

Agenda Report

May 20, 2013

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Planning & Community Development Department

**SUBJECT: PREDEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW OF PROJECT LOCATED AT
1727-1787 EAST WALNUT AVENUE AND 235 NORTH ALLEN
AVENUE**

RECOMMENDATION:

This report is for information only, no City Council action is required.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY:

AMCAL Equities, Inc. has submitted a Predevelopment Plan Review (PPR) application to develop the properties located at 1727-1787 East Walnut Street and 235 North Allen Avenue with a mixed-use project of 128 rental apartments, 5,000 square feet of retail/restaurant space, and 217 parking spaces. The project would have two buildings over one-level of subterranean parking. In addition, Meridith Avenue would be vacated by the City as part of the proposal.

The site was previously occupied by Davis Lumber (which closed on June 30, 2012) on the eastern portion of the site and an auto repair business, on the western portion. The eastern portion of the site is within the East Colorado Specific Plan, while the western portion is zoned CG (Commercial, General).

The PPR process is established in the City's Zoning Code as a process by which better projects can be achieved through early consultation between City staff and applicants. The process coordinates the review of projects among City staff, familiarizes applicants with the regulations and procedures that apply to the projects, and avoids significant investment in the design of a project without preliminary input from City staff. It also helps to identify issues that may arise during application processing such as community concerns and achieving consistency with City regulations and policies.

Projects that meet the threshold of "community-wide significance" (greater than 50,000 square feet in size with at least one discretionary action, 50 or more housing units, or any project that is deemed by the Director of Planning & Community Development

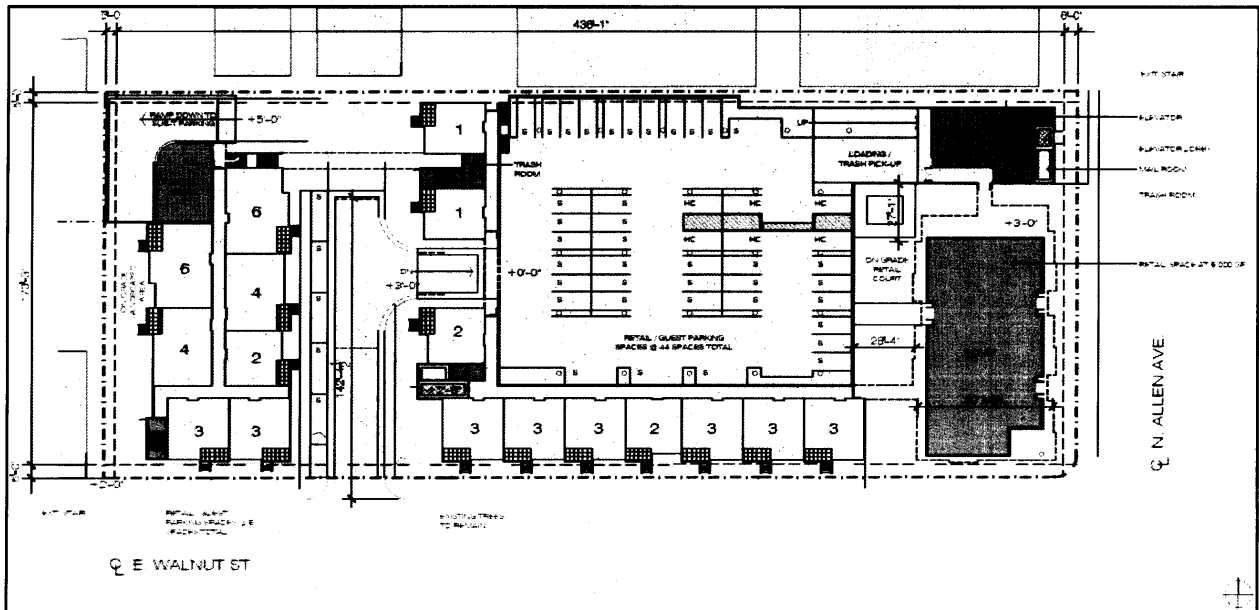
Department to be of major importance to the City) are presented to the City Council as way to inform them and the public of significant projects.

This report provides a project description, identifies the entitlement and environmental review processes, and some topic areas that staff will focus on during case processing.

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The subject site is comprised of five properties and a dead-end section of Meridith Avenue. The former Davis Lumber encompasses four properties, on the eastern portion of the site, totaling 56,816 square feet (1.3 acres), while the remaining property on the west side is 13,930 square feet. When the Meridith Avenue portion of the site is included, the overall project site totals 80,895 square feet (1.86 acres). All of the existing buildings on the entire site are proposed for removal.

As proposed in the PPR application and plans, the west side of the site would have a 38-foot tall, three-story building with 25 rental apartment units. On the east side of the site would be a 58-foot tall, four-story building with 5,000 square feet of ground floor commercial space and 103 rental apartment units. 44 of the 217 total parking spaces would be located on the ground level. These spaces would be allocated for residential guest parking and the commercial tenant customers. Access to the site would occur from Walnut Street along a private driveway where Meridith Avenue is currently located. There would be no access to/from Allen Avenue. The proposed site plan is shown below:



DISCRETIONARY ENTITLEMENTS

The proposed project requires three discretionary entitlements:

- Street Vacation of Meridith Avenue;
- Conditional Use Permit to construct housing (as part of a mixed-use project) on the CG-zoned portion of the site (west of Meridith Avenue) per Section 17.50.040 (Transit-Oriented Development) of the Zoning Code, as this portion of the site is located within ¼ mile of a light-rail station platform (the Allen Gold-Line station); and
- Design Review for a project that exceeds 5,000 square feet in size along a designated Major Corridor (East Walnut Street).

Conditional Use Permits are typically heard by a Hearing Officer. However, this project includes a Street Vacation, which requires a recommendation by the Planning Commission and a final decision by the City Council. Therefore, all aspects of the project (the Conditional Use Permit, Street Vacation, and environmental review) will be reviewed by the Planning Commission for a recommendation to the City Council for final action. If the project is approved by the City Council, the project will be subject to review by the Design Commission.

PREDEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW SUMMARY

On February 28, 2013 a meeting was held to discuss the PPR comments with the applicant team and staff from City departments/divisions, including Community Planning, Zoning Administration, Design & Historic Preservation, Fire, Public Works, Transportation, and Water. The applicant team asked a number of specific questions to clarify some of the PPR comments, as well as the processes for entitlements and building permits. Based on the PPR comments, the applicant team indicated that portions of the project would be redesigned to be brought into compliance with all applicable zoning regulations; no variances or deviations would be sought. Below is a summary of some of the PPR comments:

Zoning Code

As shown below (Figure 1: *Site and Surrounding Zoning*), the western portion of site is zoned CG (Commercial, General) and the eastern portion is zoned ECSP-CG-3 (East Pasadena Specific Plan area, Gold Line-General Commercial area). Below are some of the applicable Zoning Code development standards and how the project has addressed them.

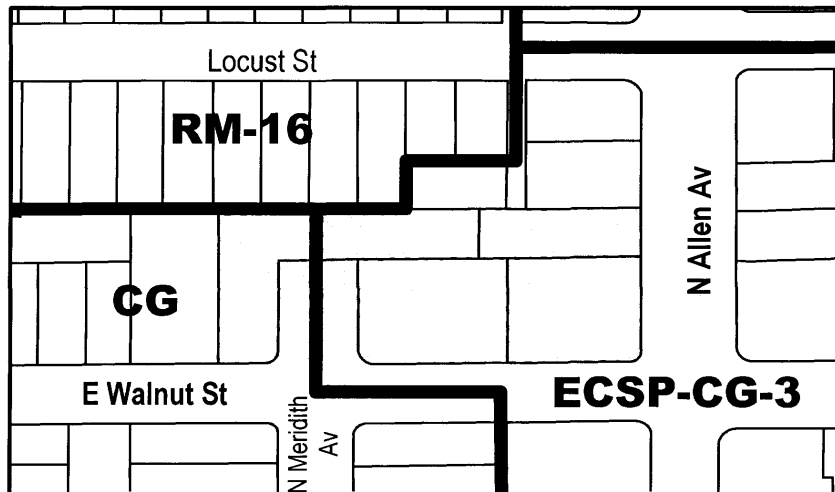


Figure 1: Site and Surrounding Zoning

Residential Density and Density Bonus: Within the CG zoning district, and per the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) section of the Zoning Code, the maximum allowed residential density is 48 units per acre. Based on that maximum density and an area of 0.44 acres, the maximum allowable density is 21 units. Within the ECSP-CG-3 zoning district the maximum allowable housing density is 60 units per acre. With an area of 1.42 acres, this results in a maximum number of 85 units, for a total of 106 units. However, the applicant intends to use the Density Bonus provisions of the Zoning Code (for affordable housing projects) to increase the number of units on the site to 128 units (25 on the CG portion and 103 on the ECSP-CG-3 portion), an increase of 21 percent.

The applicant will work with the Housing Department on an Inclusionary Housing Plan and all applicable documentation for affordable housing units.

Setbacks: Within the CG zoning district, a minimum five-foot setback is required for the front yard. The side and rear setbacks require a minimum 15-foot setback and the building shall not project within the encroachment plane when adjacent to an RM-16, RM-32, or RM-48 zone. The rear of this portion of the site is adjacent to an RM-16 zone and therefore must meet both of these requirements. The encroachment plane begins 20 feet above the property line and angles in at 45 degrees.

As proposed, the rear yard setback for the building on the CG portion of the site is five feet. This does not comply with the ten-foot minimum requirement and by extension the encroachment plane requirement. The applicant indicated that they intend to redesign to comply with both of these requirements.

Within the ECSP-CG-3 zoning district, a five foot setback is required for the front and corner yards. The same 15-foot minimum setback (when adjacent to a RM-16 zoned property) and encroachment plane requirements as described above also apply. Approximately the western 100 feet of this portion of the site is adjacent to RM-16 zoned properties, whereas the remaining eastern portion of the site is not. Additional clarification will be needed in future submittals to confirm setback and encroachment

plane requirements are met. The remainder of the proposed setbacks on the ECSP-CG-3 portion of the site (five feet on north side, six feet on the south side, and six feet on the east side) meet or exceed the minimum setback requirements.

Height: The maximum allowable height in the CG zoning district is 45 feet. The project building on this portion of the site is 44 feet tall. The maximum allowable height in the ECSP-CG-3 zoning district is 60 feet. The proposed building on this portion of the site ranges in height from 39'-2" to 54'-7".

Size: The CG-portion of the size has a maximum allowable Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.80 of the lot size. As the size of this area (including the vacated area of Meridith Avenue) is 0.44 acres, the resulting maximum allowable size is 15,333 square feet. As proposed, the building is 21,035 square feet, for an FAR of 1.10. The applicant has indicated that the project will be redesigned to comply with the 0.80 maximum FAR. There is not a maximum FAR for the ECSP-CG-3 portion of the site.

Parking: One level of at-grade parking (behind the ground floor units and commercial space on the eastern portion of the site) is proposed for residential guest parking and commercial customers, along with one level of subterranean parking for residents. The parking requirements (including loading and bicycle parking) are governed by the Zoning Code, including the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) section.

For residential uses within the TOD area, the number of required parking spaces is based on unit size (ranging from 1.0 to 1.75 per unit) in addition to providing guest parking. Alternatively, projects such as this that utilize the density bonus provisions of the Zoning Code may also utilize different residential parking standards based on the number of bedrooms. The applicant has indicated an interest in utilizing the latter standard.

For non-residential uses, the parking requirement varies by the land use classification (e.g. retail is 3/1,000 square feet and restaurants is 10/1,000 square feet) and is subject to a mandatory reduction of 25 percent for office uses and 10 percent for all other non-residential uses. Based on the plans submitted, the applicant has not accounted for these reductions, but has indicated that the project will be redesigned to comply.

Conditional Use Permit: Conditional Use Permits are intended to allow for activities and uses which may be desirable in the applicable zoning district and compatible with adjoining land uses, but whose effect on a site and its surroundings cannot be determined before being proposed for a particular location. As a result, the review authority may approve a Conditional Use Permit only after making six specific findings as summarized below:

- The proposed use is allowed within the applicable zoning district and complies with all applicable provisions of this Zoning Code;
- The location of the proposed use complies with the special purposes of the Zoning Code and the purposes of the applicable zoning district;

- The proposed use is in conformance with the goals, policies, and objectives of the General Plan and the purpose and intent of any applicable specific plan;
- The establishment, maintenance, or operation of the use would not be detrimental to the health, safety, or general welfare of persons residing or working in the neighborhood of the proposed use;
- The use would not be detrimental or injurious to property and improvements in the neighborhood or to the general welfare of the City; and
- The design, location, operating characteristics, and size of the proposed use would be compatible with the existing and future land uses in the vicinity in terms of aesthetic values, character, scale, and view protection.

Design and Historic Preservation

Demolition: The single-story structure, built in 1920, at the northwest corner of North Allen Avenue and East Walnut Street is not eligible as an historic resource. No other buildings proposed for demolition appear eligible for such designation. Therefore, a Certificate of Appropriateness is not required to demolish the building(s).

Design Review: Design Review is required as the project exceeds 5,000 square feet in size and is located along East Walnut Street, a designated Major Corridor. Because the size of the project is greater than 25,000 square feet the Design Commission is the review authority. The applicable design guidelines for the project are the *Citywide Design Principles & Criteria* in the General Plan, the *Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial & Multi-Family Districts*, and the *East Colorado Specific Plan Design Guidelines*.

Below are some of the design-related topic areas that were highlighted:

- *Massing:* The project should relate contextually to this urban site in an intelligent, innovative and deliberate fashion. Breaking the mass with additional or expanded views from the public thoroughfare could help to more meaningfully diminish the mass of the building and help create a more pedestrian friendly environment.
- *Siting:* The project is well-sited at the northwest corner of North Allen Avenue and East Walnut Street with emphasis given to the corner in the building design with the incorporation of the heavily glazed ground-floor retail component.
- *Compatibility:* The proposed project appears generally well suited to this site and will help to develop this block as an important urban link for this district within the city. The surrounding buildings and uses are an eclectic mix and building designs do not give a clear indication of architectural style. The new building must create a carefully crafted design that will stand as an example for other projects in the future.
- *Landscaping:* The planning for the open space is critical in creating useable, interconnected landscaped and hardscaped areas that add to the project in a way that encourages pedestrian activity. Permeable paving material and drought

tolerant planting, along with shade trees, should be incorporated in the landscape design.

- *Signage:* Early consideration of the location and type of signage will help to create commercial success while appropriately responding to the design aesthetic for the structure.
- *Materials:* The Citywide Design Principles call for durable, high-quality materials and thus the specification for materials and finishes and the details of their application will be of critical importance in developing a high caliber structure at this prominent location.

General Plan and Specific Plan

General Plan: The General Plan Land Use Policies and Objectives that the proposed project supports include:

- Policy 1.3 – Transit-Oriented and Pedestrian-Oriented Development: Within targeted development areas, cluster development near light rail stations and along major transportation corridors thereby creating transit oriented development “nodes” and encouraging pedestrian access.
- Policy 1.4 – Mixed-Use: Authorize and encourage Mixed Use development in targeted areas, including in-town housing, live-work spaces, and in-town commercial uses.
- Policy 15.2 – Increase Supply: Increase the total number of market rate and affordable housing units within the City.

Staff has identified the following objectives and policies for further consideration:

- Urban Open Spaces: Provide publicly assessable spaces within the project.
- Affordable Housing: Consider providing affordable housing units on site.
- Urban Design: Provide additional information and possibly, additional improvements, that demonstrates that the project’s design and amenities will support the City’s policies to provide pedestrian oriented development.
- Contextual and Compatible Design: The surrounding buildings are low in scale, one to two stories. Consider additional ways of modifying the mass of the building to make the project compatible with the surrounding scale of development.
- Spatial Attributes: Consider design modifications that reduce the project’s impact on mountain views.

Specific Plan: As noted above, only the portion of the site east of Meridith Avenue is within the East Colorado Blvd Specific Plan. The East Colorado Blvd Specific Plan is broken down into sub-areas, with the project site located within the CG-3 sub-area (Gold Line). Page II-25 of the Specific Plan includes a list of goals and objectives. The project conforms to the goal, “*Expand the list of allowable land uses to include multi-family housing on upper floors...*” The project should also strive to comply with the goal,

“Work to beautify key intersections and establish community and sub-area gateways that help to establish a sense of place.”

The Gold Line sub-area strives to connect the Gold Line with Colorado Boulevard, particularly with Pasadena City College. It is acknowledged that additional pedestrian traffic will require wider sidewalk and street edge treatment that is pedestrian friendly and the need for more lighting to create safer passage. Uses encouraged in the Gold Line sub-area include higher density residential with a mix of commercial development with retail on the ground floor and residential and/or office above. These uses would provide a commuter-oriented destination near the Allen Gold Line station and a gateway to the East Colorado Specific Plan area.

General Plan Caps: In 1994, the General Plan allocated 750 housing units, 550,000 square feet of non-residential development, and 100,000 square feet of institutional uses within the East Colorado Specific Plan. As of December 31, 2011, the East Colorado Specific Plan retained a General Plan allocation of 736 housing units and 243,322 square feet of non-residential development potential. The 103 units and 5,000 non-residential square feet proposed on the Specific Plan portion of the site are within the remaining caps (even without removing any affordable units, which do not count towards the remaining caps).

Consistent with the current regulations governing the housing unit and square footage caps, it is only upon the issuance of a building permit that the units and non-residential square footage would be deducted from the remaining caps. If new caps are adopted by the City Council prior to the issuance of the building permit, the project would count towards the new caps.

As the 25 units proposed on the west side of the site are located outside of the Specific Plan, they would not impact the Specific Plan's allocation.

Environmental Review

Pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), an environmental review of the project will occur in order to analyze the project's potential to result in significant impacts, as identified by State and local environmental guidelines. At this time it is not known what level of review will be required. As part of the environmental review of the project a Traffic Impact Study has been prepared (see 'Transportation/Traffic' below).

Transportation/Traffic

The thresholds identified in the City's Traffic Impact Review Guidelines required that a Traffic Impact Study be conducted for the project. Prior to the conclusion of the PPR comment period, the Department of Transportation retained a traffic consultant to prepare such an analysis. The Traffic Impact Study was completed in March 2013 and concluded that the project would not result in any significant traffic impacts.

NEXT STEPS

This project will require approvals involving public hearings before the Planning Commission, Design Commission, and City Council. In addition, an environmental review will occur consistent with the requirements of the CEQA. The following identifies the steps in the review process:

- Preliminary Consultation with Design Commission (occurred on March 11, 2013);
- Environmental Review
- Planning Commission Public Hearing to recommend action on the Street Vacation, Conditional Use Permit, and environmental review;
- City Council Public Hearing for final action on the Street Vacation, Conditional Use Permit, and environmental review; and
- Design Commission reviews (Concept, 50% Advisory Review, and Final).

FISCAL IMPACT:

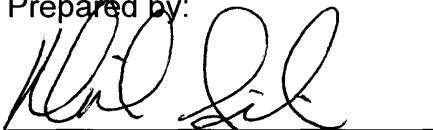
The project has the potential to generate revenue through the collection of Residential Impact fees as well as Transportation Improvement fees. The exact amount of these fees will be determined during the plan check process.

Respectfully submitted,



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Prepared by:



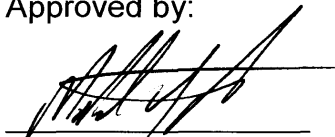
David Sinclair, LEED AP
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Concurred by:



David Reyes
Director of Planning & Community
Development Department

Approved by:



MICHAEL J. BECK
City Manager

Attachment:

Attachment A – Predevelopment Plan Review Plans