard condition no, 6 and with some exceptions, all exterior light fixtures for the project shall not exceed 3,000 kelvin and must be specified on the final plans.

Signage:

Although their potential locations are shown on the elevations, detailed signage plans are not provided for this review. There are a variety of signs, including a building identification sign, canopy sign, and numerous wall signs that are depicted in the renderings. The Zoning Code requires design review for signs on all new development. Staff recommends that this requirement be reinforced with condition of approval no. 16 requiring a Master Sign Plan for the proposed project.

Comments from Other Departments:

CUP #5407 (Modification) includes conditions of approval from other City departments; therefore, it is not necessary to repeat these requirements in this design review decision. To reinforce that compliance with these conditions will continue to be required, staff recommends condition no. 32 requiring compliance with CUP #5407 (Modification).

CONCLUSION:

Upon implementation of the recommended conditions of approval, the project will comply with the conditions of the previously approved Major Changes to an Approved Project. The submitted drawings include materials specifications and architectural details that are high-quality and compatible with the overall building design. Staff recommends that the Commission approve the application for Final Design Review with conditions discussed in this report and included in Attachment A, which will be further reviewed by staff during building plan check.

Respectfully submitted,



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Prepared by:



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Reviewed by:



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Attachments:

- A. Recommended conditions of approval
- B. Plans, elevations, landscape, lighting, details, materials
- C. Narrative