



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT STAFF REPORT

DATE: JUNE 25, 2019
TO: DESIGN COMMISSION
FROM: DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION - NEW CONSTRUCTION OF A TWO-TO-THREE-STORY, 62-UNIT MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL PROJECT
356 CORDOVA STREET

Project Description:

This proposal is for the construction of a new two-to-three-story, 62-unit multi-family residential project at 356 Cordova Street. The site, located at the southwest corner of S. Euclid Avenue and Cordova Street, is designated High Density Residential (0-48 units per acre) in the General Plan. It is within the Central District Specific Plan area and in the RM-48-HL-40(45) Zoning District (Multi-Family Residential, 48 units per acre, Height Limit Overlay). It is currently occupied by a non-historic complex of one-story medical office buildings built in 1977, interspersed with mature trees, landscaping, including a number of large boulders and a water feature, and surface parking.

The submitted tree inventory indicates that there are 52 trees on the site and four street trees along the site frontage. Of the 52 on-site trees, 17 are protected and of these protected trees, 3 are proposed to be removed, 7 are proposed to be relocated on-site and 7 are proposed to be retained in their existing on-site locations. A separate application for Private Tree Removal has already been submitted for one of these trees, tree #26, which is leaning toward existing buildings. All street trees are proposed to be retained in place. The remaining 35 non-protected trees are all proposed to be removed.

Surrounding properties include several multi-story office and multi-family residential buildings and a hotel between 6 and 13 stories in height as well as lower-scaled commercial and residential buildings and surface parking lots. There are a number of designated and eligible historic resources in close proximity to the project site, including:

- Pasadena Masonic Temple (1926, Bennett & Haskell), 200 S. Euclid Avenue (immediately north of proposed parking structure additions)
- Miss Orton's School for Girls (1898, Frederick C. Roehrig), 154 S. Euclid Avenue
- Las Flores Apartments (1937), 130 S. Euclid Avenue
- Pasadena Civic Auditorium (1933, Bergstrom, Bennet & Haskell), 300 E. Green Street,
- Foss Design & Building Company office (1926, Robert Foss), 175 S. Los Robles Avenue
- Apartment Building at 157 S. Los Robles Avenue (1916, Peoples & Cheney)

- Stanley Apartments and Livingstone Hotel Buildings (Myron Hunt, 1925 & 1927, respectively), 149 and 139 S. Los Robles Avenue, respectively
- Ernest Smith House (1911, Greene & Greene), 272 S. Los Robles Avenue
- Throop Memorial Universalist Church (1922, Frederick Kennedy, Jr.), 300 S. Los Robles Avenue
- House at 324 S. Euclid Avenue (1886).

The project is proposed to consist of two "U"-shaped buildings of varying height. The Height Limit Overlay that applies to the property provides for a 40' maximum height or 45' with height averaging. The project is proposing to utilize height averaging to build portions of the project to a maximum height of 45', with other portions being below the 40' maximum height. Although a height averaging exhibit is provided in the drawings, it is not sufficiently accurate to fully determine compliance with Zoning Code requirements. As such, staff has suggested a comment requiring a more precise height averaging exhibit be provided for review during Concept Design Review.

One level of subterranean parking with 99 spaces is proposed, with access from S. Euclid Avenue at the southern end of the site. The drawings indicate that the applicant is requesting a modification of development standards to eliminate the required guest parking, which would require provision of an additional 6 on-site parking spaces, to assist in preserving the protected trees on-site. The Tree Protection Ordinance allows the review authority to approve modification of up to two development standards to allow for tree preservation, subject to approval of the following findings, which, in this case, would be reviewed by the Design Commission during Concept Design Review:

1. Applicant investigated alternative site designs and building footprints using existing development standards;
2. Tree/s to be preserved is/are in good health and condition (taking into account species and longevity) as determined by a certified arborist;
3. Project includes a well-integrated and thoughtful design solution that enhances the property and its surroundings;
4. Project is not injurious to adjacent properties or uses, or detrimental to environmental quality, quality of life, or the health, safety, and welfare of the public; and
5. Project is consistent with the objectives and policies of the applicable design guidelines and the citywide design principles in the general plan.

The buildings are proposed to reflect a Mediterranean-inspired design with multiple articulated volumes that would break the project down into sub-components and create a varied streetscape, particularly along the longer S. Euclid Avenue frontage. These volumes are shown in the elevation drawings with a combination of flat and sloping roofs with some of the flat roofs having articulated parapets that create a unique, varied and expressive roof form for the project. The elevations are shown with a balanced proportion of solid walls to openings, with a variety of window arrangements and shapes including rectangular panels of varying sizes, projecting

bays, Gothic and parabolic arches, and circles. Additional articulation is provided by projecting balconies and upper-level pergolas. Exterior walls are proposed to be coated in stucco.

In terms of site design, the two “U-shaped” buildings are each designed to enclose a series of interconnected courtyard spaces. The larger northerly building is oriented with the opening of the “U” at the southern end and is proposed to have two wider courtyards, called “Pine Courtyard” and “Wisteria Courtyard” in the plans, connected by a narrower courtyard labeled “Palm Walk,” which, according to the narrative, also serves to mitigate the site’s north-to-south slope. A linear water feature is also proposed within this area. “Pine Courtyard” and “Palm Walk” are identified as the project’s required Main Garden; “Wisteria Courtyard” and an additional courtyard within the southerly building, identified as “Sycamore Courtyard” in the drawings, serve as Ancillary Gardens. While the “Sycamore Courtyard” is proposed to be physically separated from the other three interconnected open spaces, a covered open-air ground-level passageway provides an indirect, meandering connection between them. Three openings in the buildings, one on Cordova Street and two on S. Euclid Avenue, provide visual connections from the public realm to the interior courtyards. Two of these are covered by building volume above and one is more open with a second-floor covered bridge above. Locations of individual unit entries are not clearly indicated in the plans; however, the design narrative indicates that all ground-floor units have entries facing the street and gardens. The proposed residential units are designed in a combination of flats and townhouses that allow for upper-level walkways to be minimized and implemented in a manner that uniquely articulates the buildings and allows for communal views to the gardens below.

Applicable Design Guidelines:

- Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan
- Design Guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan
- Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial & Multi-Family Residential Districts

Previous/Existing Entitlements:

- None.

Approvals Needed/Project Scheduling:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Central District Specific Plan:

- SP1.4: Establish clear pedestrian connections on-site that are well-marked and gracious; direct pedestrians from surface or structured parking to buildings, streets and public spaces.
- SP1.5: Buffer adjacent sensitive land uses from undesirable impacts that may originate from a site; buffers may be landscape and/or architectural in character.

- SP2.1: Locate and orient buildings to positively define public streets and civic spaces, such as public plazas; maintain a continuous building street wall and in general limit spatial gaps to those necessary to accommodate vehicular and pedestrian access.
- SP4.1: Make plazas and courtyards comfortable for human activity and social interaction – standing, sitting, talking, eating.
- SP4.2: Create a pleasant microclimate, including shade from summer sun and access to winter sunlight; locate seating with consideration to noontime sun and shade.
- SP4.8: Consider adding a focal element, for instance, a sculpture, fountain or art piece, to outdoor space; civic art in outdoor plazas and courtyards is encouraged.
- BD1.6: Discourage excessive and overly gratuitous ornamentation that detracts from the visual clarity of Downtown's historic architecture.
- BD6.2: Use materials, colors and details to unify a building's appearance; buildings and structures should be built of compatible materials on all sides.
- UR1.2: Limit breaks in the building street wall to those necessary to accommodate vehicular and pedestrian access, or to establish a visual connection with communal open space areas.
- UR3.1: Incorporate communal outdoor spaces with residential projects; locate and size these spaces so that they are functional and support human occupation and use.
- UR3.2: Site communal open space so that it is centrally located; moreover, large contiguous open space areas are generally preferable to a series of small, isolated spaces.

Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial & Multi-Family Residential Districts:

- 7.2: The rear and/or side elevations of new buildings that are visible from the public realm should be designed with equal care and quality as the front or principal façade.
- 7.4: Unique natural characteristics, such as mature trees and topography, on both the project site and adjacent sites should be taken into account in new building design.

Potential Design Issues:

The following issues shall be further studied at the Concept Design Review phase.

- As the design of this project is strongly focused on preservation of protected trees, it is imperative that accurate, complete information about trees and tree protection is provided during the design review process. The applicant should ensure that the site plan, all floor and roof plans and the landscape plan depict the locations of trees to remain in place and trees to be relocated on-site along with their accurate tree numbers, coordinated with the submitted tree inventory, and continuing to depict their canopies as

accurately as possible. Correct the citation to tree # 38 in the plans (incorrectly labeled #39) and the dispositions of tree #s 26 (to be removed) and 41 (to be relocated) as stated verbally to staff. A tree relocation plan showing current and proposed locations of trees to be relocated should also be provided.

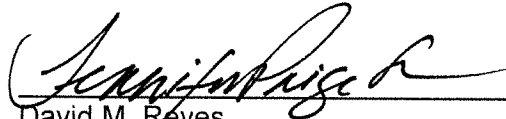
- Further study the proposed design to ensure that as much tree canopy as possible is retained and that trees proposed to be retained are not adversely impacted by project construction. In particular, tree #s 34 and 36 appear to require significant canopy pruning and the trunk of tree #12 is in close proximity to the edge of the subterranean garage and building. In addition, while the subterranean garage design appears to sufficiently protect tree #52, the location of planter walls and pathways in the ground-level courtyard appear to be in close proximity to the trunk of this tree. Consider placement of scaffolding during construction when evaluating potential tree impacts. The project arborist, structural engineer and contractor should be engaged as early as possible in the design process to identify appropriate distances from tree trunks and canopies to ensure that the trees proposed to be retained will not be adversely impacted during excavation of the site and construction of the buildings and reports and diagrams, as well as a conceptual Tree Protection Plan, should be provided during Concept Design Review to demonstrate constructability of the project.
- Although not protected, consider the possibility of preserving additional existing trees along the north and west property lines. Based on the proposed setbacks of the subterranean garage in these locations, it appears that it may be possible to preserve additional trees, which would enhance the project and retain existing screening between the project site and the adjacent existing residential building. Tree #16, in particular, is one inch below protected size and appears to be in a location where the parking structure is more substantially set back from the property line and could accommodate preservation of the tree. If found to be infeasible, consider the possibility of relocating additional mature trees, either on-site or off-site.
- Consider whether any of the protected trees proposed to be relocated could be installed in the “Pine Courtyard” tree well to provide mature tree canopy within this courtyard space. It also appears possible to place an additional tree within the “Wisteria Courtyard” tree well.
- Provide multiple alternative design studies depicting compliance with the guest parking requirement to demonstrate that the design team has adequately studied alternative designs using existing development standards.
- Ensure that the plans submitted for Concept Design Review clearly identify locations of unit entries. All units that have frontage along the street and/or courtyards should have direct entries from them.
- Continue to explore ways to ensure that upper-floor units are able to visually and/or functionally engage the interior courtyard spaces with large windows and/or balconies, while not interfering with protected tree canopies. Consider the possibility of designing rooftops as accessible communal spaces.

- While the S. Euclid Avenue façade is articulated into multiple stepped masses, the two openings providing views into interior courtyards are in relatively close proximity to one another at the southern end of the site, creating a long, unbroken façade at the central and northern portions of the frontage. Explore the possibility of either creating an additional opening along the S. Euclid Avenue frontage or relocating one of the two proposed openings to create a physical break in the building wall further north.
- Further details of access control measures at openings along the street frontages should be provided in future submittals. Fencing and gates in these openings should be as open and transparent as possible to allow for clear views into the interior courtyards from the public realm.
- Carefully consider the design of transitional spaces within the courtyards as well as view terminations. Provide courtyard-facing elevations in future submittals, as well as further details of the proposed landscape design.
- Openings on the west and south elevations should be carefully placed and sized to ensure privacy of both adjacent multi-family residential buildings and future residents of the proposed new building. Those side elevations that are visible from the street should be architecturally treated as primary facades, consistent with the street-facing elevations.
- Ensure that courtyards are designed to be usable spaces with amenities for the residents including seating, cooking facilities, shade structures, etc.
- Ensure that the Craftsmanship element required by the Zoning Code is provided, identified and detailed in subsequent submittals.
- Explore ways to incorporate additional private open space into the project, including the possibility of enlarging entry stoops, providing rear patios and adding balconies.
- Provide a precise height averaging exhibit (including calculations) indicating the areas and heights from the lowest point of existing grade of each of the buildings' roofs, along with calculations demonstrating that areas over 40' in height do not exceed 30% of the building footprint and that the average height of the buildings does not exceed 40'.
- Review the proposed fenestration and consider simplifying some of the window types, to avoid overly gratuitous ornamentation, as recommended in the Central District Specific Plan design guidelines.

Project Scheduling/Sequencing:

- Concept and Final Design Review by the Design Commission
- Building Permits

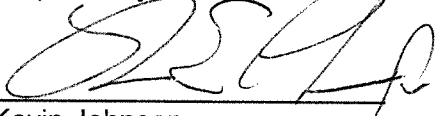
Respectfully Submitted,



David M. Reyes

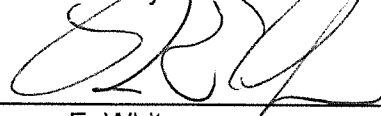
Director of Planning & Community Development Department

Prepared by:



Kevin Johnson
Senior Planner

Reviewed by:



Leon E. White
Principal Planner

Attachments:

- A. Applicant submittal package
- B. Tree inventory & disposition plan
- C. Current Planning (Zoning) compliance matrix