



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: MARCH 28, 2023

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW
CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW, APPROXIMATELY 32,000 SQUARE-FOOT, FOUR-STORY, 23-UNIT MULTI-FAMILY BUILDING WITH ONE LEVEL OF SUBTERRANEAN PARKING. THE PROJECT INCLUDES DEMOLITION OF THREE NON-HISTORIC DETACHED RESIDENTIAL UNITS AND ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES, AND REMOVAL OF TWO PROTECTED TREES.
130-140 MAR VISTA AVENUE

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Design Commission:

Environmental Determination

1. Find that the proposed project is consistent with the General Plan designation, with the General Plan goals and policies for the site, 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; and

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.

Findings for Compliance with the Tree Protection Ordinance

1. Acknowledge that a tree inventory and arborist report identify the removal of one protected specimen tree, and one protected mature tree;

2. Find that the removal of one protected specimen tree (Tree #2, Quercus suber/Cork Oak,) and the removal of one protected mature tree (Tree #5, Fraxinus uhdei/Evergreen Ash), meet Finding #6 of the Tree Protection Ordinance: “The project as defined in Section 17.80.020, includes a landscape design plan that emphasizes a tree canopy that is sustainable over the longer term by adhering to the Replacement Matrix prepared by the City Manager and included in the associated Administrative Guidelines;” and, therefore,

Approve the removal of Tree #2 and Tree #5.

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 Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts; and

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

BACKGROUND:

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: High Density Residential (0-48 units/acre)
- Zoning: RM-48 (Multi-Family Residential, City of Gardens, 0-48 units/acre)
- 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 for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts.
- Site: The site is comprised of two adjoining lots totaling approximately 14,400 square feet in size at the northeast corner of Mar Vista Avenue and East Union Street. The northern lot (140 Mar Vista Avenue) contains an existing single-family residence constructed in 1910, a detached garage, and a detached rear residential unit constructed in 1945. The southern lot (130 Mar Vista Avenue) contains an existing single-family residence constructed in 1917. The existing buildings underwent a Historic Resource Evaluation (HRE) and on May 24, 2022, they were determined to be ineligible as historical resources. A total of eight private trees are located on the site, two of which are protected under the City’s Tree Protection Ordinance. Five public street trees front the south and west street frontages of the project site.

- Surroundings: The project site sits within a transitional residential block of varying architectural styles, densities and development periods. Directly west of the project site, across North Mar Vista Avenue, is a multi-family project constructed in 2016 in a Mediterranean Revival style. Directly abutting the project site to the east is a two-story, multi-family brick vernacular style building, constructed in 1929, which has been determined to be eligible for designation as an individual historic resource. Directly to the north of the project site is another recent multi-family development constructed in 2007 and designed in a contemporary style. Directly south of the project site, across Union Street, is a Mid-Century Ranch style two-story apartment building constructed in 1959. The immediate surroundings of the project site are within the RM-48 zoning district, with Walnut Street located one block north that is currently transitioning into a mixed-use corridor with new, higher-density, projects.
- Project Description: The project involves the demolition of four non-historic structures, the removal of eight private trees, including two trees that are protected under the Tree Protection Ordinance, and the construction of a new, approximately 32,000 square foot, four-story, 23-unit, multi-family building with one level of subterranean parking that will accommodate 27 parking spaces. The project will provide three on-site affordable units (two Very Low Income, and one Moderate Income), utilize a density bonus, and make use of the City's affordable housing concession menu to provide increased height. The allowed base density is 17 units, the project qualifies for a 35% density bonus resulting in 6 bonus units; for a total of 23. The maximum allowed height is 38', the concession allows for an additional 12' in height; the project proposes a height of 46'-9", within the range. All existing public street trees are proposed to be protected in place.
- Site Design: The proposed new building will be L-shaped in design with the bulk of the building located along the northern and eastern property lines. The main garden is located as a forecourt design with interconnection between the front and street-side yard landscaped setbacks. The subterranean garage access is via a ramp located at the southeasterly building volume, entered off of East Union Street. Setbacks for the building include a 25'-4.5" setback at the front yard (Mar Vista Avenue), 15 feet at the street-side yard along East Union Street, and five feet at the north side yard, and east, rear yard.
- Architectural Style: Modern
- Developer: Alex and Kathy Metaxas
- Architects: Tighe Architecture
- Landscape Architect: Harmony Gardens, Inc.

ANALYSIS:

Design Commission Comments from Preliminary Consultation

On August 24, 2021, 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 included in Attachment C.

<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 1</p> <p>Further study the project’s relationship to the street edge and the corner to frame and enhance the building’s response to the street corner intersection and ensure the project maintains a contextual relationship to the surrounding neighborhood context in massing, siting, setbacks and form.</p>
<p>Excerpt from Applicant Response</p> <p>“The landscape design within the setback along Mar Vista Ave and Union Street has been redesigned to provide further privacy and security for the tenants. A 3’-6” board formed concrete planter wall provides security from the P.R.W. and a series of trees are strategically placed parallel to the planter wall to further enhance security. The mezzanine level has been recessed back along the sides and front yard to alleviate the mass and allow surrounding buildings greater natural light accessibility.”</p>
<p>Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed</i></p> <p>The development will provide an open space that consists of the front and street side yard setbacks and main garden area that will seamlessly blend into one large open space. This landscape proposal will provide visual transparency between the private open space and the public street, providing street activation through the use of outdoor spatial programming. Additionally, the siting of the project reflects the large corner open space of the most recent neighborhood project, directly across Mar Vista Avenue, thus visually anchoring the corner with landscape and completing the urban context of the developed northwest corner. The building provides two street frontages that are narrow, with minimal visual impact.</p>
<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 2</p> <p>Consider the siting and shape of the building form along with internal programming to further activate the two street edges. Design solutions could include but are not limited to shifting the building closer to the required setbacks, providing walk-up terraces, enhanced and enlarged balconies, or step backs in massing for upper-floor terraces.</p>
<p>Excerpt from Applicant Response</p> <p>“The mezzanine level has been recessed about 6’-10” away from the exterior edge wall, creating a relief from the mass along the inner sideyard. The proposal keeps a 15ft distance from the adjacent north property with the additional 6’-10 at the mezzanine level. Please refer to sheet A610. The mass has been reduced to a 2-story volume with the mezzanine level recessed in at the Union Street elevation, providing a larger balcony/ exterior corridor to the units located on the second level. Please refer to sheet A610.”</p>
<p>Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed</i></p> <p>The orientation and siting of the building provides a large landscape buffer zone between the public street edge and the project, that will be activated through programmed amenities including seating and cooking areas. The project has also been revised to provide additional volumetric setbacks, while retaining the expansive outdoor open space. Furthermore, the bulk of the building has been located along the north and easterly boundaries, retaining the development context of building footprints and setbacks, while visually publicizing the open space of the main garden.</p>
<p>Preliminary Consultation Comment 3</p> <p>Provide additional residential paradigmatic elements such as defined ground floor covered entries and clearly articulated public amenity and circulation spaces. Look at making the ground-level more communal and open to residents through programming, and possibly more central and visible amenity spaces.</p>
<p>Excerpt from Applicant Response</p> <p>“The landscape design at the ground level has been revised. The new design proposes A 3’-6” board formed concrete planter wall that provides security from the P.R.W. and a series of trees are strategically placed parallel to the planter wall to further enhance security. Decomposed granite has been implemented within the main garden</p>

to allow accessibility and create social pockets within the community. Built-in benches and planters can be located across the main garden for use of tenants. Please refer to sheet A210 and landscape plan.”
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment to be addressed through recommended conditions of approval numbers 1 and 2.</i>
Aside from enhanced landscape areas, the ground floor of the building also features amenities such as shade canopies and large patio doors that open onto private open spaces. The west elevation has similar features; however, this elevation continues to appear unresolved in fenestration patterning and lacks features that highlight the building entry. Staff recommends conditions of approval 1 and 2 to require the solid-to-void relationship of the west elevation to be balanced with additional fenestration, along with providing clearly demarcated and accented points of entry to the building from the garden areas.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 4
Further study the open design of the subterranean garage entry to conceal this feature within the building and ensure the massing of the volume above it appropriately responds to the existing residential neighborhood context and the architectural character of the project overall.
Excerpt from Applicant Response
“The driveway ramp is articulated with a board-formed concrete wall and a corrugated metal wall to soften the size of the opening. The mass above it has been broken down by applying shingles as the finish material with light color palette. The mezzanine level above it has been recessed in, away from the public right of way. Please refer to sheets A011 and A021.”
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval number 3.</i>
Though the garage entry has been articulated through enhanced materials, it remains unresolved in its massing. The residential volume at the south elevation appears to float above the garage entry and is ungrounded. Staff recommends condition of approval number 3 to require the architect to further study this area of the building and provide a grounded volume that is reflective of the urban residential context.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 5
Consider the double-loaded corridor as an integrated part of the project with equal emphasis on its design and the overall spatial experience of the project’s circulation paths. Determine the feasibility of a partially-open central corridor and its comfort for year-round use.
Applicant Response
“The double loaded corridor is to be open at both ends to allow for natural ventilation. Both ends of the corridor include a 42” HT metal guardrail with an integrated planter per every level. Please refer to A018 and A020.”
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval number 4.</i>
Though alternatives to the double-loaded corridor have not been provided, staff finds the overall design to be complementary to the modern architectural style and the simple building form, and to provide a rational circulation pattern. Staff recommends condition of approval number 4 to require the project to demonstrate that the publicly visible corridors are finished in high quality and durable materials and that the publicly visible unit entries are thoughtfully accented, adequately illuminated, and include protection from external elements.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 6
Study the proposed material and color palette to ensure non-reflectivity, durability, and appropriateness in application for the surrounding residential context. Break up the scale and massing through a consistency of materiality throughout the project.
Applicant Response
“The building is further articulated with proper modulation and the required stepping back of the massing. The building is rendered in a palette of high-quality, durable materials that further differentiate the distinct volumes with a curated palette of color and texture. The two ends of the mass include cement fiberboard panels with a light palette. The side and rear yard include standing seam to break the mass and provide a more 4-dimensional design. Please refer to sheet A018-A020.”
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval numbers 5 and 6</i>
The building has been refined to provide a rhythmic pattern of façade modulation that is complementary to the modern architectural style and internal building programming. The façade planes are further modulated through the selected materials proposed to be applied to the project. The applicant is proposing metal paneling as a building finish at tertiary elevations and staff finds that this material is consistent with modern architecture, and is contextual to the neighborhood as the neighboring development to the north, constructed in 2007, also features metal paneling as a façade finish. Staff recommends conditions of approval numbers 5 and 6 to ensure that there is a rational transition between the materials, that they do not occur within the same wall plane, and that an alternate material be specified to the fiber-cement composite shingles which are atypical in this building type and architectural style.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 7

The proposed landscape areas, including the main garden appear to have obtrusive barriers such as terraced landscape berms. Carefully consider the landscape design to ensure that it promotes transparency, active and passive programming, sustainability, and street activation.
Applicant Response
"The new design proposes A 3'-6" board formed concrete planter wall that provides security from the P.R.W. and a series of trees are strategically placed parallel to the planter wall to further enhance security. The sloping berm with carefully picked plants species connects to the p.r.w. activating the street experience along Union St. and Mar Vista. Please refer to the landscape sheet."
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed</i>
The landscape design has been revised to provide low planter walls that protect and define the open space. Additionally, the raised planter beds will provide necessary space for root growth to support a sustainable tree canopy for the project's proposed trees. Overall, the conceptual landscape plan provides a complementary planting palette and design to the modern project while unobtrusively providing adequate site screening and accommodating three strategically placed access points from the street frontages.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 8
Non-street facing elevations should be detailed through materials and overall design as equally as the street-facing façades.
Applicant Response
"The inner side and rear yard have been updated to include a wider variation and more thought-out composition of material, including smooth finish stucco, standing seam metal, glass guardrails and GFRC planters to soften the design. Please refer to sheet A018 and A020."
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed</i>
The north and east elevations of the building have been revised to display a similar level of façade modulation, material application and architectural detail to the primary street-facing facades.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 9
Consider the addition of architectural features such as awnings, balconies, and other amenities to further enhance the façade planes through programmatic activation and patterning and to reduce solar heat gains, particularly along the southern façade. Also, consider the use of recessed covered balconies.
Applicant Response
"Awnings have been implemented on the design to allow protection on the southern side for all balconies at all levels. See A021. The ground level landscape includes canopy trees for sun protection at social areas."
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed</i>
The applicant has revised the project to have balconies and shade awnings at the south elevation. These additional features provide added unit amenities, façade modulation, passive unit cooling, and shadow lines.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 10
Consider the retention and/or relocation of as many existing trees where feasible, and explore tree preservation incentives. Under PMC Section 8.52.060, a decision may be made through the design review process to waive up to two development standards or accept alternative solutions to assist in the preservation of protected trees. Modifications may include a reduction to garden requirements, guest parking requirements, the location of driveways, building height limits, or other requirements.
Applicant Response
"Noted, all existing trees are to be protected and remain in place."
Staff Analysis: <i>Though the response is incorrect, the comment has been adequately addressed.</i>
Though the response is incorrect in stating that all on-site trees are to be protected in place, the provided tree inventory notes that there are eight on-site trees, and all are proposed to be removed. Of the eight on-site trees, two are protected under the City's Tree Protection Ordinance. See discussion below for staff's analysis of the proposed protected tree removals.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 11
Study the viability of the proposed transparent blending of private and public open spaces and how that impacts safety, usability by the residents, and designated availability to the public. Further refine this hybridized space and distinctions between public and private spaces.
Applicant Response
"The landscape design includes multi-tier planters facing the street at different heights, and a series of tress to allow privacy and protection while also keeping a sense of transparency to the outside ."
Staff Analysis: <i>Comment satisfactorily addressed</i>
The proposed landscape design incorporates a series of low planter walls that will secure the site and define the outdoor spaces, while providing added soil depth for the proposed landscape tree plantings. The nature of the

design provides privacy for the residents, while also promoting an interconnectivity of green open space to the neighborhood through blended transparency achieved through the low garden walls and location of the main garden.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 12
Consider the integration of the transitional spaces between the residential units and the main garden. The majority of the individual residential units should fully engage with the main garden through the use of circulation, balconies, terraces, and façade openings. The use of a double-loaded corridor is efficient for circulation; however, in this application, it severs the north-flanking units' direct connection to the main garden.
Applicant Response
"The main garden offers a continuous connection to both entries of the building, the lobby, and the amenity space. The main garden also includes areas of built-in seating, a barbeque that are covered by canopy trees and direct access to the private open spaces located at the ground level."
Staff Analysis: Comment satisfactorily addressed
The applicant has explored alternatives to the siting of the building and has determined that this current proposal is the most logical and feasible to accommodate the required development standards such as open space and setbacks. The primary entries to the double-loaded corridor are through the garden areas, and the north elevation features a generous setback with added vegetation beds at the ground level. Additionally, the south-facing ground-floor units open directly onto the main garden space with patio doors fronted by individual patio-like private open space.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 13
The proposed forecourt garden design is affecting the spatial quality of the units, particularly the northern units which do not have direct access, or exposure to southern light. Look at reconfiguring the project to a "T" configuration to provide equality in access to air, light, and open space, while also providing more of a buffer to the residents in the existing development immediately to the north. Another option to study is flipping the "L" plan and possibly repositioning the garage entry.
Applicant Response
"The L configuration has been strategically configured to fully comply with the Garden City's Main Garden requirements while maintaining a practical layout and size for the residential units. By locating the main garden at the corner side, we're able to use the setback area to provide the required square footage to comply with all City Garden's requirements. The building has also been pushed in keeping a 15ft minimum requirement for light/air separation to the adjacent property. Please refer to sheet A052 for Total Garden Area Calculations. A minimum of 2,665 SF is required for the main garden. When a proposal is below the requirement, an ancillary garden could be implemented making up for the 735 SF still left. This area will need to open to above with min. dimension of 20 ft both ways. The building footprint will reduce about 1,000 SF per floor to accommodate for the ancillary garden and the side yard setback of 15ft."
Staff Analysis: Comment satisfactorily addressed
As designed, the project provides a high-quality addition to the City's residential fabric with thoughtful consideration to the required development standards, and large open space that is visually connected to the street. While the north-facing units do not have access to southern light, they have northern light through a generous allotment of windows, along with views of the San Gabriel Mountains. The architect has studied alternative siting and orientation of the building and has determined that the current L-configuration affords the best outcome for development standard compliance and unit accommodation.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 14
Further refine the coherence of the street-facing elevations particularly along Mar Vista Avenue and the split in the massing for the central corridor. Additionally, look at the materiality and how it can reduce the massing of the protruding volume over the garage entry. Study the transitions of massing height between the different heights of floor levels.
Applicant Response
"The Mar Vista Elevation has been revised. The building is rendered in a palette of high-quality, durable material cement fiber board shingles that further differentiate the distinct volumes with a curated palette of color and texture. The mass has been reduced at the mezzanine level to soften the visual connection to both street sides and inner side elevations. Please refer to sheets A018 and A020."
Staff Analysis: Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval numbers 1, 4 and 6
Though the west elevation has been revised, staff finds the elevation to be unresolved through materiality and fenestration pattern. Staff recommends conditions of approval numbers 1, 4, and 6 to require the solid-to-void relationships to be revised, an accented entry to be provided at the corridor, a cohesive and high-quality design of the publicly visible corridor spaces, and the fiber-cement shingle to be replaced with a material that is contextual to modern architecture, the surrounding context and buildings of this scale.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 15

Study the juxtaposition of the fourth-floor element and the existing development directly to the north. Provide a sectional study of that separation of space between the buildings. Overall, look at the viability of the fourth floor and additional height increase as a concession item, as opposed to other available concessions. Additionally, study the proposed usability and programming of the fourth-floor mezzanine spaces.
Excerpt of Applicant Response
"The third level mezzanine has been set back from the exterior of the building at the west, south and north sides to reduce the overall massing of the building. An additional 6'-10" set back is provided on the north side in the mezzanine level to create more separation to the northern neighbor property. The new setback provides 21'-10" at the mezzanine level. In regards to the use of the mezzanine, it's intended to provide additional area for tenants to be able to potentially use the space for work from home office space or entertainment area."
Staff Analysis: Comment satisfactorily addressed
Staff finds the revised layout to provide adequate spatial distance between the fourth-floor mezzanine and the adjacent development to the north.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 16
Study the sizing of the windows and overall composition of the fenestration patterns, primarily along the south façade.
Applicant Response
"The windows have been enlarged to allow for more natural light and practically within the residential units while enhancing the connection to the street sides. Please refer to sheet A020."
Staff Analysis: Comment satisfactorily addressed
With the exception of the west elevation previously addressed through recommended condition of approval number 1, staff finds the sizes and patterning of window fenestrations to provide a rhythmic logic of solid-to-void relationships and will provide the units with abundant natural lighting and air.

Programming and Circulation

The project proposes an open-air, double-loaded, corridor design, with units on the first through third floors; some third-floor units have access to a mezzanine at the fourth level. One level of subterranean parking is proposed to be accessed through a dual-lane ramp near the southeast corner of the project site, directly off East Union Street. The ground floor of the building will accommodate seven residential units, a common area, and lease office area. The second floor will house a total of eight units, and the third level will house a combination of eight single- and double-height units, with the double-height units having access to the fourth mezzanine level. The units are primarily accessed through the double-loaded corridor, with the south-facing ground floor units also having access through the garden area.

Proposed outdoor programming includes the main garden area which will feature landscaped planting beds, integrated outdoor cooking areas, and integrated seating areas.

While the double-loaded corridor design of the building provides a rational efficiency to the layout of the units and the circulation pattern, staff finds that the ground-level entrances to the corridors should be accentuated to provide clear visual delineation of the circulation system and that the publicly visible corridors be detailed with high quality materials as recommended in condition of approval number 4. Overall, staff finds the project to have a logical patterning and layout of indoor and outdoor programming and circulation systems that are consistent with the applicable design guidelines.

Orientation

The building is arranged in an L-shaped configuration with the bulk of the project located along the north and east edges of the property. This configuration results in the building having open space area and landscape along both street edges. All units will have unobstructed access to natural light on all sides of the building, with fenestration patterning that appropriately responds to public visibility. The main garden is located at the front of the building, and seamlessly blends into the landscaped front and street side yard setbacks for an expansive open space. This arrangement of building and open space also provides a large, landscaped buffer zone between the street edge and the project. Additionally, the siting of the project and resulting open space area is reflective of the open space configuration of a multi-family project at the northwest corner of the subject intersection (Mar Vista Avenue and East Union Street), and will provide a visual anchor to the northeast corner with additional landscape, thus completing the urban context of this residential street intersection.

Height, Massing and Modulation

The height limit for this zoning district is 38 feet. However, through an affordable housing concession, the project is allowed to increase its height by 12 feet to a maximum of 50 feet. The project proposes a maximum height of 46'-9" to accommodate a mezzanine level for the third-floor units. Though the building is over forty feet in height, its composition of form and façade articulation including fenestrations, emphasize horizontality over verticality. The building is arranged as a series of rectangular volumes, configured into an L-shape. The mezzanine fourth floor is stepped back from the primary façade planes to accommodate an expansive outdoor rooftop terrace, and additional private rooftop patios. The facades of the building are modulated with rectangular forms to break up the massing, accommodate transitions in materials, and provide necessary side yard setbacks from existing window openings at abutting properties. With the exception of the garage entry at the south elevation, staff finds that the building is designed to reflect a sensitive infill approach in regard to height and massing through its interplay of modulated facades, stepbacks, and landscaped buffer. Staff recommends condition of approval number 3 to require a solution to resolve the garage entry and the floating building volume above it, and provide a grounded building form that is reflective of the urban residential context.

Architectural Style and Detailing

The proposed new building is modern in architectural style with flat roofs, and simple rectangular forms. Material transitions primarily occur at the breaks in building form, enhancing the modulation of the façade planes. The rhythmic pattern of fenestrations, balconies, and canopies provides human-scaled design features to the building, providing additional contextuality to the building in the residential neighborhood. The conceptual material palette is also reflective of modern architecture with stucco, metal panels, and fiber-cement composite shingles. Though fiber-cement composite material has been utilized on multi-family projects in the City, staff finds that its proposed use in this context, as triangular shingles on a modern multi-story, multi-family, building is atypical in context. To address this, staff recommends condition of approval number 6 to require an alternate material to the fiber-cement composite shingles that is reflective of the building's modern architectural typology and more compatible with the surrounding context.

Compatibility

The proposed new building is located in a high-density multi-family residential zone that is in transition to higher density, in-fill, development projects. The new project will continue this development trend. Though modern in design, the building is contextual to the architecturally eclectic nature of the neighborhood which has traditional and modern multi-family residential developments of various development periods. The building is also sensitive to the eligible historic brick masonry building to the immediate east through its fenestration pattern, simple building massing, and clearances for air and light along its east elevation. As designed, the expansive outdoor space fronting the project provides a visual break from building mass at the northeast corner of the street intersection of Mar Vista Avenue and East Union Street, roughly mirroring the open space of the recent development at the northwest corner. This arrangement visually anchors the intersection through vegetative open space. The rectangular forms of the building, and modulated façade planes, along with the material palette, are characteristic of the modern architecture, and give the project a relatable human scale. Overall, with the implementation of previously mentioned conditions of approval, staff finds that the building is compatible and contextual to the surrounding multi-family residential neighborhood.

Conceptual Landscape Design

The provided landscape plans indicate a diverse planting palette of California-friendly perennials and trees. The conceptual landscape plan calls for a total of 20 new trees, to be planted at 36-inch box size. Though hardscape details were not provided, the plans indicate the use of patterned concrete, or pavers, and the use of decomposed granite for the walkable surfaces of the landscape area. Board-formed concrete is proposed for the angular terraced walls that will fill the garden spaces to provide raised planter beds, define the project site from the public edge, and frame the outdoor programming spaces with amenities that include integrated bench seating, and outdoor cooking. Staff finds the conceptual landscape plans to provide a compatible landscaping and hardscaping design, with a generous allotment of planting areas and new on-site shade trees. Further landscape details and specifications will be required as part of the Final Design Review submittal.

Protected Tree Removals

A tree inventory submitted with the application notes that there are eight existing on-site trees, all of which are proposed to be removed. Of the eight on-site private trees, two are protected under the City's Tree Protection Ordinance. Tree #2 is a protected specimen tree (*Quercus suber*/Cork Oak with a DBH of 15 inches) and Tree #5 is a protected mature tree (*Fraxinus uhdei* /Evergreen Ash with a DBH of 19 inches). According to the tree survey, both protected trees are located along the northern property boundary and will be in conflict with the excavation and construction of the subterranean garage. There are five public street trees along the abutting street frontages, which are proposed to be protected in place.

The removal of Tree #2 and Tree #5 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."

Pursuant to the adopted Tree Replacement Matrix, the removal of Tree #2 shall require planting of four on-site replacement trees at 24-inch box size, or two replacement trees at 36-inch box size, of any protected specimen or native species. Additionally, the removal of Tree #5 shall require planting of four on-site replacement trees at 24-inch box size, or two replacement trees at 36-inch box size, of any species. The provided landscape plans indicate a total of 14 new trees at 36-inch box size, and three new trees at 24-inch box size, all of which are specified as species on the protected specimen tree list, in excess of the minimum replacement requirement. Staff finds that the proposed landscape plan provides an adequate tree replacement selection and recommends approval of the removal of the two protected trees.

CITY OF GARDENS ARCHITECTURAL STANDARDS:

Craftsmanship Feature

PMC Section 17.22.080.E.1 states that *“Each project shall incorporate into the design at least one feature such as iron grates, tile fountains, cast terra cotta, wood work, stenciled ornament or other elements as approved by the Design Review authority.”*

The proposed project does not comply with this requirement. As such, staff recommends condition of approval number 7 to require the project to incorporate a craftsmanship feature. Further details and specifications will be required as part of the Final Design Review.

Pasadena Building Elements

PMC Section 17.22.080.E.2 states that *“In addition to the above requirements, each new project shall incorporate at least two building elements. Building elements include: upper floor loggias, roofed balconies supported by brackets or by columns at the ground floor, exterior wooden or masonry stairs with closed risers, or tile or masonry fountain.”*

Staff finds that the project complies with one of the prescriptive building elements: the canopy-covered balconies that overlook the main garden area. Details of these systems will be further analyzed at Final Design Review. Staff recommends condition of approval number 8 to require the project to incorporate one additional building element prescribed above into the design. With the satisfaction of these recommended conditions, the project will be in compliance with this requirement.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

Staff routed the project to several City departments, including the Public Works, Transportation, Fire and Housing Departments. Additionally, the project was routed to the Current Planning Section and the Building and Cultural Affairs Division of the Planning & Community Development Department. Recommended conditions from the Current Planning Section, and Departments of Public Works and Transportation, are included in Attachment A.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

Staff engaged Impact Sciences, an environmental consulting firm, to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the project and determine whether it would meet the required findings for a Categorical Exemption under Class 32, "Infill Development Projects." Based on the documentation prepared, which is included in Attachment E, the project will be constructed on a previously developed site in an urbanized area, is consistent with the General Plan and Zoning designations, and would not have the potential to result in significant impacts related to air quality, traffic, noise, water quality or cultural resources and, based on this analysis, staff recommends that the Commission determine that the project is Categorically Exempt from CEQA.

CONCLUSION:

The submitted project design satisfactorily addresses the majority of the comments provided during Preliminary Consultation and is consistent with the applicable 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
Director of Planning and
Community Development

Prepared by:



Edwar Sissi
Planner

Reviewed by:



Kevin Johnson
Principal Planner

Attachments:

- A. Recommended Conditions of Approval
- B. Architectural Plans, Elevations, Renderings, and Site Photos
- C. Applicant Response to Preliminary Consultation Comments
- D. Tree Inventory
- E. Environmental Documentation (Air Quality and Noise Studies, Historic Resource Evaluation determination letter, Transportation Impact Analysis CEQA Evaluation)