



## PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** MARCH 26, 2024  
**TO:** DESIGN COMMISSION  
**FROM:** JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP, DIRECTOR, PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
**ADDRESS:** 861 EAST WALNUT STREET  
**SUBJECT:** APPLICATION FOR PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION (DHP2023-00368)  
NEW CONSTRUCTION OF A SIX-STORY, 83,104 SQUARE-FOOT  
RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITY WITH 95 UNITS

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### Background & Project Description:

This proposal is for the construction of a new six-story, approximately 83,104 square-foot residential care facility with 95 units for assisted living and memory care. The site is at the northwest corner of East Walnut Street and North Lake Avenue and is comprised of three lots totaling 17,473 square-feet. The site is currently developed with a one-story commercial restaurant building constructed in 1975 that is currently vacant and is proposed to be demolished. There are also 18 trees on the site, all of which are proposed to be removed and none of which are protected under the Tree Protection Ordinance.

Surrounding properties include primarily commercial buildings including restaurants, office, retail, and banks and a multi-family development immediately to the west. The surrounding context consists of buildings two to six-stories in height with lower two-story buildings to the north along Lake Avenue and taller buildings to the south and west. There are no designated historic resources in the immediate vicinity. The site is zoned CD-5 (Central District, Lake Avenue Subdistrict).

While the project site includes a building that is 45 years or older (constructed ca. 1975), it is not a formally designated landmark or historic structure and is not a contributing building to a designated or eligible landmark or historic district.

The new building is proposed to have an L-shaped footprint in keeping with the shape of the project site. The building will maintain setbacks at all sides ranging in dimension from approximately six feet to 22 feet. The north side of the site will maintain slightly larger setbacks to accommodate publicly accessible open space and usable private open space for residents. Per the Zoning Compliance Matrix provided in Attachment A, a ten-foot setback will be required for the proposed parking ramp running parallel to East Walnut Street.

The first floor of the project is proposed to accommodate various communal spaces and uses for the residents of the development, including a theater/library, dining room, activity room, and main lobby. The main lobby and a café or bistro use are allocated at the southeast corner of the ground floor. The first floor will also include space for loading, vehicular pick up and drop off, and a ramp to the subterranean parking garage. The second floor includes memory care units along with spaces for dining, a lounge, laundry and kitchen; terraces are proposed at the north side of the second floor. Floors three through six are designated for assisted living units and include independent living units with terraces scattered throughout at each floor.

The building above the ground floor maintains breaks and areas of modulation throughout that have been reviewed for compliance with the updated Central District Specific Plan standards. The building is designed in a generally contemporary style with flat roofs, varied projecting and recessing volumes, and generally stacked punched openings.

**Applicable Design Guidelines:**

- Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan
- Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Central District Specific Plan

**Previous/Existing Applications:**

- Predevelopment Plan Review (PPR). A PPR comment letter was provided to the applicant on January 4, 2023. The project met the threshold for City Council PPR review and was presented to City Council on May 15, 2023.

**Approvals Needed/Project Scheduling:**

- Conditional Use Permit for Residential Care Facility Use
- Concept and Final Design Review (Design Commission)
- Building Permits (Building Staff)

**CEQA Clearance:**

This is preliminary consultation regarding design review and is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

**Staff Observations:**

**Applicable Design Guidelines:**

The following design guidelines are applicable to the project and should guide further development and study of the project as it moves forward in the design review process:

***Design-Related Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan:***

- 4.10: Locate and design buildings to relate to and frame major public streets, open spaces, and cityscape. New development at intersections should consider any number of corner treatments, and should balance safety and accessibility concerns with the vision of the area and the need for buildings to engage the street and create a distinct urban edge.

- 4.11: Require that development demonstrates a contextual relationship with neighboring structures and sites addressing such elements as building scale, massing, orientation, setbacks, buffering, the arrangement of shared and private open spaces, visibility, privacy, automobile and truck access, impacts of noise and lighting, landscape quality, infrastructure, and aesthetics.
- 4.12 Require that the scale and massing of new development in higher-density centers and corridors provide appropriate transitions in building height and bulk and are sensitive to the physical and visual character of adjoining lower-density neighborhood.
- 7.1: Design each building as a high-quality, long-term addition to the City’s urban fabric; exterior design and buildings material shall exhibit permanence and quality, minimize maintenance concerns, and extend the life of the building.
- 7.2: Allow for the development of a diversity of buildings styles. Support innovative and creative design solutions to issues related to context and environmental sustainability.
- 7.3: Require that new and adaptively re-used buildings are designed to respect and complement the defining built form, massing, scale, modulation, and architectural detailing of their contextual setting.
- 10.7: Encourage sustainable practices for landscape materials, landscape design, and land development.
- 23.1 Design and modulate buildings to avoid the sense of “blocky” and undifferentiated building mass, incorporate well-defined entries, and use building materials, colors, and architectural details complementing the neighborhood, while allowing flexibility for distinguished design solutions.
- 23.3: Provide appropriate setbacks, consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, along the street frontage and, where there are setbacks, ensure adequate landscaping is provided.
- 25.4: Require that new development protect community character by providing architecture, landscaping, and urban design of equal or greater quality than existing and by respecting the architectural character and scale of adjacent buildings.

***Design-Related Policies in the Central District Specific Plan:***

- 5.a. Promote higher density, transit-oriented development surrounding the three Metro A Line stations, supported by multi-modal linkages, and pedestrian and open space amenities.
- 5.b. Allow for a range of architectural styles and forms that provide visual interest and quality design through flexible massing and façade standards.
- 5.d. Shape three-dimensional development that adds richness through simple yet varied masses, including modulated sub-volumes and creative contemporary architecture.
- 5.f. Use a variety of horizontal and vertical articulations to avoid monotony while creating visual interest and shadow lines.

- 5.g. Require façade transparency, particularly on the ground floor, that improves architectural design and connection to the street, and restrict the use of blank walls in new development.
- 5.h. Use durable, high-quality materials that exhibit a sense of permanence on all sides of a building, but particularly at the street level and entrances.
- 6.c. Introduce open space design standards that apply universal design to maximize the comfort, utility, visual appeal, and programming potential of each open space for human activity and social interaction.
- 6.f. Encourage ground level pedestrian passages and common spaces with a strong functional and visual connection to the street for safety; use integrated site planning to solidify links between interior and exterior.
- 17.b. Develop parcels near the intersection of Lake Avenue and Walnut Street as a focal point for the neighborhood, with public open space and other pedestrian friendly amenities.
- 17.j. Support infill development that establishes context-sensitive transitions between the Playhouse District, Lake Avenue’s distinct high rise commercial, regional retail, and neighborhood village environments, the Green Street Village Landmark District, and the East Colorado Specific Plan area.

**Potential Design Issues:**

- Further study the areas where parking or vehicular ramps adjoin the street to ensure they are integrated into the project design and avoid blank walls along street frontages by providing views into active interior spaces. If feasible, line the edges of the building that face public streets with active uses rather than vehicular access and parking facilities and integrate the subterranean parking access with the loading space at the southwest corner of the site. Further study the scale of the parking entrance to better relate to the scale of other openings along the street.
- Consider applying accented treatments of form, detailing, and programming to the project site’s southwest corner to fully engage with and respond to the corner site condition. This would include exploring ways to incorporate the entrance and lobby closer to the southwest corner of the building and the street edge and creating enhanced and cohesive architectural treatment to accentuate the entry location.
- Incorporate simplification of design treatments, materials and composition in order to provide a clear design concept. For example, the projecting second-floor forms with hexagonal openings do not appear to have a purpose and do not appear integrated with the overall design of the rest of the building. Other design treatments appear haphazardly placed and differentiated from similar features including windows, cladding, balconies, fins and frames. Simplification of the design to reflect the uses of the interior spaces and ensure purposeful use of exterior treatments and details will result in a more cohesive and elegant design overall.

- Further study the treatment of the roofline to provide a clearer termination of the building massing and unify the design. Specifically, the proposed open railings at the roof do not appear to serve a purpose and provide an unfinished aesthetic.
- Ensure projecting volumes and materials are placed strategically, respond to interior programming and carry a consistent logic and orientation throughout the design.
- Ensure that the communal open spaces for the project include amenities that will allow for their active use by the residents of the development.

**Project Scheduling/Sequencing:**

- Zoning Entitlements (Conditional Use Permit)
- Concept and Final Design Review by the Design Commission
- Building Permits

Respectfully Submitted,



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Department

Prepared by:



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**Attachments:**

- A. Current Planning (Zoning) compliance matrix
- B. Applicant submittal package