



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: MARCH 14, 2023

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW
NEW SIX-STORY, 105-UNIT RESIDENTIAL BUILDING LOCATED ABOVE ONE LEVEL OF AT-GRADE AND ONE LEVEL OF SUBTERRANEAN PARKING
270-282 NORTH LOS ROBLES AVENUE

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Design Commission:

Environmental Determination

Find that the application for Concept Design Review was subject to environmental review in the Categorical Exemption pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15305 (Class 5: Minor Alterations in Land Use Limitations) and 15332 (Class 32: In-fill Development Projects) adopted by the City Council on January 30, 2023 in conjunction with its approval of an application for amendments to the Fuller Theological Seminary Master Plan and Development Agreement, which included the subject project, and that there are no changed circumstances or new information which would require further environmental review.

Findings for Compliance with the Tree Protection Ordinance

1. Acknowledge that a tree inventory (Attachment B) identifies removal of three protected specimen trees (tree nos. 4, 5 and 6) and one protected mature tree (tree no. 1);
2. Find that the removal of trees no. 5 and 6 meet finding no. 2 of the Tree Protection Ordinance: "The present condition of the tree is such that it is not reasonably likely to survive";
3. Find that the removal of trees no. 1 and 4 meet finding no. 6 of the Tree Protection Ordinance: "The project, as defined in Section 17.80.020, includes a landscape design plan, which will result in a tree canopy coverage of greater significance than the tree canopy

coverage being removed, within a reasonable time after completion of the project; and, therefore

Approve the removal of three protected specimen trees and one protected mature tree.

Alternative Location of Ground Floor Parking

Approve the proposed at-grade parking located beyond the rear 40%, pursuant to Zoning Code Section 17.46.020(K)(1)(a).

Findings for Concept Design Approval

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 and the Central District Specific Plan Private Realm Design Guidelines; 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:

Project Overview

- **General Plan Designation:** Medium Mixed Use (0 – 2.25 FAR; 0-87 du/ac)
- **Zoning:** CD-3 (CDSP, Ford Place/Fuller Seminary precinct of the Walnut Housing sub-district)
- **Design Guidelines:** The applicable design guidelines are the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan and the Central District Specific Plan Private Realm Design Guidelines.
- **Site:** The site is comprised of two adjoining lots totaling 39,181 square feet (0.90 acre) located on the southeast corner of Corson Street and Los Robles Avenue, immediately south of the 210 Freeway. The project site is rectangular in shape with a slightly canted south property line. The larger of the two lots (AIN: 5723-005-044) is developed with a private surface parking lot. The smaller lot (AIN: 5723-005-029) is vacant and undeveloped. The site contains a total of 16 trees, 3 of which are protected specimen trees and one of which is a protected mature tree. There are also five public street trees that will be protected and retained along the property's frontages.
- **Surroundings:** The surrounding context consists of two- to three-story multi-family residential buildings located to the south and east of the site as well as a six- to seven-story office building and a five-story parking structure across the street to the west. Nearby designated historic resources include the Ford Place Historic District, the Pasadena Civic Center Historic District and the Pasadena Playhouse Historic District to the southeast. The Lukens House (1896) located at 267 North El Molino Avenue (approximately four blocks to the east of the site) is individually designated on the National Register of Historic Places.

- **Project Description:** The project is for the construction of a new six-story, 105-unit residential project, that includes 8 very low-income units, and will be situated above one level of at-grade and one level of subterranean parking with 161 parking spaces. Three protected specimen trees and one protected mature tree, as well as 12 non-protected on-site trees, are proposed to be removed to accommodate the project.
- **Site Design:** The proposed building is sited to cover the majority of the property with a five-foot front setback along Los Robles Avenue and a ten-foot setback along Corson Street and the south and east property lines. Vehicular access to the at-grade parking and subterranean parking garage is provided through a driveway located at the northeast corner of the building, facing Corson Street and the 210 Freeway. The primary pedestrian access into the building and podium level courtyard is provided through an open two-story high entry plaza along Los Robles Avenue. Two secondary pedestrian access points are also provided along Corson Street and the south property line through a dog park/dog run. The building exhibits a strong westward orientation.
- **Architectural Style:** Contemporary
- **Developer:** CDB Investments LP c/o Bill McKibbin
- **Architects:** LCRA Architects
- **Landscape Architect:** EPT Design

ANALYSIS:

Design Commission Comments from Preliminary Consultation

On June 23, 2020, the Design Commission reviewed an application for Preliminary Consultation for this project. The Commission’s comments from that meeting, with excerpts from the design team’s responses, and staff’s comments, are detailed in the chart below. The design team’s full responses are incorporated into the set of plans in Attachment C.

Preliminary Consultation Comment 1
The project proposes to utilize the height averaging provision of the Central District Specific Plan as specified in PMC Section 17.30.050.B.1. Future submittals should more clearly address how the project massing is compatible with the surrounding lower scaled context to the south and east, and how the project is consistent with the height averaging purposes and findings. The findings state that additional building height shall be counterbalanced by lower heights across or elsewhere on a development site to punctuate important intersections or other prominent locations to contribute to a more visually compelling skyline. The project site is prominently visible from properties to the north of the 210 Freeway and from the freeway itself. Future submittal should include renderings from those various perspectives.
Applicant Response
“The project no longer utilizing the height averaging provision. Instead, the project will use the height concession from the City’s concessions menu, which would bring the maximum allowable building height to 72 feet. That said, the building massing has been modified to be set back on upper levels or stepped down in response to the lower building height of the adjacent 3-story structure toward the south.”
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval no. 14.</i>
The project provides affordable housing units at levels that qualifies the project for utilization of the Affordable Housing Concession Menu in the Zoning Code. The two concessions that were selected are exceedance in FAR and building height. The maximum permitted FAR and height within this zoning district are 2.25 and 60’, respectively and the applicant is proposing 2.62 FAR and a 71’-9” maximum height. Although the building is set

<p>back 10 feet from the south and east property lines and complies with the Zoning Code, minimal modulation with the exception of furred walls and projecting balconies, is proposed along the south and east facades that adjoin the existing residential buildings that are three- and two-story, respectively. There is stepping of the roofline where upper and lower outdoor terraces are proposed. The applicant should explore additional opportunities to achieve greater and more meaningful modulation techniques in respect to the lower-scale existing development as recommend by condition no. 14. However, the large projecting balconies on the three-story apartment building along the south property line will mirror the balcony placement and design of the proposed project and the combined setback between the two properties will provide some relief between the two buildings. As for the existing two-story apartment located building along the east property line, a greater separation is achieved between it and the proposed project since there is an existing covered carport along the rear of the adjoining property. Also worth noting is that both the adjoining south and east properties are located within the same zoning district as the subject property and allows the same residential density. Given that both buildings on these sites are currently developed with residential densities that are lower than the allowable, redevelopment opportunities exist.</p>
<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 2</p>
<p>The project features a significant amount of inward-facing roof decks and an atrium, which are not perceptible from the public view. Consider relocating the roof decks and reconfiguring the atrium to create a more interesting and visually compelling skyline as viewed from the public realm. Similar projects in the nearby context, such as the recently completed project at the northwest corner of Corson Street and El Molino Avenue, incorporate significant transitions in height across the site. Roof decks and extensive balconies are located on the north-facing elevation adjacent to Corson Street, which create a more interesting skyline and take advantage of the mountain views.</p>
<p>Applicant Response</p>
<p>“The small courtyard (previously “atrium”) has been relocated toward the south so that the main roof terrace area has an unobstructed view to the north and has continuous roof area that extends all the way to the north-facing parapet wall. The new configuration of the building has the secondary roof terrace area on the south portion. This further maximizes views to the north by stepping away from the loft units at the north side and their respective private patios.”</p>
<p>Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed.</i></p>
<p>The roof plan, in relation to the private patios and common outdoor spaces, has been reconfigured to achieve variations in the roofline, improve the transition between the upper 5th and 6th floors, and frame the mountain view to the north. The west and south elevations show improvement in the transition between the two upper levels by introducing outdoor spaces that are stepped as illustrated on Sheets A-2.0 and A-2.1. Additionally, private patios are framed by the rooftop enclosures/lofts that are situated along the leading edge of the roof. This configuration allows the open roof terrace located behind the patios to have views through them while also creating an interesting and clean roofline and rhythm across the north and west façades as well as a sense of openness throughout the outdoor space.</p>
<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 3</p>
<p>The Central District Specific Plan Private Realm Design Guidelines clearly envision a walkable, pedestrian-oriented community with activated ground floor uses and visually attractive housing. Well-composed building facades and intimately scaled architectural elements such as balconies, bay windows and trim details add residential character. It is unclear how this project reinforces these ideas on all elevations, as there is only one access point for pedestrian travel to and from the building, which is from Los Robles Avenue; almost the entirety of the proposed ground floor facing Corson Street is occupied by parking and vehicular access. More carefully consider the application of these Design Guidelines in the design of the ground floor of the project.</p>
<p>Applicant Response</p>
<p>“The pedestrian-oriented street frontage is that of Los Robles Avenue, which leads south toward the heart of the Central District’s various commercial offerings. Thus, we have proposed active uses for the project along the ground floor along Los Robles such as the gym, the main lobby and leasing center. The multi-purpose lounge on the 2nd floor is also open to Los Robles with floor-to-ceiling glazing. Although the main courtyard is elevated, it remains entirely walkable and pedestrian oriented. We believe a raised courtyard can be perceived as a point of interest and the monumental stair offers a unique invitation for pedestrians that otherwise would not be provided by a traditional gated ground floor courtyard. Furthermore, the landscape design will integrate the courtyard with the surround building’s perimeter and public way to create a continuous visual experience leading to and from the courtyard.”</p>
<p>Staff Analysis: <i>Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval no. 5.</i></p>
<p>The orientation of the building towards Los Robles Avenue has been improved through careful design of the facade, creation of an open entry plaza and placement of ground-floor amenity spaces, such as the gym, lobby, leasing office and bike storage, which emphasizes the importance of this street as a pedestrian spine that connects the site and building to nearby commercial corridors within the Central District. With its two-story volume, the multi-purpose lounge on the second floor overlooks Los Robles Avenue and helps activate the street. The wide</p>

opening at the entry plaza is welcoming and offers direct access to the podium level courtyard and building as well as two additional secondary entries located along the north and south facades connecting to the stairwells. However, additional opportunities exist to further address and improve the human scale along the west (Los Robles Ave.) elevation. Staff recommends condition of approval no. 5 requiring the applicant to explore integrated canopies or similar projecting elements to break up the appearance of a two-story volume and bring down the scale to the pedestrian level, especially in the northern portion of the west façade. The same treatment could be extended south of the entry plaza in lieu of the white banding currently proposed in this area.

Corson Street runs parallel and is oriented to the 210 Freeway in the east-west direction, doesn't offer a direct connection to commercial areas to the south and is often considered to be the rear or side street to most developments and not a commercial frontage or active pedestrian thoroughfare. Any buildings proposed along Corson Street will be highly visible from the freeway and should be carefully designed. Although the Corson Street façade is more automobile-oriented, the placement of the driveway to the northeast corner of the site is carefully thought out to minimize potential impacts to the pedestrian realm and path of travel and deemphasize the appearance and focus on the driveway. Ground floor at-grade parking is permitted for multi-family residential projects within the CD-3 zoning district; however, such parking must be located at the rear 40% of the site. The applicant is requesting an exception to this standard through the Design Review process to provide at-grade parking beyond the rear 40% of the site. See analysis of this request in this report.

Preliminary Consultation Comment 4

The ground floor of the north elevation consists of parking and lacks meaningful architectural details or pedestrian interest. This elevation should be re-studied and the ground floor provided with the same level of detail provided for the ground floor as depicted on the west elevation. The Central District Specific Plan Private Realm Design guidelines strongly emphasize minimizing service and parking impacts on design and encourage locating parking to reduce its visibility from the street to either below grade or toward the interior of the block of residential developments.

Applicant Response

"A uniform two-story base with an overhanging canopy above has been added that extends along the street elevations. This base will have an enhanced building material such as exterior cladding or a rainscreen system. With this new continuous base, the pedestrian experience on Corson Street will be more in line with that of Los Robles Avenue. There is also bicycle storage accessible both from Corson Street and the garage in response to the bike lane along this street. Corson is a very automobile-oriented street, with garages of both new and old buildings fronting this street. With its proximity to the freeway for quick getaways, having residential units accessed from Corson would pose security concerns. There is also no pedestrian-oriented retail use along Corson in either older or newer buildings. Thus, we feel that our current design of enriched finishes, decorative grills at openings into the garage, and bicycle storage access is appropriate."

Staff Analysis: *Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval no. 6.*

The applicant has addressed this comment in a number of ways that help improve the design quality of the north elevation to achieve cohesiveness and consistency with the west (Los Robles Ave) elevation. For example, the storefront glazing system turns the corner from the west to the north elevation for two bays, terminating at the bike storage/parking room. The driveway access is located to the northeast corner and visually de-emphasizes the importance of the vehicular entry into the garage. The second story canopy that extends across both street-facing elevations is an appropriate and consistent design treatment that conveys the importance of both frontages. However, the decorative perforated metal screens proposed between the piers that enclose the ground floor parking level appear out of character with the rest of the material palette and general aesthetic of the ground floor. The applicant should consider alternative ground-floor treatments that are more consistent with the building's material palette such as fritted glass panels to continue the mostly glass façade of the west elevation or a concrete/stucco grille to complement the stucco finish proposed on the upper floors as recommended by condition no. 6.

Preliminary Consultation Comment 5

The proposed site design and massing of the building are intended to emphasize the centrality and significance of the courtyard. The project narrative also indicates that the courtyard typology is an important part of the design intended to make this project more specific to Pasadena by referencing the rich collection of open-air courts in Pasadena, including City Hall. Consider re-studying the common characteristics of the courtyard typology in Pasadena and revising the project to be more consistent with those characteristics. For example, the proposed courtyard is elevated above the street and only accessible via a relatively short transition area, which consists of a broad flight of stairs that are narrowed by landscaped walls, limiting the visibility of the courtyard from the public realm. The more significant and successful courtyard developments in Pasadena, such as City Hall, are pedestrian-oriented and have broader entrances that are unobstructed by fences, gates or solid walls, with entrances that are at the street level, or if above, incorporate a more gradual transition from the street.

<p>Applicant Response</p> <p>"The courtyard typology is common in Pasadena, both historically in low-rise bungalow courts and currently in mid-rise housing. It provides a gathering and activity space for the tenants, as well as better access to natural light and ventilation. These courtyards are typically semi-open and visible to the neighborhood, creating less of a walled streetscape. Our project's courtyard, though mostly on the 2nd level, also has a welcoming more than 20'x20' zone at ground level, with wide, welcoming, landscaped and terraced steps up to the second level courtyard. The only 2-story volume of the residence lobby also allows the building mass to open up into the courtyard zone, as does the step in the overall building massing in middle of the west elevation."</p>
<p>Staff Analysis: <i>Comment to be addressed through recommended conditions of approval nos. 7- 9 and 11.</i></p>
<p>A central courtyard is a common feature in residential development and is often provided on the ground floor with direct access from the street. The proposed courtyard design is atypical since it is provided on the second floor of a podium style building. The approaches that have been incorporated into the design, such as the open and recessed area at the entry plaza level, attempt to achieve a seamless transition to the street and the pedestrian realm while also making a visual connection to the larger courtyard at the podium level. However, additional opportunities exist to elevate the design further. For example, the open area that is connected to the sidewalk should be carefully designed as a passive outdoor space enhanced by appropriate landscaping and seating areas leading up to the larger courtyard as depicted on Pages 1 and 2 of the overall conceptual landscape plan. Additionally, the lobby and gym on either side of this area should be oriented toward the ground floor outdoor space, to the degree possible, to capture and address this area. For example, secondary entries could be provided as connection between the indoor/outdoor space. Staff recommends condition no. 11 to require the applicant to study these issues further. The design of the stair and side wall could also be improved to create a sense of openness and lightness by way of glass, metal picket or cable railings in lieu of stucco as recommended by condition no. 7. Similarly, the secondary wall enclosure of the central courtyard at the top of the stairs from the entry plaza should be as open and transparent as possible to create visual connectivity between the two outdoor spaces as recommended by condition no. 8. Additionally, the design and location of the courtyard next to the elevator near the southeast section of the building shall be redesigned to connect with the central courtyard and be designed as a usable outdoor space as recommended by condition of approval no. 9.</p>
<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 6</p>
<p>It is unclear how the Contemporary architectural style of the proposed building is particular to Pasadena. The provided narrative indicates the repetitious shed style roofs on the north elevation are intended to evoke images of Pasadena's manufacturing past, even though Pasadena does not have a significantly notable manufacturing history. The manufacturing reference is an unusual choice for a building at such a prominent and highly visible location.</p>
<p>Applicant Response</p>
<p>"Pasadena is well known for its diversity of great architecture from many periods of history. Modernism is one of the historic styles for which Pasadena has great and often landmarked examples, such as the Stuart Pharmaceuticals building, Bullock's Pasadena, the Beckman Auditorium at Caltech, and numerous mid-century modernist homes. Our original design proposal referenced this heritage as well as the light industrial past of Pasadena. However, by following the City's own Inclusionary Housing Concessions Menu, we no longer have the same height allowance for the shed roof forms. We still propose the use of accent metal finishes to continue the industrial reference while also continuing with the modern stylistic approach which is in keeping with the commercial building, which frames the intersection with our project."</p>
<p>Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed.</i></p>
<p>The proposed contemporary design is consistent with Pasadena's architectural pedigree. The existing context is comprised of older and new development that reflect a contemporary design aesthetic. The most recent iteration of this design aesthetic is The Theo, an apartment building located at 289 N. El Molino Avenue, which was recently completed. The proposed contemporary design is consistent with the immediate context and other residential and mixed-use projects within or near the Central District.</p>
<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 7</p>
<p>The project site is at a prominent corner. As the project turns the corner from the west to the north elevation, the transitions from articulated sub volumes at the west to a large, glazed tower element at the corner and then to the repeating shed roof forms on the north are abrupt. The transition from west to north should be further studied and refined to more successfully engage the corner and ensure consistency in architectural design.</p>
<p>Applicant Response</p>
<p>"Sitting on top of the two-story base (see response #4) is a series of alternating window bays and protruding balconies. A secondary canopy at the roof level has been added to the mass below. The rhythm established above the podium level in concert the continuity of the base below, ties the building together to create a clean and attractive transition at the northwest corner. A 2-story transparent glassed volume is part of the corner treatment</p>

at the base and a similarly more transparent treatment is also carried out from the base to the roof top. At the base, glass volume provide view into the leasing center as well as the amenities space above.”
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed.</i>
The revised project exhibits a clear corner treatment to highlight the building design as it transitions from the west to north elevation. This is achieved through an uninterrupted glazing feature that is extended from the ground to the sixth floor. Additionally, this feature is framed and highlighted by two protruding volumes finished in white stucco that are proud of the glazing. At the ground floor, the two-story glass façade of the leasing office continues north and turns the corner and helps to articulate the corner treatment and achieve design consistency.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 8
Although drawings were not provided for the interior courtyard elevations or the north and south elevations flanking the entryway portal at this stage, the rendering on the coversheet shows large blank walls on the north elevation of the southern volumes of the north elevation. This elevation will be prominently visible from the north and should include fenestration and architectural treatments consistent with the architectural design.
Applicant Response
“Interior courtyard elevations have been added and are consistent with the architectural treatment and design throughout the building.”
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed.</i>
Sections A and B are provided on Sheet A-3.0 and have been designed to avoid blank facades and their treatment, including fenestration patterning that is consistent with the overall design concept.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 9
The elevators are located at the northwest and southeast corners of the development. The units facing east and north are accessed via a double loaded corridor, and although residents will have some engagement with the enclosed atrium, they will not experience a meaningful engagement with the central courtyard or common amenities as they travel from the parking area or the pedestrian entrance to the units. Continue to study and refine the internal circulation and unit layout to ensure that all units will meaningfully engage with the courtyard and amenities, or are provided with a more directly accessible outdoor space that takes advantage of the mountain views to the north and west.
Applicant Response
“The elevator at the southeast corner has been integrated with the small courtyard which has been relocated to the south to gain better circulation and connection to the main courtyard from the lobby. This elevator also now has access to the roof terrace. The northwest stair has also been shifted inward. Both these changes have reduced the amount of unnecessary corridor and has created more direct relationships with the open spaces. Furthermore, the elevations have improved with both stair and elevator set back and especially since the northwest elevator has been shortened.”
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval no. 9.</i>
The changes as described have improved the internal circulation throughout the building especially for east and north-facing units. While there is no direct access to the central courtyard, there is some visual connection from the units to the outdoor open space from these units. The small court is introduced next to the elevator near the southeast corner of the second floor. However, it is unclear how this area will be programmed, landscaped or used. As proposed, this space appears isolated and will not likely be used and become a dead space. If this court is an extension of the central courtyard, this feature will improve the quality and livability of the units surrounding it. Staff recommends condition of approval no. 9 for the applicant to explore the location of the small court in conjunction with the configuration of the units surrounding it so that the space will become usable.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 10
The massing and site design shall be further explored and multiple options shall be studied and presented to the Design Commission at Concept Design Review. The options should include study bringing the courtyard to the ground level and placing an “L” shaped building behind the courtyard, exploring the creation of a two-story element at the corner by stacking the proposed amenity space, or creating a double height element at the podium level. Consider relocating the majority of the roof terraces to the southern wing.
Applicant Response
“The massing has been further explored in terms of step downs toward the south and varied articulation of the north elevation. Tall solid vertical massing of stairs and elevators have been pushed to the interior of the building mass wherever possible. The site, being a simple rectangle with the primary pedestrian oriented side facing Los Robles, still calls for a central courtyard for light and gathering area for tenants, as well as the main access point opening toward Los Robles. Opening toward the north would allow the unwanted noise and pollution of the freeway to infiltrate the courtyard and become part of the entry experience.”
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed.</i>
Various options were explored and the submittal for Concept Design Review reflects the appropriate changes from the design exploration and appear sensible based on the site condition, neighborhood context and proximity to the

<p>Central District and the 210 Freeway. The central courtyard continues to be located on the podium level since the ground floor is intended to accommodate a variety of building amenities and at-grade parking. The at-grade parking is a limiting factor and is provided to offset the cost of constructing affordable housing and subterranean parking. At-grade parking garages are not prohibited by the Zoning Code when associated with residential projects. Though, its location beyond the rear 40% of the lot requires review and approval by the Design Commission in tandem with Concept Design Review. However, the applicant has provided a two-story element at the prominent northwest corner and restudied the arrangement of the outdoor spaces on the roof terrace to provide both private and common outdoor spaces while maintaining mountain views to the north.</p>
<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 11</p>
<p>The circulation within the project site is important and the location and relationship of the stairs and elevators shall be better integrated into the design of the overall project. The windowless mass of the elevator shafts are not compatible with the rest of the design and need additional detailing or shifting of the volumes.</p>
<p>Applicant Response</p>
<p>"See response to #9."</p>
<p>Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed.</i></p>
<p>All stairwells and elevators have been relocated to the interior spaces within close proximity to the courtyard. This modification allows more units and amenity spaces to have street frontage, better access to light and air, views, and improved facades.</p>
<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 12</p>
<p>The north elevation should be restudied to take advantage of the light and views. Closely study the possibility of operable windows and balconies facing north.</p>
<p>Applicant Response</p>
<p>"In general, the elevations now have more windows in total count as well as cumulative opening area. Unobstructed balconies have been introduced (where there is no walled opening in front of the sliding glass doors) and more balcony area has been added particularly at the north elevation."</p>
<p>Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed.</i></p>
<p>Numerous and various balcony sizes and configurations have been added on the north elevation to take advantage of light, air and views of the mountains. Similarly, the projecting balconies on the west elevation are also oriented to take advantage of the views to the north. More importantly, the common rooftop terrace, private patios, and lofts take full advantage of light, air and unobstructed view that can be enjoyed by many more residents.</p>
<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 13</p>
<p>The expression of bays on the north elevation that come down from the upper level lofts should be continued to the podium level.</p>
<p>Applicant Response</p>
<p>"The window bays on the north and on the east have been brought down one floor to meet a four-story base. The windows at the northwest corner remain continuous from the podium level up to the roof. We believe that differentiation creates interest and hierarchy at the building's prominent corner."</p>
<p>Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed.</i></p>
<p>Staff concurs with the applicant that allowing the window bays on the north and east elevations to terminate at the fourth level achieves design hierarchy and a more balanced horizontal and vertical expression of the façades. This treatment also elevates the design of the northwest corner where the windows (bay) extend all the way to the ground, making this a singular design feature that appears important and special since it is at a prominent corner.</p>
<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 14</p>
<p>Connectivity to transit and bike infrastructure are important for this project. Explain how someone with a bike will be able to easily travel to and from the site, in particular, at the northeast corner of the building.</p>
<p>Applicant Response</p>
<p>"Bike storage has been added facing Corson Street closer to the northwest corner for better visibility from the corner intersection. In addition, signage is provided so that it is visible from the northeast. The bike storage has direct access to the public way as well as proximity to the ground floor lobby."</p>
<p>Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed.</i></p>
<p>Based on the orientation of both Los Robles Avenue and Corson Street and their connection to the Central District, it is determined that Los Robles Avenue will experience the most pedestrian activity, including bicyclists arriving from downtown. The location of the bicycle parking/storage facility as an extension of the west front and primary façade is sensible from access and usability perspectives. Additionally, its location helps extend the anticipated street activation along Los Robles Avenue to Corson Street. As for bicyclists traveling westbound (from the east), the location of the driveway at the northeast corner of the building ensures that there will be a long expanse of uninterrupted and safe path of travel, which is also beneficial to pedestrians.</p>

Programming and Circulation

The proposed residential building, although located on a corner site, is primarily oriented towards Los Robles Avenue (west elevation). The proposed orientation aligns and engages with the pedestrian realm and offers a more direct connection to commercial areas to the south of the site. The design proposes to provide access along Los Robles Avenue to all ground floor residential amenities such as the lobby, gym and leasing office spaces, further recognizing the importance and strong pedestrian connection along this street. The remaining easterly portion of the ground level is proposed to accommodate at-grade parking. Bifurcating the west elevation is a wide landscaped open entry plaza that physically and visually opens to the street and leads to the podium level and central courtyard. All units on the second to sixth floors surround the courtyard and are accessible through double-loaded corridors; except for a few units on each floor that are located in the northern and western sections of each floor and are served by single-loaded corridors. While the central courtyard, which features a pool, is the primary common outdoor space, three upper and lower open terraces are also provided. Additionally, private patios and balconies are provided at various levels to enhance the quality and livability of the units as well as access to light, air and view of the mountains. Furthermore, a community room is provided on the second floor that looks out onto Los Robles Avenue and the two-story lobby below. A dog park/run is also proposed within the 10-foot setback along the south property line.

Vertical circulation is provided by three stairwells and two elevators that are located on the interior and close to the west elevation, with the exception of an elevator located near the southeast section of the building. These stairs and elevators either provide access to the parking garages, to the podium level, or access to all residential units/levels.

Vehicular access to the at-grade and subterranean parking garages is provided on the secondary Corson Street (north) elevation through a single driveway located at the northeast corner of the building. The ramp to the subterranean parking spaces is centrally located on the ground floor of the parking garage. Ground level at-grade parking spaces are permitted for residential projects but are required to be located in the rear 40% of the site. A portion of the proposed at-grade parking is located beyond the rear 40% of the site. Through the Design Review process, at grade parking may be located beyond the rear 40 percent of the site; the applicant is requesting approval through the design review process, as discussed below.

Overall, the programming of the building and site is consistent with the applicable design guidelines. The plans provide for sufficient amenity spaces within the project to serve the residents and places service and parking uses out of public views or primary façade, including placement of the driveway access and consistent with similar development in the vicinity.

Proposed Modification to Location of Ground Level Parking

The project proposes to provide at-grade parking spaces, which are permitted for residential buildings provided that they are located in the rear 40% of the site. For the purpose of this requirement, Corson Street is the front of the property, and the south property line is the rear. As shown on Sheet A-1.2, at-grade parking spaces are proposed beyond the rear 40% of the site. Pursuant to Section 17.46.020(K)(1) of the Zoning Code, through the Design Review process, parking may be located beyond the rear 40% of the site; no specific findings are required to be made to approve this modification. The location of the proposed at-grade parking

is along Corson Street, which is not considered to be a pedestrian-oriented street based on its proximity to the 210 Freeway. The placement of the building's amenity spaces on the ground floor, with access directly from Los Robles Avenue, further emphasizes the building's front façade along a pedestrian-oriented street and informs the logical placement and access for the at-grade parking spaces behind these amenity spaces. The project complies with all other requirements of the Zoning Code.

Orientation

The proposed building is designed with a prominent west-facing orientation along Los Robles Avenue. Since the proposal is a residential-only building, no commercial space is proposed on the ground floor. Instead, various residential amenity spaces, such as the leasing office, lobby and gym, are located on the ground floor and will facilitate activation of the pedestrian/public realm. Surface parking and driveway access to the site are located at the rear and along the secondary frontage, Corson Street. More importantly, a prominent open entry plaza is carved out midway along the west façade that provides some outdoor space along the public right-of-way. Within the entry plaza is a set of stairs that leads to the podium level and into the central courtyard and from there, access to the residential units. Aside from a two-story high canopy, the entry plaza is opened to the sky, which emphasizes the dramatic appearance of this signature entry feature. The Corson Street façade is designed to appear as a primary elevation since it is highly visible and incorporates a balanced proportion and similar modulation as the Los Robles Avenue elevation. In a similar manner, both the south and east elevations achieve similar design treatment to maintain a level of consistency with the street-facing façades. However, as recommended by condition no. 14, greater modulation and/or stepbacks should be explored to achieve greater sensitivity to the adjoining lower scale development along the south and east property lines.

All residential units are on the upper levels of the building, as are the community room, outdoor and rooftop terraces, private patios and balconies; which are either oriented towards the central courtyard or outward. Their placement and orientation within the building enhances the quality and livability of each unit by providing access to light, air, and views.

Height, Massing and Modulation

The maximum height limit at this location is 60' or 75' using height averaging. The applicant is not pursuing height averaging for the project. Instead, the applicant is utilizing the Affordable Housing Concession Menu to increase the allowable height by up to 12 feet (72' maximum height). The proposed building is six-stories with a height of 71'-9" and is consistent with the requirement. The proposed height is compatible with existing development surrounding the site which ranges from two- to seven-story residential and office buildings.

The building form is composed of varying projecting and receding volumes to achieve modulated facades and break down the building's mass and scale. Complementary dark and light colors, finishes and their placement on the building also help break up the mass while adding visual interest. The varying roofline also provides visual interest against the skyline and helps reduce the building mass along the upper level. Additionally, the gaps created between the covered and uncovered patios maintain views to the north and add lightness to the top floor.

The west elevation appears to be most successful in breaking down the building's overall mass. The opening in the plaza entry becomes wider as it continues upward and terminates in stepped upper and lower roof terraces on either side as depicted on Sheet A-2.0. This facade treatment provides visual depth as it permits views into the courtyard and the units beyond as well as an appropriate design technique in breaking up the building into smaller masses.

The base, specifically along the most visible west and north elevations, is a tall two-story volume capped by a metal canopy, which is finished in extensive glazing on the west elevation and decorative metal panels along the north elevation. The height of the canopy and tall glazing exaggerate the scale of the building at the base making it incompatible with the human scale along a pedestrian-oriented corridor. For this reason, staff is recommending condition of approval no. 5 to restudy the placement of the awning or alternative treatment of the base so that it is more complementary to the pedestrian scale.

In general, the overall modulation depicted in the elevation drawings is appropriate and responsive to the design guidelines and previous comments from the Commission with the exception of the treatment of the base as mentioned above.

Architectural Style and Detailing

The proposed building is designed in a contemporary style with a flat roof, large storefront and aluminum windows arranged in vertical bays, modulated facades, a base capped with a metal canopy and roof terraces and is supported by high quality, modern finishes in neutral colors such as cementitious siding, porcelain tile, wood-like aluminum siding, and stucco. The contemporary style and finishes are consistent with the existing residential and office buildings and recently complete projects within the immediate vicinity and surrounding site context, such as the Theo, a multi-family apartment building located east of the project site.

The geometric and linear projecting and receding volumes are consistent with the style as are the fenestration pattern achieved through the arrangement of windows with sizes that express visual hierarchy and design logic. The composition results in cantilevered volumes that shift along the façades and create a layered appearance.

The base of the building is visually discernible as it is achieved through a two-story volume of uninterrupted glazing, particularly along the west elevation and in a similar manner, along the north elevation as well. Both facades terminate at a horizontal metal canopy that also creates a datum point. Along the east and south elevations, similar treatment is created with a strong horizontal stucco band in dark and light colors above the second floor. The base treatment on these elevations appears rhythmic, repetitious, and interrupted by glazing and decorative metal screens that help conceal the ground level parking.

The flat roof provides opportunities for rooftop terraces, private patios and roof access enclosures/lofts as depicted on Sheet A-2.0. There is also variation in the roofline as some lofts are covered under a single roof form resulting in covered, but open private patios in between. The breaks between covered and opened patios create added visual interest.

The prominent element at the northwest corner is finished in glass that is framed by two stucco walls on the upper floors and tile on the ground floor, while the wide and open entry plaza exposes the interior courtyard elevation into view from the right-of-way.

By responding to the comments provided during the Preliminary Consultation, the applicant has improved the overall design. For example, a distinctive treatment of the northwest corner is achieved as are the arrangement of the balconies and outdoor spaces to expand and enhance views of the mountains as well as creating units that are high quality and more livable with sufficient access to light and air. To that end, the height of the ground floor or base of the building, particularly north of the plaza entry on the west elevation, appears overly exaggerated due to the placement of the metal canopy above the second floor and tall glazing. Additional studies should be explored to achieve a design treatment that is sensitive to the pedestrian scale. Although the design or pattern was not provided, the decorative metal screens proposed along the north, south and east elevations, to conceal the ground floor parking garage, appear inconsistent with the overall material palette. As recommended by condition no. 6 the applicant should consider an alternative treatment or material in these openings, such as fritted glass that mimics the appearance of the glazing on the west elevation or concrete screen/grille in a pattern that complement the stucco finish and pattern or geometry of the facades. To address this condition, the applicant should consider drawing inspiration from the recently completed Theo apartment building located at the southwest corner of El Molino Avenue and Corson Street, about two blocks east of the proposed project. Also at the base, porcelain wall tile is proposed along the west and north elevations. While this material is high quality, it is not used anywhere else on the building, creates a pattern that is inconsistent with other materials and adds to a busy appearance. For these reasons, the applicant should reconsider this material and consider a stucco finish or the James Hardie reveal panels where it is currently shown as recommended by condition no. 10. This change would improve the cohesiveness of the material palette.

Compatibility

As noted above, the proposed residential building is compatible with its immediate surroundings, particularly recently completed and anticipated development in the vicinity, in terms of height, massing, setbacks and architectural design. The project's design quality and materiality will be further enhanced with the studies recommended by staff to be included as conditions of approval. Since the Preliminary Consultation phase, the revised design submitted for this review appears more complementary to its site, surrounding and relationship to the pedestrian realm.

Conceptual Landscape Design

The conceptual landscape plans identify proposed landscaping within the entry plaza adjoining Los Robles Avenue, the central courtyard, upper and lower roof decks, and within the required setback areas around the building. The landscape design would soften the streetscape and building as well as enhance a variety of passive and active outdoor spaces, such as the central courtyard, where there is a pool, and at the roof decks. The proposed landscape within the open entry plaza will create a visual connection between the public and private landscaping and elevates the arrival experience. Additionally, the landscape proposed at the entry can be seen as an extension of and into the central courtyard. As previously noted, this outdoor space should be attractively designed to achieve visual connection to the adjoining interior spaces such as the gym and lobby as well as seating to be enjoyed by residents and members of the public without impeding on the path of travel as specified by recommended condition no. 11. Further, should it be necessary, careful consideration should be given to the location and design of the line of security, such as fences or gates onto the property so that this feature will complement the building and landscape design as recommended by condition no. 12. In

general, the landscape design and plant palette should be carefully considered to complement the building design, highlight important design features, provide visual interest on a year-round basis and be drought tolerant.

Protected Tree Removals

There are a total of 16 private trees located on the project site; all of them will be removed, including four protected trees. The proposed project requires the removal of three protected specimen trees: tree #4 (a Canary Island Date Palm Tree, BT 40'), tree # 5 (a Redwood Tree, DBH 29.4") and tree #6 (a Redwood Tree, DBH 24.3") and one protected mature tree: tree #1 (a Shamel Ash Tree, DBH 32"). Tree #4 (Canary Island Date Palm Tree) is located within the footprint of the proposed development and needs to be removed to accommodate the project. Trees #5 and #6 are either dead or experiencing water stress and require removal. Tree #1 (Shamel Ash Tree) is noted as having a history of breakage and overhangs the adjoining properties to the east and south while also located in the planned dog park proposed within the rear setback and interfere with the new site landscape design.

The removal of trees nos. 5 and 6 can be approved under findings #2 of the Tree Protection Ordinance, which states, "the present condition of the tree is such that it is not reasonably likely to survive".

The removal of trees nos. 1 and 4 can be approved under finding #6 of the Tree Protection Ordinance, which states, "the project, as defined in Section 17.80.020, includes a landscape design plan that emphasizes a tree canopy that is sustainable over the long term by adhering to the replacement matrix prepared by the city manager and included in the associated administrative guidelines." According to the replacement matrix, the proposed removal of tree no. 4 must be replaced with eight, 24"-box or four, 36"-box specimen or native trees. Tree no. 1 must be replaced with four, 24"-box or two, 36"-box trees; the replacement species is not restricted. The conceptual landscape plan (EPT Design, Sheet 2) identifies four, 36"- box replacement Australian Willow trees for the replacement requirement for tree no. 4. Numerous other trees are shown along the perimeter of the site; however, they are not clearly identified as replacement trees for tree no. 1. If they are intended to be replacement trees, the proposed replacement would comply. Condition no. 13 requires clarification with compliance with the Tree Replacement Matrix. Proposed trees should be planted throughout the site to provide sufficient shade in all areas of the development as recommended by condition no. 15. The design and arrangement of plant materials will be reviewed during Final Design Review upon submittal of a detailed landscape plan.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

Staff routed the project for comment to several City departments, as well as other divisions of the Planning & Community Development Department, including the Public Works, Transportation, Fire and Housing Departments and the Building, Current Planning and Cultural Affairs Divisions of the Planning & Community Development Department. Recommended conditions of approval from Public Works, Transportation, and Fire are included in Attachment A.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

On January 30, 2023 in conjunction with its approval of an application for amendments to the Fuller Theological Seminary Master Plan and Development Agreement, which included the subject project, the City Council found that the project is Categorical Exempt from environmental review pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15305 (Class 5: Minor Alterations in Land Use Limitations) and 15332 (Class 32: In-fill Development Projects). Staff recommends that the Design Commission find that this project is consistent with that determination and that there are no changed circumstances or new information which would require further environmental review.

CONCLUSION:

The project design has satisfactorily addressed the comments provided during Preliminary Consultation and is consistent with the design guidelines in the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan and the Central District Specific Plan Private Realm Design Guidelines. Staff recommends approval of the application for Concept Design Review for the project with the conditions of approval described above and included in Attachment A, which will be reviewed during Final Design Review.

Respectfully Submitted,



for Jennifer Paige, AICP
Acting Director of Planning and
Community Development

Prepared by:



Rathar Duong
Senior Planner

Reviewed by:



Kevin Johnson
Principal Planner

Attachments:

- A. Recommended Conditions of Approval
- B. Tree Inventory and exhibit; Private Tree Removal application
- C. Current Plans, Elevations and Responses to Preliminary Consultation Comments

