



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: SEPTEMBER 27, 2022

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW
NEW CONSTRUCTION OF A FIVE-STORY, 106-UNIT AFFORDABLE SENIOR HOUSING PROJECT
280 RAMONA STREET

RECOMMENDATION:

The staff recommends that the Commission:

Environmental Determination

1. Find that the proposed project is consistent with the General Plan designation, with the General Plan goals and policies, and with the applicable zoning designation and regulations; and that the project site has no value as habitat for endangered or threatened species, and can be served by utilities and public services.
2. Find that approval of the project will not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, water quality or cultural resources.

Conclude, therefore, that the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under §15332, (Class 32) "in-fill development projects" and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances.

Finding for Compliance with the Tree Protection Ordinance

Acknowledge that there are no protected trees on the project site.

Finding for Concept Design Approval

1. Find that the project, upon implementation of the conditions of approval, will comply with the purposes of design review, the design-related goals and policies of the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the Design Guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation; and

Based on these findings, approve the application for Concept Design Review, subject to the conditions in Attachment A, which shall be further reviewed during Final Design Review.

BACKGROUND:

On April 26 and June 14, 2022, the Design Commission reviewed the application for Concept Design Review for a 111-unit affordable senior housing project at 280 Ramona Street. The Commission provided comments on the design and continued the public hearing to allow the applicant an opportunity to revise the design to address the comments provided. At the conclusion of the hearing, a decision was made to create a subcommittee to assist the applicant/design team to address the overall design concerns that were identified by the Design Commission.

On June 28, 2022, a Design Subcommittee was created. The Design Subcommittee met three times on July 14, July 28, and August 11, 2022. The revised submittal reflects the general design direction provided by the Design Subcommittee, but with more detail and refinements. In responding to the Design Subcommittee's design guidance, the number of units was reduced from 111 to 106; as reflected in the current submittal. The reduction of units was a result of added modulation and step back at the upper level at the corner entry facing Centennial Plaza.

On September 2, 2022, the applicant requested to eliminate the single level subterranean parking garage containing 44 parking spaces based on economic and programmatic reasons and shown on Sheet CDR-3.1. This change will not impact the building design with the exception of the elimination of a driveway approach and portal along Ramona Street. A revised north elevation (Ramona Street) has not been provided for inclusion in the submitted plans; therefore, staff recommends condition of approval no. 7 requiring this information, as well as a revised ground floor plan illustrating the use of the former driveway ramp area, to be provided in the plans submitted for Final Design Review.

The Zoning Administrator has determined that the proposed affordable senior housing project is exempt from having to provide required on-site parking pursuant to Government Code Section 65915 since the proposed development is a 100% affordable housing project in close proximity to transit (e.g. Metro L Line).

Notwithstanding the above changes to the scope of the project, refinements to various design components were addressed as discussed in the Analysis section in response to the Commission's comments. Upon reviewing the drawings in detail, staff recommends approval of the application with the revised conditions of approval outlined in Attachment A and explained within this report.

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: Medium Mixed Use (0 – 2.25 FAR)
- Zoning: CD-2 (Central District Specific Plan, Civic Center/Midtown Subdistrict)
- Design Guidelines: The applicable design guidelines are the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the Design Guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan and the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

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, including the areas east of the YWCA and YMCA buildings. 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 D), 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.

- Site: The site is comprised of a single lot approximately one acre in size on the west side of N. Garfield Avenue, the entire block between Ramona Street and Holly Street. It is irregular in shape and is currently developed with an undeveloped dirt lot at the west end, 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. The site includes a narrow strip of land that extends along the entire frontage of Holly Street to N. Marengo Avenue. A tree inventory provided with the application identifies 47 trees on the site and along its frontage, all of which are protected public trees due to the fact that the property is owned by the City. The property is in a highly prominent location within one of the most historically sensitive areas in the City.
- Surroundings: 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. East of the property, across Garfield Avenue, is City Hall.

- **Project Description:** The project involves construction of a five-story, 106-unit affordable senior housing project. A total of 26 protected public trees are proposed to be removed to accommodate the project. No on-site parking would be provided.
- **Site Design:** 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'-9" from the property line. The south façade is shown set back 35'-11½" from the south property line. A 10' setback is maintained from the adjacent walls of the existing YMCA building.
- **Architectural Style:** Mediterranean Revival
- **Developer:** National Community Renaissance
- **Architect & Landscape Architect:** ONYX Architects

ANALYSIS:

Recommended Conditions of Approval:

At the June 14, 2022 Design Commission hearing, staff recommended approval of the proposed project subject to 14 conditions of approval. The revised submittal has addressed the majority of the project-specific conditions previously recommended. Below is a disposition of each of the previously proposed conditions. Those that have been satisfied in the current submittal have been removed from the recommended conditions in Attachment A.

1. The proposal to remove public trees is subject to separate review by the Urban Forestry Advisory Committee and approval by the City Manager prior to Final Design Review. If the request is not approved, and changes to the approved concept design are required to accommodate the existing trees, an application for Changes to an Approved Project will be required to be reviewed prior to submittal of an application for Final Design Review.

Still Applicable as condition no.1. This is a standard condition for any project that proposes to remove public trees and the approval by the City Manager will be verified prior to submittal of a Final Design Review application to ensure compliance.

2. The second-floor bridge within the upper portion of the double-height southeast corner opening shall be carefully designed to be as light and transparent as possible to ensure the opening does not appear truncated from the public realm.

Condition Satisfied. The design of the corner entry has been substantially modified in an effort to improve the design quality of the entry. The current design no longer includes a second-floor bridge, but appears transparent and allows visibility into the courtyard and further aided by the glass-enclosed corridors at the upper levels, but its overall design, mass, proportion of the towers, detailing, and transition between materials/design treatments present opportunities for further refinements.

3. Roof drainage shall be routed within the building walls rather than in exposed downspouts.

Still Applicable as condition no. 2. While the downspouts are no longer shown on the elevations, it is unclear how the drainage design will be implemented as the drawings do not identify the location or drainage method (typically reviewed during Final Design Review).

4. Exterior plaster shall have a smooth, hand-troweled finish.

Condition Satisfied. The elevation drawings shown on Sheet CDR-4.2 specify cement plaster in a smooth finish.

5. Rusticated treatment, entablatures, lintels, friezes, belt courses and similar design features shall terminate in logical locations and/or wrap the corners.

Condition Satisfied. The elevation drawings shown on Sheets CDR-4.2 and CDR-4.3 identified the proposed features and their locations and appear to be thoughtful and appropriate.

6. The project shall incorporate high quality materials and craftsmanship throughout the building.

Still Applicable as condition no. 3. The submittal design packet does not include details and manufacturer's specifications on the various design components of the project and how they will be executed during construction (typically reviewed during Final Design Review).

7. Restudy and simplify the patterning, treatment and design of the parapet at the chamfered corner to be consistent with the parapets on the rest of the building.

Condition is no longer applicable. The design of the corner entry has been completely redesigned and the concern over the treatment of the parapet no longer exists under the revised entry design.

8. Incorporate design treatment and prominence on the Ramona Street entryway consistent with the secondary entry facing Holly Street.

Still Applicable as condition no. 4. This feature may change due to the elimination of the subterranean parking garage and the driveway approach along Ramona Street. If the entryway remains or is shifted as a result of interior programming layout changes, it should be designed in a similar way as the secondary entry along Holly Street.

9. On the Garfield Avenue elevation, incorporate a vertical reveal similar to the reveal created at the elevator lobby along Holly Street.

Condition Satisfied. The reveals are introduced on both ends of the entry and reflect a consistent design treatment.

10. Reduce the floor-to-ceiling heights to the extent possible to achieve an improved massing and reduce building height to create a visual deference to City Hall.

Condition Satisfied. Although the floor-to-ceiling height remained unchanged, the project achieves visual deference to City Hall by introducing step-backs and further articulating the upper floor.

11. Ensure that the line of security (fence/gate) in the entry loggia is pulled back from the entry opening and does not interfere with design features within the loggia. The design of the entry fence/gate shall be of the same or similar quality as the balcony railings.

Condition Satisfied. Landscape plan Sheet L1.01 identifies a decorative gate indicated by callout G-1, which will be attached to the two columns framing the loggia as depicted on Sheet CDR-5.0. This location appears sensible based on the concave feature of the entry. A gate located further back into the loggia (entry court) would interfere with the outdoor seating proposed alongside the entryway as depicted on Sheet 3 of the Landscape Concept Diagram.

12. The project shall comply with all Zoning Code requirements.

Still Applicable as condition no. 8 in Attachment A.

13. The Vibration Management Plan included in the project's CEQA documentation shall be included in the plans submitted for building plan check.

Still Applicable as condition no. 9. in Attachment A. This is a standard condition for projects proposing construction adjacent to historic resources and compliance will be verified during plan check.

14. The central courtyard shall be programmed and designed as a usable space for the future residents of the project, in combination with other open space areas provided.

Condition Satisfied. Sheet 6 of the landscape plan shows a central courtyard designed with a variety of seating configurations starting within the loggia where there is lounge seating along the walls. The focal point of the courtyard is a large flexible seating area in the center that is connected to the community room. This outdoor space can be reconfigured to accommodate various arrangements and seating requirements. Shown are small tables with chairs and an outdoor dining table for larger group gatherings. Along the northern planters dubbed the "Garden Walk" are individual benches integrated into the landscape and lining the pathway. The garden terrace is on the second floor that overlooks portions of the central courtyard for visual connectivity between the two spaces. The garden terrace will be integrated with landscape in raised planters and more flexible seating options.

The overall landscape design is composed of various zones (as illustrated on Sheet 3 of the landscape concept diagram), each with its own unique features and design quality, such as the entry court, the garden walk, patio, garden terrace and perimeter garden. Inspiration photos for the design concept are provided on Sheets 4 and 5.

Since the subterranean parking is no longer proposed, there is greater opportunity for design flexibility for landscape within the courtyard. For example, landscaping on the first floor should be in-ground and any raised planters should be avoided or limited to a design intention (as accent) in order to minimize visual clutter, reduce safety hazards or interference with paths of travel and walkways. Additionally, the applicant should consider including a tree(s) within the patio flexible space. The final courtyard design will be reviewed in more detail during Final Design Review.

Design Commission Comments from June 14, 2022 Concept Design Review Hearing:

Below are the Commission's comments and recommendations from the Concept Design Review meeting held on June 14, 2022 as well as the architect's responses and staff's comments to how the comments were addressed. See Attachment B for the complete set of revised plans, elevations, wall sections, architectural details and materials specifications and imagery. The design narrative is also included in the submittal on Sheet CDR-1.3.

Commission Comment, June 14, 2022	Excerpts from Architect's Response	Staff Comments
<p>1. Explore additional ways to address the building's overall proportion, articulation and relationship between the base, middle and top sections to achieve balance and lightness in its appearance throughout, and the building's appropriateness in relationship to the civic center context.</p>	<p>"Removal of 5 units from chamfer and adjacent building wings.</p> <p>Purpose of unit removal is to articulate massing and create a great sense of transparency at the chamfered corner.</p> <p>Investigate chamfer entry and detailing.</p> <p>Redesign "bridge" over loggia and introduce framed openings for enhanced lighting and views.</p> <p>Investigate use of full and segmented arch.</p> <p>Building uses a combination of full and segmented arches.</p> <p>Investigate introduction of flanking elements at chamfered entry.</p> <p>Sketched have been prepared showing areas simplification and areas of detailing for contrast."</p>	<p><i>This comment to be addressed with new condition of approval no 6.</i></p> <p>The applicant has generally addressed this comment by making a number of design changes in concert with the guidance provided by the Design Subcommittee. The most noticeable change occurs at the chamfered entry corner which is now framed by two towers with a central arch element integrated into adjoining curved tile-clad walls that spring from the interiors of the towers. The upper level is stepped back to achieve improved massing and deference to City Hall. This prominent 3-story high central arched entry is flanked by two smaller and more subordinate arched windows. Behind this feature are a series of stacked upper level corridors that connect the building's two wings. The layering of a curved and arched entry flanked by curving walls followed by a more rigid linear/rectilinear corridor design between achieves a juxtaposition of forms that reads as opposing design features. The confluence of these treatments, results in an overly complicated appearance.</p> <p>As for the two towers, their proportions appear unresolved, somewhat massive, and the differences in the solid-to-void relationships between them add to the visual distraction of the façade overall. The prominence, appearance and proportion of the towers dominate the entry loggia and contradict the delicate central arch/decorative grille/tile design. Another new design feature is the red tile roof at the 5th floor with corbels/cornice detail on the underside, which also continues along the other elevations of the building. The red tile makes a visual connection to the surrounding</p>

		<p>buildings within the Civic Center District, such as City Hall and the YWCA.</p> <p>The entry façade should be an important component of the design given its site planning, orientation to City Hall, and its location within the Civic Center District. The composition of the corner entry design of the proposed project, while distinctive, important and a focal point, appears overly complicated, too prominent, and exaggerates a disconnect to the design of the adjoining wings.</p> <p>The design composition should be reconsidered with a focus on simplicity, refinement and achieving cohesion throughout, while still communicating an important focal element and with consideration to design hierarchy. Staff recommends condition no. 6 to address these concerns, for review during Final Design Review.</p>
<p>2. Continue to study the incorporation of design features and techniques that enhance the residential character of the building and give cues to its residential use within an institutional setting.</p>	<p>“Investigate distinction of program spaces.</p> <p>Create visual separation from Civic corner at Holly, Garfield, and Ramona elevations.</p> <p>Introduce red roof tile at roof line.</p> <p>New elevation sketches show profile and color of red tile at roof edge.</p> <p>Simplify cornice profile.</p> <p>New elevation sketches show cornice at the building roof line.</p> <p>Refine, clarify, and rationalize fenestration, balconies, moldings.</p>	<p><i>This comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>While the project site is located within an institutional setting, the revised design incorporates residential vernacular in its façade treatment, where possible. For example, casement windows that open outward are proposed throughout the project in varying sizes between the different levels. Their arrangement and resulting fenestration pattern imparts a residential quality to the building as opposed to a more regimented window arrangement and uniformity in window size.</p> <p>Another residential design component are the Juliet balconies introduced at the second floor. The balconies allow the tall windows to be opened completely creating an opportunity for engagement and</p>

	<p>Elevations have been re-examined and sketched.”</p>	<p>connectivity to the public realm due to their orientation toward both Ramona and Holly Streets.</p> <p>Finally, the upper 5th floor is visually highlighted and separated from the lower levels by a precast concrete cornice/lintel detail that is informed by some of the design precedents illustrated on Sheet CDR-1.3B</p> <p>Further, the tile roof directly relates the project to other important buildings within the Civic Center context and impart a residential quality to the design.</p>
<p>3. Demonstrate the anticipated pedestrian experience navigating the ground floor at and around the proposed building and within the Civic Center.</p>	<p>“Study landscaped areas and planting design.</p> <p>Update landscape exhibits with character imagery, planting, and furniture define outdoor program spaces within the main courtyard and forecourt visible from the street.</p> <p>Examine daytime and nighttime lighting experience.</p> <p>New 3d perspective and fly-through video provided to demonstrate experience.”</p>	<p><i>This comment has been satisfactorily addressed.</i></p> <p>The revised submittal illustrates a series of anticipated pedestrian experiences around the building as well as interaction with and use of outdoor spaces in the courtyard and around the perimeter. These moments are illustrated on Sheet CDR-1.8.</p>

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

Based on the revised project scope, specifically, the elimination of the subterranean parking garage and reduction in unit count from 111 units to 106 units, the CEQA analysis was re-evaluated to reflect the current scope. Due to a reduced scope, the project was determined to be, as was previously, categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under §15332, (Class 32) “in-fill development projects” and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances. The revised documentation is included in Attachment C.

CONCLUSION:

Upon implementation of the recommended conditions of approval, the project will have addressed the comments previously provided to the applicant by the Design Commission on June 14, 2022. 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 Concept Design Review with conditions discussed in this report and included in Attachment A, which will be further reviewed by staff and the Design Commission during Final Design Review.

Respectfully submitted,



Jennifer Paige, AICP
Acting Director of Planning & Community
Development Department

Prepared by:



Rathar Duong, Senior Planner

Reviewed by:



Kevin Johnson, Principal Planner

Attachments:

- A. Recommended Conditions of Approval
- B. Plans, Elevations, Narrative
- C. Revised CEQA Documentation
- D. OLIN Partnership plan