

Agenda Report

September 18, 2017

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: PREDEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW OF A NEW MULTI-FAMILY BUILDING AT 253 SOUTH LOS ROBLES AVENUE

RECOMMENDATION:

This report is intended to provide information to the City Council, no action is required.

BACKGROUND:

The applicant, Zhuang & Zhong Los Robles, LLC, has submitted a Predevelopment Plan Review (PPR) application to redevelop the property at 253 South Los Robles Avenue. The property at 253 South Los Robles Avenue is a newly created land lot from the approval of Parcel Map #73462, which subdivided one 85,506 square foot irregular shaped property into two land lots, with Parcel 1, the subject site, measuring 35,502 square feet and Parcel 2 measuring 50,002 square feet.

Staff conducted a site visit on August 30, 2017 to observe the existing site conditions. The site is currently improved with a two-story, 43,500 square-foot commercial office building. The project would demolish the existing commercial building to allow for the construction of a new six-story, multi-family structure with 95 units and two levels of subterranean parking with 133 parking spaces.

The PPR process is established in Section 17.60.040.C of 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 a way to inform Councilmembers and the public of significant projects.

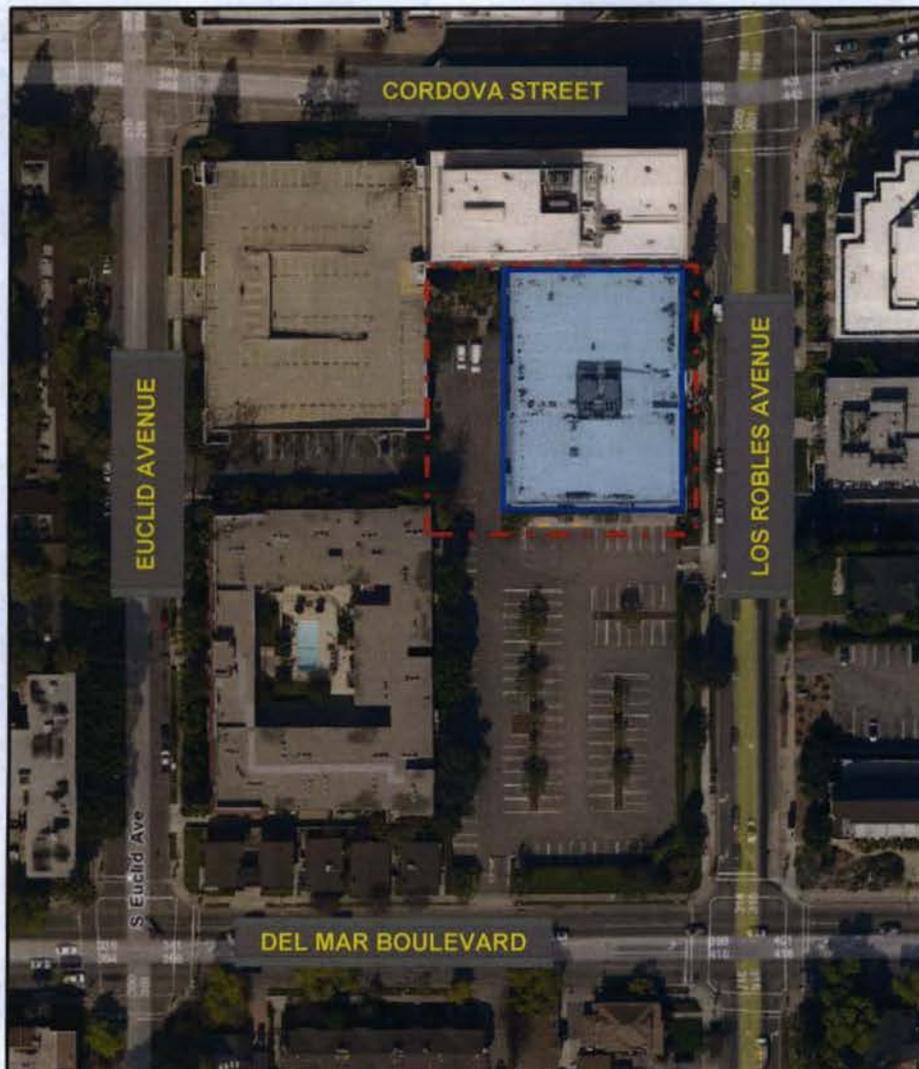
This report provides a project description, identifies the entitlement and environmental review processes, and important topic areas that staff will focus on during case processing.

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The subject site is a rectangular-shaped parcel of land, with frontage on Los Robles Avenue to the east. The 35,502 square-foot site is located in the CD-2 (Central District, Civic Center/Midtown subdistrict) zoning district. The project includes:

- Demolition of a two-story, 43,500 square-foot commercial office building;
- Construction of a six-story 98,859 square-foot multi-family residential building with 95 units; and new three-level subterranean parking garage with 133 parking spaces; and

The aerial map of the existing site and the proposed site plan are shown below:





Project Statistics:

Zoning Designation:	
CD-2 (Central District, Civic Center/Midtown subdistrict)	
General Plan Designation:	
Medium Mixed-Use	
Lot Size:	
35,502 square feet	
Density:	
Maximum Permitted	Proposed
87 units per acre or 71 units	95 units or 117 units per acre
Building Size:	
Maximum Permitted	Proposed
79,880 square feet	98,859 square feet
Floor Area Ratio:	
Maximum Permitted	Proposed

2.25	2.78
Parking Requirement:	
Required	Proposed
1 space for each 0-1 bedroom unit	67 units: 67 spaces
2 spaces for each 2-3 bedroom unit	28 units: 56 spaces
1 guest space for every 10 units	95 units: 9 spaces
Total required: 132 spaces	Total proposed: 133 spaces
Building Height:	
Maximum Permitted	Proposed
60' (75' with height averaging)	80'
Setbacks:	
Required	Proposed
Los Robles Ave: min 5' to max 10'	7'-1"
Rear (west) min 10'	33'-0"
Side (north) min 10'	20'-6"
Side (south) min 10'	10'-8"

Discretionary Entitlements:

The project site is zoned CD-2 (Central District, Civic Center/Midtown Subdistrict), with a maximum residential density of 87 dwelling units per acre and a maximum floor area ratio of 2.25. For the subject 35,502 square foot site, a total of 71 residential units are permitted by right. The density bonus section of the Zoning Code (Section 17.43.040) permits an increase in the number of units permitted on the site, without discretionary approval, provided a specified percentage are designated as affordable units. In this case, the maximum number of units permitted on the property under the base zoning is 71 dwelling units. Designating 11 percent of the allowed base units (i.e., eight units) as very low-income would permit a density bonus of 35 percent (i.e., 25 units), for a total of 96 dwelling units. The proposed 95 dwelling units are within the maximum permitted number of units with the provision of the eight very low-income units.

Pursuant to State law, projects that utilize the density bonus provisions may request one or more concessions. The proposed gross floor area of the project is 98,859 square feet, which equals 2.78 floor area ratio. If the project moves forward as proposed, an Affordable Housing Concession Permit to increase the floor area ratio from the allowed 2.25 to 2.78 would be required. In addition, the proposed height of the structure is 80-feet, while the maximum height permitted on the subject site is 60-feet, or 75-feet, while utilizing height averaging. A second Affordable Housing Concession Permit would be required for the project to exceed the height limit of 60 feet.

Concessions are processed through an Affordable Housing Concession Permit, whose process is the same as a Minor Variance (Sec.17.61.080.C.3). One of the required information for the application submittal is detailed financial information of the project in order to justify the need for the concession(s) for the creation of affordable housing. The City would retain, at the applicant's expense, an economic consultant to review the applicant's financial information. The concession would be approved upon making the following two findings:

- 1) The concession or incentive is required in order for the designated units to be affordable.
- 2) The concession or incentive would not have a specific adverse impact on public health, public safety, or the physical environment, and would not have an adverse impact on a property that is listed in the California Register of Historical Resources, and for which there is no feasible method to satisfactorily mitigated or avoid the specific adverse impact, or adverse impact, without rendering the development unaffordable to low- and moderate-income households. A specific adverse impact is a significant, quantifiable, direct, and unavoidable impact, based on objective, identified written public health or safety standards, policies, or conditions as they existed on the date the application was deemed complete.

Discretionary Entitlements required for the project are as follows:

- Affordable Housing Concession Permit:
 - 1) To exceed the maximum permitted floor area ratio requirement of 2.25, and
 - 2) To exceed the height limit of 60 feet.
- Design Review for a project that exceeds 25,000 square feet in size.

The Affordable Housing Concession Permit would be presented to a Hearing Officer for his/her consideration, along with the appropriate environmental review documentation. The Design Commission is the review authority for Design Review.

PREDEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW SUMMARY:

Zoning Code:

The project site is located within the CD-2 (Central District, Civic Center/Midtown subdistrict) zoning district. The allowable uses and development standards are those of the Central District Specific Plan section of the Zoning Code.

Height: Pursuant to Section 17.30.040, Table 3-2, Figure 3-8, the maximum building height limit is 60 feet. The submitted plans indicate that portions of the building would have a height of up to 80 feet. The 60-foot height limit may be exceeded utilizing Section 17.30.050.B (Height Averaging) of the Zoning Code, subject to the specified height averaging standards. For this site, the maximum permitted height utilizing height averaging is 75 feet. The building may be as tall as 75 feet if no more than 30 percent of the building footprint exceeds the height limit and the overall average height of the building does not exceed 60 feet. In this instance, the applicant is not pursuing height averaging, and the project would require an Affordable Housing Concession Permit to allow a height of 80 feet.

Floor Area: Pursuant to Section 17.30.040, Table 3-2, Figure 3-9, the maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) allowed for the subject site is 2.25. Based on the submitted

information, the project site measures 35,502 square feet and therefore is permitted a 79,880 square foot building.

FAR is the numerical value obtained by dividing the aboveground gross floor area of a building or buildings located on a lot by the total area of the lot. Gross floor area is defined as the total enclosed area of all floors of a building measured to the inside face of the exterior walls including halls, stairways, elevator shafts at each floor level, service and mechanical equipment rooms and basement or attic areas having a height of more than seven feet, but excluding area used exclusively for vehicle parking or loading.

The proposed project would have a gross floor area of 98,859 square feet, or an FAR of 2.78. As proposed, the project would require an Affordable Housing Concession Permit to exceed the FAR.

Open Space: Section 17.50.350.E (Urban Housing) of the Zoning Code includes requirements for open space in residential projects. The minimum requirement for open space is 30 percent of the net floor area of the project. Net floor area is defined as the total size of the project, minus garages, hallways, lobbies, elevators, and other common space.

Open Spaces includes private balconies, at-grade patios, rooftop gardens (including upper level terraces), and a portion of a front or corner side yard that exceeds the minimum setback requirement. However, any of these areas that are intended to count towards the open space requirement must have a minimum dimension of six feet in each direction. Further, balconies may count for a maximum of 35 percent of the total open space requirement.

According to the information provided on the plans, the proposed net floor area of the project is 77,264 square feet therefore a minimum of 23,179 square feet of open space is required, of which a maximum of 8,113 square feet may be provided as private balconies. According to the submitted plans, it is unclear if the project complies with the open space requirement. An open space area is proposed along the west portion of the site, however, this area appears to serve as an access driveway for the property to the west, in which case would not qualify this area as useable open space for the project.

General Plan:

According to the General Plan Land Use Diagram, the subject property is designated as Medium Mixed Use (0-2.25 FAR, and 0-87 dwelling units per acre).

The proposed project proposes a FAR of 2.78 and a density of 117 dwelling units per acre. The project as proposed would exceed both the maximum allowed FAR (2.25 FAR) and the maximum allowed density (87 dwelling units per acre) for the subject site. In order to allow the additional FAR, the project may request an approval of an Affordable Housing Concession Permit if the project is utilizing density bonus, or a variance. Also, in order to allow the additional density, the density bonus provisions of the Zoning Code must be utilized.

In addition, please refer to the section “Specific Plan” below for additional comment regarding the maximum development intensities established by the Central District Specific Plan.

Goals and Policies

The General Plan provides the following policies and objectives that are relevant to the proposed project:

- *Policy 1.3 – Development Capacities: Regulate building intensity and population density consistently with the designations established by the Land Use Diagram. Within these, cumulative new development within the specific plan areas shall not exceed the number of housing units and commercial square feet specified in the table.*

The 2015 General Plan established caps for residential and non-residential development in each of the specific plan areas. Below is a table that demonstrates the caps for the Central District Specific Plan.

	Original Allocation in Existing General Plan	Balance of Allocation in Existing General Plan*
Residential Units	4,272	4,094
Commercial Square Feet	2,112,000	2,061,878

*As of January, 2017

The proposed project consists of 95 residential units. Therefore, the proposed project’s development density is within the remaining development intensity.

- *Policy 2.1 – Housing Choices: Provide opportunities for a full range of housing types, densities, locations, and affordability levels to address the community’s fair share of regional, senior, and workforce housing needs and provide a strong customer base sustaining the economic vitality of Pasadena’s commercial land uses. The types, densities, and location of housing shall be determined by the Land Use Diagram and reflect the projected needs specified in the Housing Element.*

The proposed project is a for-sale multi-family residential development that consists of 95 dwelling units, inclusive of eight affordable units.

- *Policy 4.11 – Development that is Compatible: Require that development demonstrates a contextual relationship with neighboring structures and sites addressing such elements as building scale, massing, orientation, setbacks, buffering, the arrangement of shared and private open spaces, visibility, privacy, automobile and truck access, impacts of noise and lighting, landscaping quality, infrastructure, and aesthetics;*

- *Policy 7.1 – Architectural Quality: Design each building as a high-quality, long term addition to the City’s urban fabric; exterior design and buildings material shall exhibit permanence and quality, minimize maintenance concerns, and extend the life of the building;*
- *Policy 7.3 – Compatibility: Require that new and adaptively re-used buildings are designed to respect and complement the defining built form, massing, scale, modulation, and architectural detailing of their contextual setting; and*
- *Policy 34.3 – Development Scale and Transitions: Require that the types of uses, densities, building massing and heights, and design development along Fair Oaks Avenue and Orange Grove Boulevard assure compatibility and accessibility with adjoining residential neighborhoods.*

Further consideration must be given to the compatibility of the proposed project (e.g. scale, design quality, height, setbacks, etc.) to the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood. Please continue to work with the Design and Historic Preservation Section to refine the project’s design so that it further encourages architectural and design excellence and is reflective of the Central District Specific Plan standards and the City’s design guidelines.

- *Policy 20.1 – Neighborhood Meetings: Encourage broad representation and community participation at all steps of the planning process.*

The applicant is highly encouraged to meet with the surrounding residents and the groups listed under the heading “Neighborhoods” below to address potential issues regarding design, traffic, noise, use of the site, and other impacts specifically related to the project.

- *21.1 – Adequate and Affordable Housing. Provide a variety of housing types (i.e. small subdivisions, row housing, and condominiums), styles, densities, and affordability levels that are accessible to and meet preferences for different neighborhood types (e.g., mixed use pedestrian environments and traditional suburban neighborhoods), physical abilities and income levels, pursuant to the Housing Element.*

The proposed project would add eight affordable, ownership units within the City.

Specific Plan:

The project site is located within the Central District Specific Plan (CDSP). The primary purpose of the CDSP is to provide a diverse mix of land uses designed to create the primary business, financial, retailing, and government center of the City. It emphasizes the concept of a higher-density, mixed-use environment that will support transit- and pedestrian-oriented mobility strategies. The CDSP places the subject property in the CD-2 Civic Center/Midtown sub-district (Midtown/Civic Auditorium sub-precinct). The

objective of this sub-district is to strengthen its role as the symbolic and governmental center of the City, encouraging the presence of civic, cultural and public service institutions, while augmenting the character of the area with a supportive mixture of uses.

The CDSP specifies that the maximum FAR for the proposed site as 2.25, and the maximum residential density as 87 dwelling units per acre. Since the proposed project proposes a FAR of 2.78 and a density of 117 dwelling units per acre, the proposed project would exceed both the maximum allowed FAR and the maximum allowed density of the CDSP. In order to allow the additional FAR, the project may request an approval of an Affordable Housing Concession Permit if the project is utilizing density bonus, or a variance. Also, in order to allow the additional density, the density bonus provisions of the Zoning Code must be utilized.

Specific Plan Objectives

The CDSP provides the following Planning Objectives are relevant to the proposed project:

- *Objective 2 – Identify Growth Areas: Downtown growth and development will be directed toward the most appropriate locations, with the intention of 1) protecting existing residential neighborhoods; 2) supporting transit usage; 3) and revitalizing underutilized areas; and*

The proposed project is located approximately a half mile from Del Mar Gold Line Station and within the Central District Transit-Oriented Area. Therefore, further consideration shall be given to ensure that the proposed project consists of design and programmatic elements that encourages pedestrian activities and encourages transit use.

- *Objective 5 – Build Housing Downtown: Downtown will offer a range of housing opportunities, with provisions for the construction of new market-rate and affordable housing units, as well as non-traditional forms of housing, such as work-live accommodations; and*
- *Objective 19 – Offer Suitable Housing: Downtown housing will meet property standards of maintenance, and accommodate a variety of income levels and lifestyles.*

The proposed project is a for-sale multi-family residential development that consists of 95 dwelling units, inclusive of eight affordable units.

- *Objective 6 – Reinforce District Character: The distinctive character of Downtown and its unique Sub-districts will be maintained and further enhanced. New development will respond to the area’s architectural heritage with sensitivity and offer creative design solutions.*

- *Objective 10 – Support Traditional Urban Patterns: New construction and contemporary design will reinforce Downtown’s traditional development patterns, respond to the surrounding context, and contribute to Pasadena’s status as an inviting and memorable place. Streets will support public activity and buildings will be scaled to the presence of people.*

Further consideration must be given to the compatibility of the proposed project (e.g. scale, design quality, height, setbacks, etc.) to the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood. Please continue to work with the Design and Historic Preservation Section to refine the project’s design so that it is consistent with the area’s architectural heritage and the surrounding context.

Design & Historic Preservation:

Design Review is required, per Section 17.61.030 of the Zoning Code, as the project exceeds 5,000 square feet in size, with the Design Commission as the review authority.

The project was reviewed by the Design Commission through the Preliminary Consultation process on June 13, 2017. The Commission provided the comments below on the preliminary design:

1. The conceptual building design is compatible with the surrounding context and responds strongly to the design guidelines in the Central District Specific Plan. The proposed building will provide an appropriate transition both in height and building setback along the Los Robles Avenue frontage, between the existing office building to the north and the approved residential project located to the south of the development site. The proposed building elevations illustrate a variety of visually interesting elements including simple projecting and recessed building volumes, punched openings, trellises, recessed and cantilevered balconies, and roof overhangs. The recessed open space adjacent to the entry lobby area, along with the patio stoops of the ground floor units provide a pedestrian scale experience along the Los Robles Avenue frontage.
2. Continue to study the location of the walls and the programming within the open space adjacent to Los Robles Avenue. Consider re-thinking the location of some of the internal walls and landscape hedges in an effort to ensure that the open space is usable to the residents and/or public. Consider the elimination of the low walls adjacent to the driveway that extends to sidewalk. Reconsider the location of the water feature to allow a direct connection between the private/public open space and the ground floor amenity space.
3. Ensure that the patios of the ground floor units (north elevation) are engaging the street. Study the depth of the porches so that they are usable and allow for resident personalization.

4. Regarding the southern portion of the building, the abstract screen feature is visually successful. Consider bring screening feature down to ground level. The entry to the garage and the adjacent blank wall need further resolution. Consider visually softening the south elevations of the northern and southern portions of the building.
5. Consider incorporating a stone pattern or textured stone within the first 20 feet of the front building setback.
6. In general be more responsive to the neighborhood context. Explore opportunities to create pedestrian linkages with the neighboring properties with the use of common paths and open space. The use of a pedestrian cross-through can also strengthen the connection between neighboring properties. Enhance how the open space relates to street facing façade.
7. Consider flipping the floor plan of the 2-5 floors (northern portion of the building) to reduces the number units that will face the existing office building located to the north.
8. Consider modifying the floor plan of the units located behind the penthouse structure at the roof to allow articulation of the south facing building wall at this location.
9. Further enhance the successful visual contrast created by the projecting balconies on the north portion of the building and the recessed balconies on the south portion of the building.
10. Further restudy the projecting canopies located along the northern portion (Los Robles frontage) of the building. As proposed, the canopies dilute the visually strong aesthetic along this building elevation.
11. Reconsider/restudy the proposed "fish scale texture" illustrated on the north portion of the building that has frontage on South Los Robles Avenue.

Environmental Review:

Pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), an environmental review of the project will occur to analyze the project's potential environmental impacts, as identified by State and local environmental guidelines. An Initial Environmental Study will be required along the zoning entitlement application and/or the Design Review process. Depending on the conclusions of the Initial Environmental Study, the project may result in impacts that can be mitigated, or if not, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) would be required. The Initial Study will include cumulative analysis of other projects which have been recently approved in the vicinity of this subject site.

NEXT STEPS:

Public hearings before the Hearing Officer and Design Commission are required for the proposed project. In addition, an environmental review will occur consistent with the requirements of CEQA. The following identifies the steps in the review process:

- Conduct environmental review per CEQA;
- Hearing Officer Public Hearing review of the Affordable Housing Concession Permits, and to consider adoption of the environmental review; and
- Concept and Final Design Review by the Design Commission.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This report is for information only and will not result in any fiscal impact.

Respectfully submitted,



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Concurred by:



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Approved by:



STEVE MERMELL
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Attachment (1)

Attachment A – Predevelopment Plan Review Plans