

ATTACHMENT B

Preliminary Consultation Design Review Comments



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
PLANNING DIVISION

July 9, 2020

Burke Farrar
141 South Lake Avenue, Suite 105
Pasadena, CA 91101

NOTICE OF DESIGN COMMISSION COMMENTS

Application for Preliminary Consultation

270 North Los Robles Avenue

Case #PLN2020-00146

Council District 3

Dear Mr. Farrar,

On June 23, 2020, at a public meeting held via teleconference/videoconference pursuant to Executive Order N-29-20 issued by Governor Gavin Newsom on March 17, 2020, the Design Commission, acting under the provisions of Section 17.61.030 of the Pasadena Municipal Code, reviewed your application for Preliminary Consultation of the proposed 105-unit multi-family development at the above-referenced address. The design guidelines applied to this review were the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan and the Central District Specific Plan Private Realm Design Guidelines. The Commission generally agreed with the comments in the staff report, which are reiterated below, and provided additional comments on the preliminary design, also listed below:

1. The project proposes to utilize the height averaging provision of the Central District Specific Plan as specified in PMC Section 17.30.050.B.1. Future submittals should more clearly address how the project massing is compatible with the surrounding lower scaled context to the south and east, and how the project is consistent with the height averaging purposes and findings. The findings state that additional building height shall be counterbalanced by lower heights across or elsewhere on a development site to punctuate important intersections or other prominent locations to contribute to a more visually compelling skyline. The project site is prominently visible from properties to the north of the 210 Freeway and from the freeway itself. Future submittal should include renderings from those various perspectives.
2. The project features a significant amount of inward-facing roof decks and an atrium, which are not perceptible from the public view. Consider relocating the roof decks and reconfiguring the atrium to create a more interesting and visually compelling skyline as viewed from the public realm. Similar projects in the nearby context, such as the recently completed project at the northwest corner of Corson Street and El Molino Avenue, incorporate significant transitions in height across the site. Roof decks and extensive balconies are located on the north-facing elevation adjacent to Corson Street, which create a more interesting skyline and take advantage of the mountain views.

3. The Central District Specific Plan Private Realm Design Guidelines clearly envision a walkable, pedestrian-oriented community with activated ground floor uses and visually attractive housing. Well-composed building facades and intimately scaled architectural elements such as balconies, bay windows and trim details add residential character. It is unclear how this project reinforces these ideas on all elevations, as there is only one access point for pedestrian travel to and from the building, which is from Los Robles Avenue; almost the entirety of the proposed ground floor facing Corson Street is occupied by parking and vehicular access. More carefully consider the application of these Design Guidelines in the design of the ground floor of the project.
4. The ground floor of the north elevation consists of parking and lacks meaningful architectural details or pedestrian interest. This elevation should be re-studied and the ground floor provided with the same level of detail provided for the ground floor as depicted on the west elevation. The Central District Specific Plan Private Realm Design guidelines strongly emphasize minimizing service and parking impacts on design and encourage locating parking to reduce its visibility from the street to either below grade or toward the interior of the block of residential developments.
5. The proposed site design and massing of the building are intended to emphasize the centrality and significance of the courtyard. The project narrative also indicates that the courtyard typology is an important part of the design intended to make this project more specific to Pasadena by referencing the rich collection of open-air courts in Pasadena, including City Hall. Consider re-studying the common characteristics of the courtyard typology in Pasadena and revising the project to be more consistent with those characteristics. For example, the proposed courtyard is elevated above the street and only accessible via a relatively short transition area, which consists of a broad flight of stairs that are narrowed by landscaped walls, limiting the visibility of the courtyard from the public realm. The more significant and successful courtyard developments in Pasadena, such as City Hall, are pedestrian-oriented and have broader entrances that are unobstructed by fences, gates or solid walls, with entrances that are at the street level, or if above, incorporate a more gradual transition from the street.
6. It is unclear how the Contemporary architectural style of the proposed building is particular to Pasadena. The provided narrative indicates the repetitious shed style roofs on the north elevation are intended to evoke images of Pasadena's manufacturing past, even though Pasadena does not have a significantly notable manufacturing history. The manufacturing reference is an unusual choice for a building at such a prominent and highly visible location.
7. The project site is at a prominent corner. As the project turns the corner from the west to the north elevation, the transitions from articulated sub volumes at the west to a large glazed tower element at the corner and then to the repeating shed roof forms on the north are abrupt. The transition from west to north should be further studied and refined to more successfully engage the corner and ensure consistency in architectural design.
8. Although drawings were not provided for the interior courtyard elevations or the north and south elevations flanking the entryway portal at this stage, the rendering on the coversheet shows large blank walls on the north elevation of the southern volumes of the north elevation. This elevation will be prominently visible from the north and should include fenestration and architectural treatments consistent with the architectural design.

9. The elevators are located at the northwest and southeast corners of the development. The units facing east and north are accessed via a double loaded corridor, and although residents will have some engagement with the enclosed atrium, they will not experience a meaningful engagement with the central courtyard or common amenities as they travel from the parking area or the pedestrian entrance to the units. Continue to study and refine the internal circulation and unit layout to ensure that all units will meaningfully engage with the courtyard and amenities, or are provided with a more directly accessible outdoor space that takes advantage of the mountain views to the north and west.
10. The massing and site design shall be further explored and multiple options shall be studied and presented to the Design Commission at Concept Design Review. The options should include study bringing the courtyard to the ground level and placing an "L" shaped building behind the courtyard, exploring the creation of a two-story element at the corner by stacking the proposed amenity space, or creating a double height element at the podium level. Consider relocating the majority of the roof terraces to the southern wing.
11. The circulation within the project site is important and the location and relationship of the stairs and elevators shall be better integrated into the design of the overall project. The windowless mass of the elevator shafts are not compatible with the rest of the design and need additional detailing or shifting of the volumes.
12. The north elevation should be restudied to take advantage of the light and views. Closely study the possibility of operable windows and balconies facing north.
13. The expression of bays on the north elevation that come down from the upper level lofts should be continued to the podium level.
14. Connectivity to transit and bike infrastructure are important for this project. Explain how someone with a bike will be able to easily travel to and from the site, in particular, at the northeast corner of the building.

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NEXT STEPS

This completes the Preliminary Consultation process. As your project moves forward to Concept Design Review, the new building design should endeavor to address and respond, in writing and/or graphically, to the comments above. If the comments are not satisfactorily addressed, revisions to the submitted plans may be required and the approval process for your project may be delayed.

Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter.

Sincerely,



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cc: ENERGOV; Address file