

Agenda Report

TO: City Council

DATE: July 21, 2003

FROM: City Manager

SUBJECT: Appeal of Design Commission decision to deny the application for Consolidated Design Review for the expansion of the 2nd floor and addition of new glazing (L.A. Fitness, 201 S. Lake Avenue)

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Acknowledge that this project has been determined to be Categorically Exempt from environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act, Section 15301, Existing Facilities.
2. Acknowledge that the project does not affect any protected trees.
3. Find that the design of the project complies with the City-wide Design Principles in the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the Urban Design Objectives and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the Purposes of Design Review, and the Central District Design Guidelines;
4. Reverse the decision of the Design Commission and approve the application for consolidated design as revised.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE DESIGN COMMISSION:

1. Find that the design of the project does not comply with the applicable guidelines; and
2. Deny the application for consolidated design review.

On June 9, 2003, the Design Commission reviewed the application for Consolidated Design Review (as a call for review of a staff decision) and voted to deny the application on a 5-3 vote. It was the majority opinion that the changes were an inappropriate alteration to the building's original design. The Commissioners were concerned that by extending the glazing beyond the existing footprint of the second

floor, the proposed design altered the character-defining feature of cantilevering. They also noted that the mechanical enclosure details needed further refinement.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

In response to the decision by the Design Commission and the Commissioners' discussion, the applicant, Creative Energy (for the owner Aetna Life Insurance Company) has modified their original proposal. They now propose recessing the glass curtain wall 3 feet from the original proposal and reducing the length of the enclosure at the corners to further maintain the cantilevered effect (See Attachment B).

BACKGROUND:

The project site is on the southwest corner of South Lake Avenue and East Cordova Street. The surrounding land uses include: office and residential (under construction) to the north, office buildings to the south and west, and retail, restaurant and office to the east. The project under review is the expansion of the existing second-floor area by extending the existing glazed wall by 11'7" on both the north and south elevations for a total addition of 3,396 SF. The existing square footage of the 2nd floor is 6,938; the new, total square footage for the 2nd floor will be 10,334 SF. The applicant has already received a Conditional Use Permit for shared parking due to the increase of square footage.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

Historic/Architectural Significance

The 8-story office complex—of three mid-rise buildings organized around a central courtyard—was built in 1966. William Pereira (1909-1985) was the architect and William Simpson, the contractor.

Although this complex was designed by a significant architect and constructed by a regionally significant contractor, the building is not considered a historic resource and does not meet the requirement of "exceptional significance" to justify listing as a resource under 50 years of age in the National Register. Similarly, alterations, specifically changes to design of the plaza and south elevation, make it less desirable as an individual landmark.

Among the four projects in Pasadena designed by Pereira, this building and the original Parson's office complex do not currently possess sufficient architectural integrity to qualify for any historic designation. The consultants conducting an updated historic resources survey of the Central District omitted both of these buildings from the survey. The 201 South Lake complex is of lesser significance than the 9-story Union Bank building (301 E. Colorado; 1964; Welton Becket, architect), which has had fewer alterations. By comparison, however, two other local works by Pereira, the Union Bank building (1963), formerly at 171 S. Lake and

demolished in 1997, and the Robinson's Department Store (1957; now Target) in the Playhouse District, are decidedly more prominent examples of his work.

Although the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation are not applied in this case, the proposal is consistent with those standards, namely:

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Massing

The massing and scale of this building are consistent with the conventions of Corporate International Style popular during the 1960s. Even with the proposed alteration to the second floor, much of the cantilevered and floating effect of the original design will remain intact. The proposed glass is clear and the structural piers are visible through the glazing. In addition, the expansion is only on the north and south elevations, the east and west elevations are unchanged.

CONCLUSION:

Staff considered the following issues in its analysis of the proposed design for the 2nd floor of 201 S. Lake:

- The building, though visually dominant on Lake Avenue, is not a historic resource. Nevertheless, the proposed alterations still meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings;
- The building has a lesser level of architectural significance than two other Pereira-designed buildings in Pasadena;
- The building is not eligible for individual landmark status and is not considered a contributor to the Central District;
- The building has had similar changes over time including a complete resurfacing and redesign of the courtyard and the addition of a glass shed on the south elevation;
- The proposal is compatible in design and scale with the rest of the building and could be removed in the future;
- The relocated walls have a high level of transparency of walls which permit views of the structural piers;
- The floating and cantilevered effects of the "office tower on pilotis" are largely retained;
- The changes are not at street level and do not affect the way in which the building engages the street and pedestrian views;
- The glazed infill design complies with the Central District Design Guidelines for Lake Avenue, e.g.:

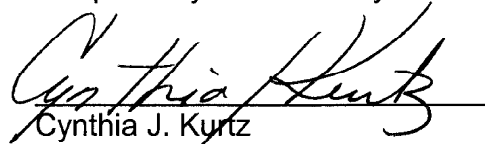
Emphasizing the simplicity and clarity that is characteristic of many buildings along Lake Avenue...International Style precedents, an uncluttered design motif, and transparent windows simply and effectively add three-dimensional interest. (Section 10); and

Based on these considerations and in particular the transparency of the design, staff recommends approval of the proposal as revised.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There are very limited fiscal impacts to the City as a result of this application. Permit fees will be collected and upon completion, the project will generate a modest increase in sales tax revenues to the City.


Respectfully submitted by:


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LIST OF ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A Request for Appeal of Design Commission Decision
- Attachment B Project Plans and Elevations

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