

## ATTACHMENT H

# MOULE & POLYZOIDES

ARCHITECTS AND URBANISTS

### MEMORANDUM

To: John Steinmeyer  
From: Moule & Polyzoides for IDS  
Date: September 8, 2011  
Re: Playhouse Plaza - Design Narrative  
cc:

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The following addresses item G. "Design Narrative" on the Concept Design Review Submittal Requirements and the referenced eight items listed on item E. "Design Narrative" Preliminary Consultation Submittal Requirements.

**1. How does the proposed building relate to its site and to its neighbors in terms of setbacks, height, massing, scale, frontage, materiality, open space, landscape, solar orientation and topography?** - The contextual fit between the Playhouse Plaza project and its Playhouse District setting is based upon three design strategies. All operate at the scale of the block. The first is in the way the public realm is bounded and activated. The second is in the sculpting and placement of the building's massing. The third is in the design of its ground floor plan:

At zero setback, the street wall and by extension the street space and street scape are continued and completed both on Colorado and El Molino. A new, courtyard, complimentary in geometry and dimensions is located across the existing, historic Pasadena Playhouse courtyard. A paseo and second courtyard complete the open space network in a pattern that integrates the vertical, horizontal and service movements through the entire site, and connects to the public realm of the rest of the Playhouse District.

The building is divided into a variety of discreet volumes, in a manner characteristic of its urban surroundings. The aerial view of the model describes how consistent this strategy is with the existing built patterns of the blocks adjacent to the site. The five story office block is placed in the corner of Colorado and El Molino. From there, an interconnected three- story office building extends all the way to the southern edge of the site, stepping down to two stories in the last 62 feet. In front of it, and along El Molino, one- story building volumes reinforce the visual prominence of the Playhouse. All three sets of buildings are rendered in complimentary materials and styles.

The ground floor of the entire project is continuously open to its adjacent sidewalks, and to courtyards internal to it.

A retail frontage throughout allows for commercial uses, stores and restaurants to be flexibly accommodated. The principal pedestrian entrance to the project is off Colorado Blvd.

Entrance to the garage is at the southern and topographically lowest point on the site, and set back from El Molino by over 60 feet. All parking and the service bays are placed underground, protecting the edge of the El Molino block frontage.

**2. If the proposed building is immediately adjacent to a lower-density zone, what measures have been employed to ensure that the proposed building is appropriate to and not a visual nuisance to existing, smaller scale buildings in lower-density zone? -**

The massing of the project protects the visual prominence and monumental character of the lower buildings in its immediate vicinity, namely both the Playhouse and the Arcade Building.

The Playhouse remains the dominant building on El Molino. The scale of the Arcade building is reflected into the base of the new Colorado office block. Access to light and air for the Arcade building are protected by stepping back the new building in plan and providing a 20 foot sideyard against its western side.

**3. What style has been chosen for the proposed building and why? -** A project that extends across two density and three height zones, and is arrayed on half a city block must be rendered in more than one style. This is in order for its scale to be reduced, and for its various masses and dimensional datums to become visually bonded to the diverse buildings in its immediate vicinity.

The two new retail/ restaurant buildings facing El Molino are designed as vernacular Pasadena brick commercial blocks. Almost the same in frontage, height, and material, they are presented as different from each other in both overall form and detail, in the interest of architectural variety and consistency with the character of the Playhouse District. The three story office building in the middle of the block is designed in a serial composition typical of of 1950's and 60's Southern California office block types, mainly because of its rhythmic horizontality and its symmetrical, axial entrance elevation, facing the Playhouse. The massing and style of the five story office block is inspired by some of the great proto- modern office buildings of the 1920's. The balance between its glass and wall surface, the depth and verticality of its principal elevational panels, the complex folding of its corners on Colorado, have their precedent in the quiet, abstract classicism of the Deco style.

**4. What is the design concept or architectural logic of the design presented? -** New buildings must be designed into urban settings in order to both project their individual architectural presence, and to promote the overall form of the city, at the same time. In this case, we have designed a building in many parts, some large and monumental, and others small and simple. The former stand out, the latter blend and complete the anonymous building fabric and the public realm of the Playhouse District.

**5. What materials and finishes are proposed and how will they be employed to express the permanence of the building and to reinforce the design concept? -** Job one of sustainability at the building scale is permanence of construction. The portions of the office blocks facing the public realm of the streets are constructed in light pre-cast concrete. The portions facing the interior of the block are finished in hard-troweled plaster. The two lower commercial buildings facing El Molino are constructed in brick.

**6. What makes the proposed building particular to Pasadena? How does it contribute and respond to Pasadena's architectural legacy and climate?** The compositional strategy employed in site plan, massing and style is common to Pasadena's Central District, particularly the corridor between Green and Union, centering on Colorado Blvd.

**7. If the proposed building is adjacent to a designated or eligible historic resource, what measures have been employed to insure that the proposed building responds to or enhances the historic resource?** The scaling of the two El Molino buildings and the geometry and dimensions of the new public space between them, are expressly calibrated to promote the visual prominence of the Pasadena Playhouse. Every care is also taken to build next to the Arcade building by respecting its form and material, and by not overwhelming it.

**8. What green building measures, including passive environmental control strategies and/or active environmental control systems, does the building incorporate into its design?** Reducing sun exposure through opaqueness, cross ventilating commercial spaces on the ground floor, maximizing access to natural lighting for offices in section, self shading for courtyards, are the principal passive environmental design techniques utilized in the project. On the active environmental systems side, the project will conform to the new California Green Building Code.