



## PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

### STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** NOVEMBER 22, 2022

**TO:** DESIGN COMMISSION

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

**SUBJECT:** APPLICATION FOR MAJOR CHANGES TO AN APPROVED CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW  
CHANGE FROM A SEVEN-STORY MIXED-USE BUILDING TO A SIX-STORY, MIXED-USE BUILDING AND FAÇADE RENOVATION AND INTERIOR REMODEL OF THE UPPER LEVELS OF AN EXISTING FOUR-STORY OFFICE BUILDING TO CONVERT TO RESIDENTIAL UNITS  
747 E. GREEN STREET

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### RECOMMENDATION

The staff recommends that the Commission:

#### **Environmental Determination**

Find that the application for Major Changes to an Approved Project was subject to environmental review in the Categorical Exemption adopted by the Board of Zoning Appeals for Affordable Housing Concession Permit #11860 on May 2, 2018, 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 the Design Commission approved the removal of one protected mature tree and one protected specimen tree in conjunction with the approval of Concept Design Review on July 10, 2018 and that the proposed changes are consistent with that prior approval.

#### **Findings for Approval of Major Changes to an Approved Concept Design Review**

1. Find that there are changed circumstances sufficient to justify the modification of the original Concept Design Review approval, specifically the applicant's request to modify the scope and program of the proposed project;

2. Find that, upon implementation of the conditions of approval, the proposed major changes 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

Based on these findings, approve the application for Major Changes to an Approved Project, at the Concept Design Review level, subject to the conditions in Attachment A, to be reviewed by the Design Commission during Final Design Review.

### **BACKGROUND:**

On July 10, 2018, the Design Commission reviewed and approved an application for a new seven-story mixed-use building with 5,345 square feet of ground floor commercial space and 72 residential units above a three-level subterranean parking garage, including retention of an existing four-story office building. The decision became effective on July 24, 2019, and was valid for a period of one year.

On August 1, 2019, the Design & Historic Preservation staff approved an application for a Time Extension for one year, from July 24, 2019 to July 24, 2020. In addition, on April 20, 2020, the City Manager approved a one-year time extension for all land use entitlements approved prior to July 1, 2020 due to the COVID-19 health emergency, extending the expiration date of the Concept Design Review to July 24, 2021

On July 20, 2021, the applicant submitted an application for Major Changes to an Approved Project to modify the previously approved project as described in this report.

### **Project Overview**

- General Plan Designation: High Mixed Use (0 – 3.00 FAR) at the northern portion of the site; Medium Mixed Use (0-2.25 FAR) at the southern portion of the site
- 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 site is comprised of a single 0.82-acre lot at the northeast corner of E. Green Street and S. Oak Knoll Avenue. The L-shaped lot is currently developed with a 4-story office building and a surface parking lot with landscaping. A tree inventory provided with the application identifies 18 trees on site, three of which are protected, as well as three street trees.
- Surroundings: Surrounding properties are developed with commercial, mixed-use and office buildings between one and nine stories in height. There are no designated historic resources in the immediate vicinity; the Pasadena Playhouse Historic District's eastern edge is located one block west and the Constance Hotel and Green Street Village Landmark District are located three blocks east. Eligible, but undesignated historic resources in the vicinity include: Target formerly (Robinson's Pasadena) at 777 E. Colorado Boulevard,

Florence Theater at 766 E. Colorado Boulevard and, the Arcade Building at 696 E. Colorado Boulevard.

- Project Description: The revised project involves construction of a six-story, mixed-use project with 5,302 square feet of ground-floor commercial space and 60 residential units situated above 2.5 levels of subterranean parking for 136 spaces. The existing four-story office building will be remodeled and the upper second through fourth floors will be readapted providing 12 residential units. The project will continue providing 72 residential units. One protected mature tree, one protected specimen tree and 11 non-protected trees are proposed to be removed to accommodate the project; three street trees and two private trees, including one protected specimen tree, are proposed to be retained as part of the project.
- Site Design: The new building is designed to cover the entire existing surface parking lot area, with the ground floor extending to the edges of the site (zero setbacks from property lines except along most of the Oak Knoll Avenue frontage which provides a 3'-7" setback) and varying setbacks at the upper floors. Vehicular access to the ground-level and subterranean parking garage is provided between the existing office and proposed buildings; an existing vehicular access point north of the existing building is proposed to be relocated slightly south. The driveway portal is proposed to be on the south side of the new building, behind the commercial space at the street edge. Pedestrian access to the buildings and commercial spaces are provided along E. Green Street and S. Oak Knoll Avenue.
- Architectural Style: Contemporary
- Developer: 747 E Green St Development, LLC – Arthur Liu
- Architect/Landscape Architect: Tyler+Kelly Architecture

#### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED CHANGES:**

The originally approved project included construction of a new seven-story mixed-use building with 5,345 square feet of ground-floor commercial space and 72 residential units above a three-level subterranean parking garage with 173 parking spaces, including retention of an existing four-story office building.

The current project is now proposed to include construction of a new six-story mixed-use building with 5,302 square feet of ground-floor commercial space and 60 residential units above a 2.5-story subterranean parking garage with 132 parking spaces as well as remodeling of the existing four-story office building to convert the upper three floors to accommodate 12 residential units and renovate the exterior facades. The ground floor of the existing office building will continue to accommodate office uses. In general, the approved architectural concept will be retained. The most substantial changes are proposed to the existing four-story office building. The proposed façade renovations of the existing mid-century modern design of the office building are proposed to be changed to a contemporary design consistent with the new building. The modified project continues to be in compliance with the Zoning Code.

As a result of the proposed changes, the project will provide more onsite amenities (such as a residents' lounge, a library, and rooftop terrace), larger units, taller ceiling height, and an expanded solar panel area.

## **ANALYSIS:**

The findings required to approve an application for Major Changes to an Approved Project are the same findings required to approve the original application for Concept Design Review as well as the additional finding that there are changed circumstances sufficient to justify the change. In this case, the major changes to the project are necessitated by the property owner's request to change the scope of the project as described above. The contemporary design of the office building façade renovation takes cues from the new mixed-use building to achieve a consistent and complementary architectural concept for the entire site.

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 apply to this project. To fully evaluate the project's consistency with these guidelines, the staff analysis is provided below.

### **Programming and Circulation**

The ground floor of the proposed new building is intended to provide up to two commercial spaces and a residential lobby/lounge space, a dog wash station and a vertical circulation core along the street edge with at-grade parking at the rear. The second through sixth floors are shown with residential units accessed by single- and double-loaded corridors and are organized around a second-floor central courtyard and a fifth floor roof terrace on the western end of the building. Most of the second-floor units are shown with adjoining private terraces. Those units that adjoin the central courtyard are shown having direct access to it. More private terraces are featured at the third and sixth floors. The fifth floor features a roof terrace that is connected to a residents' lounge on the western portion of the building overlooking Oak Knoll Avenue and the central courtyard on its east side. The sixth floor contains more private and common terraces accessible from various units and the library. There will also be 2.5 levels of subterranean parking and a residents' gym is located underground at the second basement level.

In addition to the stairs and elevator core within the lobby space, which provides vertical circulation to all levels of the building and parking levels below, there are two secondary stairwells planned near the northwest corner and south-central portion of the building along with a second elevator adjacent to the south-central stair which provides access from the subterranean parking garage to the sixth floor.

The new building also includes a ground-level courtyard space located between the existing office building and the proposed driveway approach/new mixed-use building and features a sunken garden and a landscape-lined walking path connecting the two buildings. In this area, which is located at natural grade six, 36-inch box size trees are proposed to be planted.

Staff recommends condition of approval no. 9 to require further details of the roof terrace and similar common outdoor spaces for review during Final Design Review to ensure they are appropriately designed to maximize their usability and to ensure an appropriate interface between the ground-level courtyard, pedestrian walkway and vehicular driveway.

Programming and circulation changes are also proposed to the existing office building. The ground level of the existing building will be partitioned to accommodate two office tenants and north and south lobbies which serve as the central circulation core for the building. The south lobby is connected to an existing covered loggia that leads to E. Green Street, while the north lobby opens to the new ground floor courtyard/sunken garden located between the proposed and existing buildings. The 12 units in the upper three floors of this building are arranged around a double-loaded corridor that is connected to two stairwells on the east and west sides. Four units are configured on each level with four repeating floor plans. The two units on the second floor facing Green Street have a shared terrace that is situated above an existing covered loggia that will be retained and redesigned. No other private open spaces are provided for these units; however, the residents in this building will have access to common amenity spaces on the site and in the proposed new building.

As proposed, the siting and programming of both buildings are consistent with the applicable design guidelines.

### **Orientation**

The proposed new building is designed to have windows of varying sizes, balconies and sun-shading devices arranged in a clear pattern on all sides. The street edge is highly articulated with storefront windows, projecting canopies and a cast stone base material. The existing office building will be re-envisioned as a contemporary building. The existing fenestration and materials will be modified or enlarged and be replaced to resemble the new mixed-used building. Unlike the proposed building, the base of the existing building will be finished in plaster, in a smooth finish, instead of cast stone. Overall, both buildings will have a strong street presence along Green Street and Oak Knoll Avenue and their highly visible side elevations have a balanced proportion of solids to voids, with the exception of the east elevation of the existing building where there are no existing openings and no new openings are proposed as part of the renovation given that this side is located along the side property line.

### **Height, Massing and Modulation**

The height proposed is compatible with existing and proposed development surrounding the site which ranges in height from one to nine stories. The proposed elimination of the penthouse/seventh floor ushered corresponding changes at the upper levels, including the outdoor terrace. Some changes improve the original design or maintain a similar design quality; however, staff recommends further study of some of the proposed changes to ensure they do not negatively impact the design. For example, the west and north elevations are noticeably different from the previously approved design. The removal of the connecting outdoor stairs between the fourth and fifth level roof terrace on the west elevation improves the design quality and removes this unresolved design feature that was required to be further studied in the original Concept Design Review approval. The proportionality between the two north and south wings is improved and further resolved by the new pergola over the rooftop terrace. The lowered north wing (achieved through the removal of the penthouse) and 12-foot height increase of the south wing balance the height difference across the top section of the building. The approved south elevation, which faces the rear of the existing office building, possesses an interesting and varied roofline with stepped heights and is highlighted by the open pergola as illustrated on Sheet A3.5. The proposed changes offer an unbroken roofline lacking interesting design, varied roof form or similar visual features when compared to the original approval.

However, the shifting of building planes and stepped or staggered volumes help minimize and relieve this condition visually as a result of the 3-dimensional quality of this facade. In addition, the solid-to-void ratio proposed on the east volume of this facade appears unbalanced in relation to the rest of the building's proportions. The unusual fenestration pattern clustered in the center coupled with the added mass and heaviness from the solid wall planes is a departure from the successful west volume that adjoins this section. Staff recommends condition of approval no. 10 requiring this area of the south elevation to be restudied to achieve an improved fenestration or maintain a similar fenestration to the approved design. The applicant should consider enlarging the narrow windows flanking the larger central windows or introducing new openings to break up the solid walls.

The massing of the new building is organized such that taller volumes are placed along the north, east and south edges, with a lower, highly glazed volume at the center and facing the street to achieve an improved pedestrian scale and transition. The exterior wall planes are also modulated in conjunction with the volumetric changes and include a series of multi-floor projecting bays on the north elevation and the northernmost volume of the west elevation. Overall, the vertical and horizontal articulation of the building volume and exterior wall planes are well designed and consistent with the surrounding context and the applicable design guidelines.

The existing building will undergo design changes and will be treated with new finishes, design treatments and colors to complement the new building and its design concept. The height will not be changed, but through the facade renovation, which includes new window openings on the west facade and enlargement of existing windows, the solid-to-void proportion and modulation of the building's existing form will be improved.

### **Architecture Style and Detailing**

The proposed new building is a contemporary design with flat roofs and a combination of stucco walls with repeated punched openings set against a large highly glazed, metal-clad central panel fronting the street. The publicly visible portion of the ground floor is clad in a cast stone finish. Some traditional Mediterranean details are incorporated into the design including ogee profile or curving parapet articulation, arched openings at the entry and side wall and a three-story projecting bay on the west elevation above the lobby entry that features a sloping base and extended parapet creating a small fifth floor balcony. The three projecting bays on the north elevation have simpler detailing, as was the case in the previously approved design. The minimal Mediterranean detailing is not distracting or executed in a way that creates an inappropriate hybrid of traditional and contemporary design. Staff finds the design to be high quality, appropriate for this location and consistent with the design guidelines.

The existing office building, although subordinate to the new building, will be renovated to achieve a similar design quality to achieve a cohesive appearance throughout the site. While the building's height, footprint and orientation will not be changed, plaster in varying shades in smooth and rough finish will clad the exterior. The covered loggia on the south elevation, as well as an existing breeze block wall on the west elevation that transitions to a freestanding CMU wall adjacent to the north elevation, will be finished in stone. The renderings provided depict other areas of the ground floor that are clad in stone, which are called out as stucco on the elevation drawings. Staff recommends condition no. 13 requiring the elevations to be revised to be consistent with the renderings and include a stone base at the majority of the building.

Aluminum cladding will be introduced at all windows within the four middle bays on the south and north facades. Similarly, new and enlarged windows are proposed with windows on the ground floor that are arched or have an arched transom. Glass railings are proposed and installed proud of the enlarged windows along the upper third and fourth floors facing E. Green Street (south elevation) and all upper levels on the north elevation of the central bays so that they can be fully opened similar to a balcony feature. New arched openings on the side of the existing loggia will also be introduced and seen along the east and west elevations. The existing vertical projecting frames around the four interior bays on the north and south facades will be retained and the upper most window within each bay features an ogee arch at the top. The outermost frames on both elevations will be removed. Additionally, the height of the three central frames will be lowered and will terminate at the existing roofline. These proposed changes will achieve a similar design aesthetic between the two buildings without appearing the same.

### **Compatibility**

The existing and proposed buildings are compatible with their immediate surrounding context, particularly recently completed and anticipated future development, in terms of height, massing, setbacks and architectural design. Both buildings are also internally compatible with each other through design, scale and orientation toward both streets.

### **Conceptual Landscape Design**

In addition to the ground-level courtyard design discussed earlier in this report, the landscape plans outline an extensive program of landscaping at the upper level courtyards to include a variety of trees, lower plantings and seating to ensure their usability. Some foundation planting is also proposed along S. Oak Knoll Avenue and highlights the entrance to the residential lobby and commercial spaces. Staff recommends condition no. 11 to provide a landscape plan for the existing building including the landscape proposed at the common open space area above the covered loggia fronting E. Green Street.

### **Protected Tree Removals**

The previously approved Concept Design Review application allowed the removal of one protected mature tree (# 11, a Carrotwood Tree with a diameter-at-breast-height (“dbh”) of 20.3”) and one protected specimen tree (#13, a Canary Island Pine Tree with dbh of 26.5”). Tree #11 was approved for removal using Tree Protection Ordinance (TPO) finding #2, which states, “the present condition of the tree is such that it is not reasonably likely to survive” and is therefore not be required to be replaced. Tree #13 was approved using TPO finding #6 which states, “the project, as defined in Section 17.12.020, includes a landscape design plan that emphasizes a tree canopy that is sustainable over the long term by adhering to the replacement matrix adopted by resolution of the city council and included in the associated administrative guidelines.” To meet this finding, four 36” box trees of species from either the specimen or native tree lists are required to be planted and currently six (two 36” box Canary Island Pine Trees and four 36” box Olive Trees, both species from the specimen tree list) are proposed at the ground-level courtyard along with many others at the upper-level decks. As such, the proposal is consistent with the previous approval and has addressed previous condition of approval no. 3, which required the replacement trees to be of species from either the specimen or native tree lists.

As previously noted, the project includes the retention of one protected tree at the southeast corner of the site, in a planter adjacent to the existing office building. Because there will now be construction occurring on the exterior of this building, staff recommends condition of approval no. 12 requiring protection measures to be implemented to ensure the tree is not impacted by the adjacent construction.

### **Time Limit**

Granting approval of the Major Change to the approved Concept Design Review would provide a one-year time limit for Concept Design Review, which could be extended for one year if an application for Final Design Review is not submitted prior to the end of the one-year time limit.

### **COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:**

City departments reviewed and provided conditions of approval as part of the Affordable Housing Concession Permit (AHCP) process. In April, 2022, the City eliminated the AHCP process. Therefore, the original conditions from other City departments, resulting from the AHCP review, have been incorporated into Attachment A. Staff of the Current Planning Section has reviewed the revised proposal and determined it to be consistent with the requirements of the Zoning Code.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

On May 2, 2018, the Board of Zoning Appeals determined the scope of the project, reviewed with the AHCP, to be categorically exempt by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15332 (Class 32, In-Fill Development Projects), and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class; therefore, there are no unusual circumstances. The revised project reflects a reduced overall scope with the elimination of the seventh floor and private rooftop terrace as well as reduction in the subterranean parking garage from 3 to 2.5 levels. No changes are occurring as part of the proposed Major Changes application, that would necessitate additional environmental review; therefore, the project continues to be categorically exempt.

**CONCLUSION:**

The proposed changes to the previously approved Concept Design are largely consistent with the previous project approval, although staff finds that additional study is needed to address the eastern section of the south elevation that depicts an unusual fenestration pattern and unresolved solid-to-void ratio. Therefore, staff recommends approval of the changes to the approved Concept Design Review with conditions (Attachment A). Conditions include those discussed in this report in addition to those previously issued that have not been addressed. Conditions that have been addressed (no.2 related to articulation of the blank wall on the north elevation, no. 3 related to tree replacement, and no. 6 related to openings to the north courtyard elevation and location of exit stairs) have been removed. See Attachment E for the original approval letter and conditions.

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachments:

- A. Recommended Conditions of Approval
- B. Current proposed plans & elevations
- C. Tree Protection Guidelines
- D. Tree Protection Certification
- E. Original Concept Design Review decision letter dated July 10, 2018