

# Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL

DATE: JULY 9, 2001

FROM: CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: APPEAL OF CONSOLIDATED DESIGN APPROVAL OF THE BOSTON COURT THEATER (70 N. MENTOR AVENUE)

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## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Acknowledge the previous decision of the City Council (on March 19, 2001) to issue a categorical exemption for this project (Class 3 and Class 32) under the California Environmental Quality Act and an expressive use permit.
2. Acknowledge that on March 22, 2001, the City Clerk filed a categorical exemption with the Los Angeles County Clerk for the project.
3. Find that the design of the project complies with the Urban Design Objectives and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan; the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, and the Purposes of Design Review in §17.92.010 of the Zoning Code.
4. Based on this finding, affirm the decision of the Design Commission to approve as submitted the application for consolidated design review with the following conditions:

The design of the southern portion of the west façade (the wall of the recital hall) shall be modified to include more visual interest to pedestrians. (Pasadena Downtown Urban Design Guidelines-Design Principles and Criteria: *Buildings should be inviting and should sustain attention*). The modified design shall be reviewed and approved by staff prior to issuance of a building permit. The developer shall consider the inclusion of landscape elements near the building on the north and west facades, and shall explore options to enrich the appearance of the concrete masonry unit (CMU) material (e.g. by burnishing the exterior).

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The site is a 34,000 square-foot interior lot on the east side of N. Mentor Ave. between E. Colorado Blvd. and E. Union Street. Currently, it is used as a parking lot. It is in the Central District Specific Plan subarea a5 and has a CD-2 zoning designation. The block includes condominiums, commercial uses, an office building, and a parking garage.

The proposed building is at the western end of the irregular-shaped lot with a partial 5-foot setback from N. Mentor Ave. for egress from the recital hall. The building meets the southern property line, where it abuts a two-story commercial structure. It is 12,209 square feet.

The first floor has a 99-seat theater, a 61-seat recital hall, lobby with box office, offices, dressing rooms, and storage. The second floor has a catwalk and room for technical equipment. The building is Type 5 construction with a combination of steel and wood framing and walls comprised of tan-colored, concrete masonry units. A coated, corrugated galvanized metal is used for portions of the roof and door canopies. The building features curved roof forms, a corner entrance, steel lintels, and an electronic marquee.

A two-way driveway is located between the building and the northern property line, which leads to a 45-space parking lot that covers approximately one-half of the site. Portions of the site are enclosed by cement block walls at the property lines. The project proposes to fill in the unfenced areas with six-foot to eight-foot cement block walls and to include a 3-foot wide planting strip along the perimeter of the site. The proposed parking lot and fences satisfy the requirements of the City's zoning code.

## **BACKGROUND AND DESIGN ISSUES**

On February 7, 2001, the Zoning Hearing Officer (ZHO) reviewed an application for an Expressive Use Permit (EUP) for the proposed project. The ZHO's decision was appealed to the City Council, which upheld the ZHO's decision and approved the EUP on March 19, 2001.

As part of a separate entitlement, the developers of the theater also applied for design approval of their project. On March 3, 2001, the staff approved an application for Consolidated Design Review. By code, the Planning Director conducts design review for new construction under 25,000 square feet in this sub-district of the Central District. These decisions, however, are listed on the agenda of the Design Commission for a possible call for review. The decision appeared on the April 9 agenda of the Design Commission, which the Commission called for review.

On April 23, the Design Commission approved the application by a vote of 4-1 with one condition and two recommendations. The Commission supported the staff's decision that the design of the southern portion of the west façade (which fronts N. Mentor Ave.) should be modified to increase visual interest for pedestrians because, as proposed, this wall does not have openings or variations in building plane, materials, texture, or color. The Commission also recommended two ways of possibly enhancing the appearance of the building: 1) including landscape elements on the north and west facades; and 2) enriching the appearance of the concrete masonry unit (CMU) material (possibly by burnishing the exterior). Burnished block is specially-treated by the manufacturer to achieve a more authentic, stone-like appearance.

On June 6, the Lake/Colorado Business Property Owners' Coalition appealed the Design Commission's decision to the City Council. The Coalition based its appeal on objections to the proposed location of ingress and egress (driveway), asserting that it will create traffic congestion at the corner of Boston Court and N. Mentor Avenue. The appeal also referred to the general plan's urban design policies, the Downtown Pasadena Urban Design Plan, and the purposes of Design Review.

## **ANALYSIS**

As part of their application for a use permit, the developers of the theater submitted a site plan and traffic analysis to the City's Public Works and Transportation Department. The Department reviewed this submittal on March 2, 2001 and concluded that traffic volume will increase somewhat along N. Mentor Ave. because there is only one driveway to the site. The Department found, however, that the impact will be less than significant for four reasons:

- The proposed two-way driveway is in the same location as the present driveway to the existing public parking lot for 81 cars. The proposed parking lot would accommodate 45 cars. The present driveway, which is used frequently by patrons, currently does not cause congestion or adverse impacts.
- The design of the proposed parking lot allows several cars to queue for spaces on-site instead of queuing on N. Mentor Ave
- The theater's most heavily attended performances will be on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, which do not coincide with the weekday peak travel period in the surrounding area which typically lasts from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
- The proposed driveway and site plan meet all requirements of the municipal and building codes.

### **Categorical Exemption under the California Environmental Quality Act**

This evaluation of traffic impacts by the Public Works & Transportation staff influenced the decision that the theater project qualifies for a categorical exemption under CEQA. The Council confirmed this decision when it approved the expressive use permit. The categorical exemption cites the Infill Development exemption, Section 15332. In order to be characterized as an in-fill development, a project must meet the following: it is consistent with the development standards of the zoning code; the site is less than five acres; it has no value as a habitat for endangered species; it will not result in significant impacts on traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality; and the site is served by all required utilities and public services.

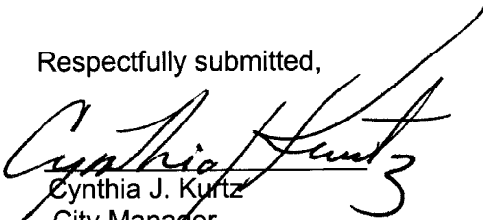
## **CONCLUSION**

The proposed design successfully meets Pasadena's Downtown Urban Design Guidelines if modified to comply with the recommended condition of approval. The building is a creative architectural design that generally enhances the pedestrian experience and uses high quality building materials (*Architectural Design Policies 1, 5, 6*). The design integrates architectural features that add visual interest and transparency along the N. Mentor Ave. The extensive use of glazing for the main entrance and lobby windows creates an inviting appearance to the theater (*Fundamental Qualities of Building and Open Space*). The height and scale of the building are appropriate for this commercial urban neighborhood in the Central District.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

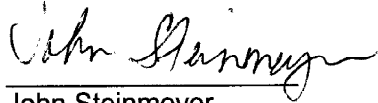
Decisions affecting the design of the Boston Court Theater will not affect revenues to the City. The General Fee Schedule specifies fees to cover the cost of conducting design review and plan check. Any modifications to the design of the proposed new building and its site will not impose costs on the City.

Respectfully submitted,



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