

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER  
**MEMORANDUM**

**TO: City Council**

**FROM: City Manager**

**DATE: February 25, 2008**

**SUBJECT: Call for Review - Application for Consolidated Design Review -  
New Construction of Twenty-one Unit Condominium at  
229-247 South Marengo Avenue**

At a public hearing on February 4, 2008, the City Council reviewed the attached application for consolidated design review of a proposed new development at 229 S. Marengo. This review was a call for review of a decision by the Design Commission. At the hearing, members of the City Council had several questions and asked the staff to return with answers on February 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Question #1**

**Evaluate the rents of the existing apartments at the two buildings on the property (229-247 S. Marengo Avenue) to determine if they are affordable to households with low or moderate incomes (“affordable units”)?**

Response from staff:

City staff reviewed rent tables (submitted from the property owner) for the 16 existing units for the months of June and July 2007. The rents range from \$650/month for a 250-s.f. studio to \$1,100/month for a 550-s.f. two-bedroom apartment. According to the income and rent schedules adopted by the City Council in 2007, the ten studios and the four one-bedroom units are affordable to both low-income and moderate-income households (based on maximum rents of \$792 for the studios and \$904 for the one-bedroom apartments). The two two-bedroom units are above the maximum rent for a low-income household but are affordable for a moderate-income household. It should be noted that these are very small units.

**Question #2****Verify if the project is in the Central District and what this means in terms of overall development?**

Response from staff:

The project site is in the boundaries of the Central District Specific Plan (Old Pasadena sub-district) and the General Plan designation for the Central District. The implementing zoning for this “In-Town Housing” district of the Central District is the RM or multi-family residential zoning district. The In-Town Housing District was formerly zoned CD-7 and CD-7A, but during the Central District Specific Plan process it was changed to multi-family zoning. The project site’s zoning designation is now RM-48 (multi-family residential 0-48/units acre) and new development is subject to the City of Gardens development standards. The planning concepts for the site—the uses, the residential densities, the planning objectives—are in the Central District Specific Plan as well as the design guidelines for new construction in this location.

**Question #3****Verify if the project is within ¼ mile of a light-rail station and what this means in terms of transit-oriented development (TOD)?**

Response from staff:

The site is within ¼ mile of a light-rail station platform (Del Mar). According to §17.50.340.3 (Transit-Oriented Development) of the zoning code, only those projects within the Central District Specific Plan, identified in figure 3-5 (Central District Transit-Oriented Area) – Attachment A, are subject to the TOD requirements (including reduced parking standards). The ¼-mile provision applies to projects outside the Central District Specific Plan. In this case, the site is in the Central District Plan, but outside the boundaries identified in figure 3-5; as such, it is not subject to the ¼-mile provision. Based on this information, the site is not subject to the TOD standards.

This Central District TOD District map was created because there is extensive bus service and the ¼ mile radius was extended in some areas of the Central District. The map was redrawn to include the high-density areas and removed lower-density residential areas such as the areas zoned RM-48 along South Marengo. The Council adopted the map as part of the Central District Specific Plan and the zoning code.

**Question #4**

**To the degree possible, look into the impact of the project and light and air quality for the residents to the immediate north and south of the project?**

Response from staff:

The project complies with the development standards for height, front-yard setback, side-yard setback, and light-and-air separation in P.M.C. §17.22.060. By code, new structures are required to maintain a minimum separation of 15 feet from existing buildings on neighboring sites (side yards) for a distance of 40 feet behind the front setback line. The purpose of these requirements is to ensure an adequate amount of light, air, privacy, and open space between new and existing buildings. For a window with an area of less than 16 square feet, the minimum separation is 10 feet. Any window larger than 16 square feet must be 15 feet away.

The setbacks and the building envelope at 229 S. Marengo comply with these standards for side-yard separation, for light-and-air separation (§17.22.020 C), and for views into the main garden (§17.22.080 A 5), (§17.22.40.160 D). The front-yard setback for is 25 feet. The side-yard setback is 5 feet. On the north side, the distance to neighboring buildings varies from 16 feet to 17 feet—and to 21 feet to the rear building. On the south side, the separation from the existing building is 25 feet. The rear setback to the Milan Lofts project (under construction) is approximately eight feet. The opening to the main garden, as viewed from south Marengo, is approximately 15 feet. The accompanying exhibit (ATTACHMENT B) illustrates the light-and-air separations between the proposed project and adjacent properties.

An overarching principle of the RM (City of Gardens) standards is recreating the traditional courtyard plan of apartment complexes from the early and mid-twentieth century: “each multi-family project shall have a landscaped open space as its central focus” §17.22.080 A). This objective necessitates the placement of buildings at the outer edges of a site and concentrates light and air in the main garden. The intent of the City of Gardens requirements is to minimize side and rear yards and combine those setback areas into a central garden.

**Question #5**

**Identify other neighborhoods in a similar transition to the S. Marengo/Cordova area?**

Response from staff:

There is no equivalent condition of an existing multi-family neighborhood experiencing new infill construction, new development surrounding a light-rail station, and major expansion of a City facility (the convention center). Residential neighborhoods along E. Walnut and Union Streets, primarily west of N. Lake, have had a concentration of new

development consisting of both commercial and residential. There are, however, neighborhoods zoned for medium-density housing which are not built to the zoned density and, therefore, could undergo a similar transition. Staff will examine these areas and make zoning recommendations for them during the General Plan land-use update.

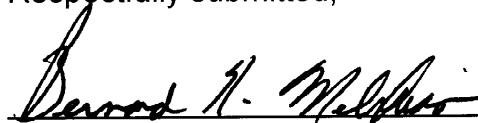
**Question #6**

**Were stairs required on the Cordova side of the Cinema Lofts project (217 S. Marengo Avenue)? If so, what happened to them?**

Response from staff:

In 2004, during design review of the project, the Design Commission requested the developer to add exterior stairs to connect the lower-level units facing Cordova with the sidewalk. This was not made a condition of approval. The developer agreed to this request, and the plans submitted for building plan check included the stairs along the north (Cordova) edge of the project site. During plan check, it was discovered that the stairs extended over a small strip of land that belongs to the City and, therefore, could not be constructed. City staff informed the developer that construction of the stairs required a lease agreement with the City. Because of the complications over the title to this piece of land, the developer chose not to apply for a lease agreement.

Respectfully submitted,



**BERNARD K. MELEKIAN**

City Manager

## **ATTACHMENTS**

**ATTACHMENT A:** TOD Map of Central District

**ATTACHMENT B:** Plan View of Project at 229 S. Marengo Avenue with Setbacks