

# Agenda Report

June 7, 2010

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning & Development Department  
**SUBJECT:** Call for Review of a Decision by the Design Commission –  
Concept Design Review, 680 E. Colorado Boulevard – IDS Playhouse  
Plaza

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the City Council:

- A) Find that this project was subject to an environmental review in the Environmental Impact Report, Statement of Overriding Considerations, and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program adopted by the City Council on November 16, 2009, and that there are no changed circumstances or new information which would trigger further environmental review;
- B) Find that the concept-level design is consistent with the Purposes of Design Review set forth in §17.61.030 of the Zoning Code, as well as the following design guidelines adopted by the Council: Citywide Design Principles in the Land-use Element of the General Plan and the Central District Design Guidelines and specific plan;
- C) Grant Concept Design Approval with the conditions set forth in Attachment A;
- D) Direct that an advisory 50% review and final design review be conducted by the Design Commission;
- E) Request the Applicant to study the third-story balcony along Colorado to insure it is an occupiable and active feature of the building (engaged with the internal circulation).

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Design Review process is established by Pasadena Municipal Code section 17.61.030. Pursuant to the Code, Design Review is intended to implement urban design goals and policies and the citywide design principles in the General Plan.

Concept Design Review is the primary step in the Design Review process. Applications for Concept Design Review normally address the basic design of a project, including compatibility with surroundings, massing, proportion, siting, solid-to-void relationships, and compliance with applicable design guidelines.

The subject project, IDS Playhouse Plaza, was reviewed by the Design Commission on five occasions, two advisory reviews prior to the City Council Public Hearing on November 16, 2009 and three Concept Design reviews in March and April 2010. At the last Concept Design review meeting, April 26<sup>th</sup>, a motion to approve the application failed as did a motion to deny the application. Because both motions failed, the outcome was a “failure to act”, which has the effect of disapproving the application.

On May 10, 2010, the City Council agreed to call this matter for review, as such the City Council will be acting in the place of the Design Commission for the purpose of conducting Concept Design Review and will follow the procedures that would be followed by the Design Commission.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The proposed project, IDS Playhouse Plaza, is a five story office building with ground-floor retail. The ground-floor level is 17 feet in height and portions of the building reach a maximum height of 75'. The exterior building materials are preliminarily proposed as pre-cast concrete panels; large areas of glazing, offset by punched window openings and vertical bands of glazing with traditional ground-floor retail storefronts.

The site plan includes an east/west-oriented pedestrian paseo in the middle of the site on El Molino. The covered paseo connects to the Arcade Lane retail shops through a proposed opening in the Arcade's western wall. The project also proposes a public plaza on S. El Molino Avenue. The plaza would be landscaped and available for public use and pedestrian access to the new retail shops. The building has setbacks that range from five to 25 feet along S. El Molino Avenue. The purpose of these setbacks is to promote publicly accessible outdoor spaces and to provide a wider sidewalk area to accommodate pedestrians for special events. Vehicles access the six-level subterranean parking garage from a driveway on southern edge of the site on El Molino Ave.

### **Chronology of Design Commission Review**

The Design Commission conducted two advisory reviews of this project in November 2008 and July 2009 related to the draft environmental impact report and land-use entitlements for the project. The Commission concluded that the project was generally consistent with the design-related findings and indicated that it should have some flexibility in the review and approval of the project's site plan, building massing and modulation. Comments from the Commission included requests to:

- Continue to modulate the east elevation of the building with setbacks/step backs in to improve its scale with the adjacent Arcade Lane building.
- Further develop and articulate the east and south elevations to provide more visual interest and/or pedestrian scale, as shown on the north and west elevations.
- Avoid creating large expanses of flat wall surfaces and glazed areas without substantial articulation or that appear monotonous.

Subsequent to the advisory reviews and prior to Concept Design review, the applicant's design team worked closely with City staff to develop a project that responds to the site conditions.

On March 22, 2010 the Commission held the first of three public hearings for Concept Design. After receiving a presentation from staff and the applicant as well as public comment, the Commission continued the item and asked the design architects to restudy and further refine the project to:

- Enliven the streetscape along El Molino Avenue by reducing the massing and by possibly stepping down toward the street to reinforce the street edge.
- Step down the corner tower (at Colorado and El Molino) and adding an entrance so the building relates better to Colorado Blvd.
- Redesign the vertical windows to have less of a "post-Federalist" appearance and read more like a "background" building.
- Transfer some of the massing above the one-story entry to the parking garage (El Molino elevation).

On April 12, 2010 the second public hearing was conducted. After receiving a presentation on a revised design intended to address the comments from the Commission received on March 22<sup>nd</sup> as well as public comment, the Commission continued the item and asked the design architects to:

- Restudy an entrance on Colorado Boulevard at the center of the building. The kind of entrance that would activate the paseo and make some kind of connection from the building to the paseo and Arcade Lane.
- Restudy the possibility of having pavilions along El Molino Avenue and how they would interact with pedestrian circulation along El Molino.

- Study further the recommendations of staff (which included refining terminus of corner tower, intersecting volumes, transitions in materials, and glazed opening over the east-west passageway).

On April 26, 2010 a third public hearing was conducted at which time the Commission was presented additional redesigns of the project intended to be responsive to the prior Commission direction. This revised design introduced a main, public entry to the building at the corner of Colorado and El Molino and enclosed the formerly open ground-floor of the glazed corner. In addition, the revised submittal incorporated glass pavilions along the El Molino elevation projecting into the plaza area and the covered retail arcade was removed.

Commission comments in response to the revised design included:

- Distance of covered space in the passageway connecting to Arcade is too long/ window above needs more design work: reshape, depress, etc./ add more visual interest to passageway.
- Offer more public benefits (water feature, lighting).
- “Intense institutional character” may be too much of a contrast to Arcade Building and the Playhouse.
- Service side of the building (south elevation) is unresolved.
- Add more glazing on Colorado at ground floor; could be an enhanced entry to a retail business.
- Return wall at the corner (into courtyard) needs to be better resolved (possibly with more glazing).
- Add more eye-level (pedestrian) views.
- Study adding more building mass along El Molino.
- Add more modulation to the pavilions; more “push and pull.”

After discussing the design, a motion to approve the application for concept design review failed as did a motion to deny the application. Because both motions failed, the outcome was a “failure to act”, which has the effect of disapproving the application.

On May 10, 2010, the City Council agreed to call this matter for review. As such, the City Council will be acting in the place of the Design Commission for the purpose of conducting Concept Design Review and will follow the same rules to which the Design

Commission was subject. Previously questions regarding the Design Commission's authority to modify the land use entitlements granted by Council were raised, and the following explanation was provided in the April 12, 2010 staff report to the Design Commission. These same limits apply to the City Council as it considers this matter.

Through design review, changes may be made to an approved project with regard to "density, height, open space, parking or loading, and sign requirements, *as long as the conditions are not more restrictive than* those prescribed by applicable zoning district regulations or a valid Adjustment Permit, Conditional Use Permit, Development Agreement, Master Plan, Planned Development, Variance, or other legislative or zoning entitlements." (PMC § 17.61.030.I(5)(a), emphasis added.) On November 16, 2009, City Council granted certain land use entitlements which limit the changes that may be required of this project<sup>1</sup>, as follows:

1. A new, five-story commercial building of 159,829 square feet (145,422 square feet of office and 14,407 square feet of ground-floor retail). The building entitlements include Adjustment Permits for four deviations from the Zoning Code, including: building height; to exceed FAR in one FAR district; to not construct the building at the property lines on E. Colorado Boulevard and S. El Molino Avenue; and to reduce the required number of loading spaces from five to two. The building entitlements also include a floor area ratio increase of 10%. The project design cannot be required to be altered such that the applicant involuntarily relinquishes any of these adjustments.
2. A six-level subterranean parking garage with a total of 522 parking spaces. The garage would include 155 spaces for public parking. Garage access is from S. El Molino Avenue. The 155 public parking spaces available at all times, and the 367 project parking spaces available after hours were specifically cited in the Statement of Overriding Considerations adopted by Council. The number of parking spaces (project or public) cannot be reduced.
3. A plaza for public use on S. El Molino Avenue. The plaza was specifically cited in approvals for a variance to allow an increased setback on S. El Molino and cited as a public benefit of the project in the Statement of Overriding Considerations adopted by the Council. The landscaped area and enhanced hardscape outdoor public open space as approved by Council was approximately 9,800 square feet, the vast majority of which included the plaza. The plaza cannot be

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<sup>1</sup> The applicant may consent to reductions in any land use entitlements already granted so long as such reductions do not undermine the integrity of the findings supporting any land use approvals.

substantially reduced beyond that square footage.

4. A pedestrian paseo linking the Arcade Lane building and its retail shops to the east with the proposed new retail development and S. El Molino Avenue to the west. The provision of the paseo was cited in approvals for a variance to allow an increased setback on S. El Molino and cited as a public benefit of the project in the Statement of Overriding Considerations adopted by the Council. The paseo cannot be deleted.

The City Council also certified an EIR for the project, and found that the above land use approvals did not result in significant historic or aesthetic effects from the project. The Council relied on review to be conducted through the design review process and consideration of the Playhouse District Design Guidelines to ensure the continued integrity of those findings. Accordingly, in conducting design review the Council is to start with the premise that the building as already approved on November 16, 2009 does not have significant aesthetic impacts, and is consistent with the City's General Plan, zoning code and other applicable regulatory requirements as set forth in the EIR and land use findings made by the Council. Prior to granting concept design review, the Council is asked to find that any changes arising from changes required through design review or voluntarily provided by the applicant continue to have a less than significant aesthetic and historic effect and remain within the findings already adopted by Council on November 16, 2009.

#### ***Options for Action by the City Council***

According to the Zoning Code (PMC §17.72.070 B), the City Council has the following options on this call for review.

1. Approve the application for concept design with conditions of approval as set forth in this report, or as modified by Council.
  - a. Council may require 50% design review of the project.
    - i. If the Council chooses to require 50% design review, it may be held by either the Council, Design Commission, or Director of Planning and Development. Staff is recommending that the 50% design review be conducted by the Design Commission.
    - ii. Pursuant to the Code the 50% design review is advisory only and not subject to call for review or an appeal.
  - b. Pursuant to PMC §17.61.030.F, final design review is required.
    - i. The Director would be the review authority at final design review unless Council directs such authority to either the Design

Commission or itself. Staff is recommending that final design review be conducted by the Design Commission.

- ii. Final design review can be appealed or called for review.
2. Continue review of the application to a specific date and ask the applicant to return to Council with additional design studies.
3. Refer the application back to the Design Commission for further consideration and action with specific instructions, or to consider certain design issues and submittal of a recommendation to the City Council which would continue to act as the decision-making body for concept design review.
4. Disapprove the application.

If the Council, like the Design Commission, “fails to act” on the application, the April 26<sup>th</sup> decision of the Design Commission would be reinstated, and the application would be effectively disapproved.

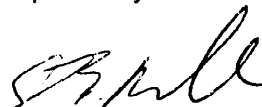
**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The applicant has paid the fee for Concept Design Review (\$11,705) as well as for the other land-use entitlements and environmental study, totaling \$14,823.39 (plus the cost of the traffic study). The City will require further additional fees for Final Design Review, as well as plan check, permits fees and a construction tax on a building permit.

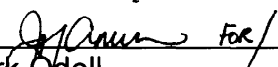
**CONCLUSION:**

The height differentiations of the building modules, the introduction of a larger open-air plaza space and the modulation of the structure, increased glazing, structural referencing on the facades and a preliminary resolution of the tower element with a Colorado Boulevard public entry, as a whole, have significantly improved from the previous design iterations. Further close study of the project through the next two phases of design review, with particular focus on the open space, glazing, and materiality on each elevation, will be important to insure that this building is an appropriate and aesthetically pleasing addition to the Playhouse District.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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**Attachments:**

Attachment A - Concept Design conditions

Attachment B - Plans, renderings and elevations

Attachment C - Prior Land Use Approvals and Response to Guidelines