

# Agenda Report

September 20, 2021

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Planning & Community Development Department

**SUBJECT: PREDEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW OF A NEW 112-UNIT SENIOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECT AT 280 RAMONA ST / 279 EAST HOLLY STREET**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

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

**BACKGROUND:**

The applicant, National Community Renaissance (National CORE) of California, has submitted a Predevelopment Plan Review (PPR) application to develop the property at 280 Ramona Street / 279 E. Holly Street (APN 5723-018-910) with a new 5-story, 112-unit senior affordable housing project with on-site amenities, two courtyards, including one semi-public, and one level of subterranean parking with 44 parking spaces. The site consists of one parcel with area totaling 43,258 square feet (0.99 acre), and is located in the Civic Center, adjacent to the YMCA building with frontage on E. Holly Street, Garfield Avenue, and Ramona Street. The site is zoned CD-2 (Central District Specific Plan) and is currently vacant with one small storage container located on the site. To facilitate the development project, the applicant is currently seeking a State density bonus and a lot line adjustment.

Pursuant to Zoning Code Section 17.60.040.C.2.a.(4) (Application Preparation and Filing – Predevelopment Plan Review – Applicability – Mandatory review) a PPR is required for multi-family projects consisting of ten or more dwelling units. The purpose of the PPR is to achieve better projects through early consultation between City staff and applicants. The intent is to coordinate the review of projects among City staff and City departments, familiarize applicants with regulations and procedures that apply to the project, and avoid significant investment in the design of a project without preliminary input from City staff. In addition, the purpose is to identify issues that may arise during review of the project, provide opportunities for discussion about the project and an exchange of information on potential issues between the City staff and applicants, and inform the City Council and the public of proposed development projects defined in the administrative guidelines to be of communitywide significance.

A project is categorized as a project of communitywide significance if it consists of: 1) more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area with one discretionary action; or 2) 50 or more housing units; or 3) any project determined by the Planning Director to be of major importance to the City. Projects of communitywide significance are presented to the City Council for informational purposes. The proposed project involves the construction of 112 housing units and qualifies as a project of communitywide significance.

This report provides a project description, identifies the anticipated entitlement and environmental review processes, and summarizes key areas of concern regarding Zoning Code and General Plan compliance.

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The applicant's proposal includes the following:

- A lot line adjustment to shift portions of the setback areas into a newly created parcel; and
- Construction of a new, five story senior affordable housing building totaling approximately 83,050 square feet and including the following:
  - 112 studio and one-bedroom rental units, all of which are intended to be affordable and dedicated for seniors, plus one two-bedroom manager's unit
  - Common on-site amenities for residents
  - Property management and resident support offices
  - Outdoor amenities, including a private courtyard for residents and a separate, semi-public courtyard accessible to the public
  - 44 parking spaces in one semi-subterranean level

It is noted that the applicant is reconsidering the proposal for a lot line adjustment, and may also require concessions/incentives pursuant to State Density Bonus Law or the City's local Affordable Housing Concession Menu. The need for these entitlements will be verified as the project design is refined prior to submittal for City review.

### **PREDEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW ANALYSIS:**

All applicable City departments reviewed the project as part of the PPR process and provided comments that are included in Attachment A. Notable preliminary Planning-related comments are discussed throughout the following sections of the report.

#### **Existing Context**

The project site is located in the Central District Specific Plan CD-2 (Civic Center) Zoning District, within the Civic Center Historic District. Virtually every surrounding parcel contains a designated historic landmark. These include the adjacent Pasadena YMCA Building, Pasadena City Hall, the George Ellery Hale Building, the Pasadena YWCA Building, and the County Court Building. Heights of surrounding buildings range



from two to five stories, with a few exceptions, including the County Court Building, the office tower at E. Colorado and N. Garfield, and the City Hall dome, which reaches a height of 206 feet at its tallest point. Buildings in the vicinity of the project site mostly consist of civic and institutional uses, however the adjacent Pasadena YMCA Building is a permanent supportive housing use with 144 single-room occupancy units. The following is an aerial view of the existing site and its surrounding areas as well as a site plan of the proposed project.

**Figure 1: Aerial View of Existing Site and Context**

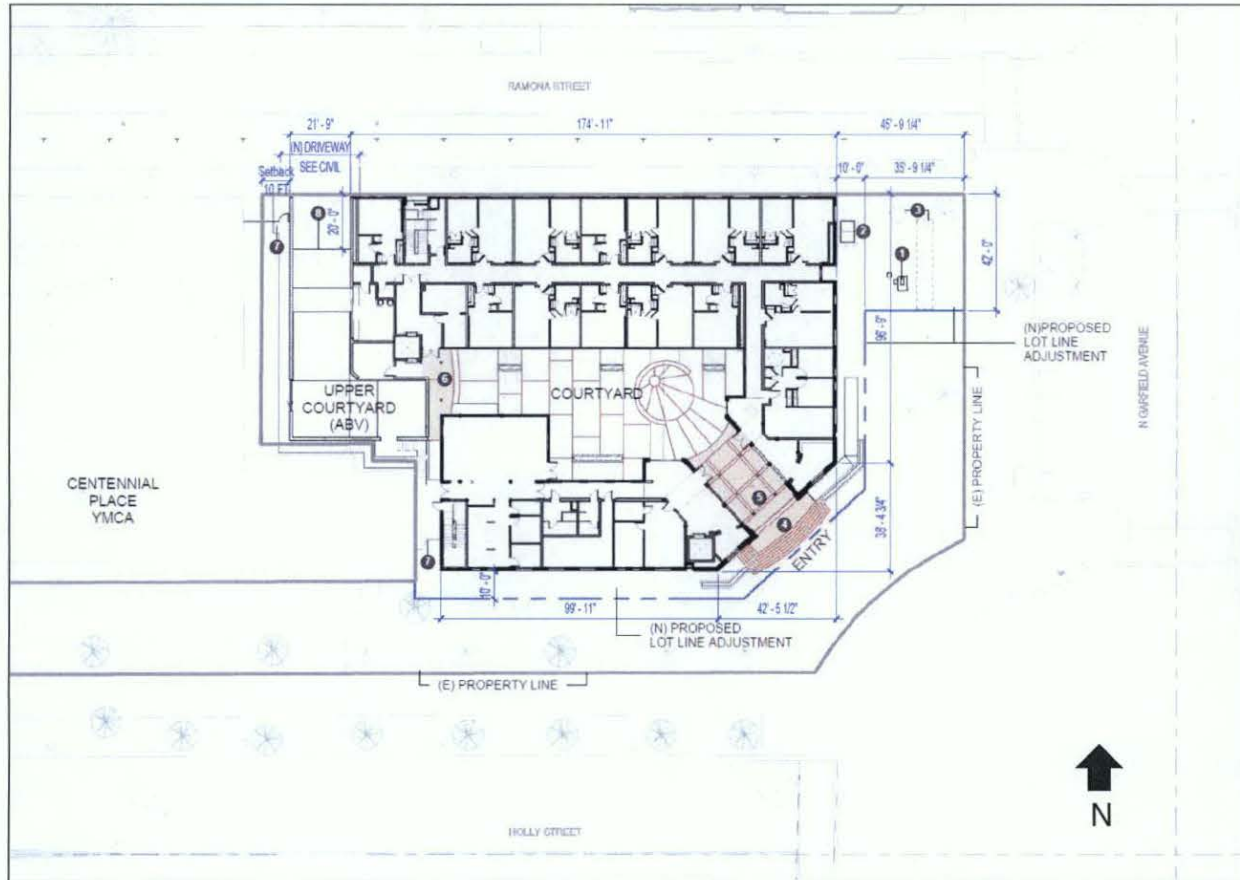


The provision of a semi-public courtyard accessible from the main corner entrance at Garfield and Holly is consistent with the pedestrian- and civic-oriented vision of the area and will encourage more activity along the street. Staff comments to the applicant note that further attention be given to the design of this corner, particularly to address the setback options identified in the Civic Center Report by OLIN Partnership (“OLIN Partnership Report”) and alignment of the building with the YMCA building along Holly Street. The proposed location of all project parking below grade with a single vehicular entry along the secondary frontage on Ramona Street minimizes the visibility of parking



and garages while also limiting the number of curb cuts and enhancing pedestrian safety.

**Figure 2: Proposed Site Plan**



### Consistency With Development Regulations

Staff has evaluated the proposed project against the development standards that apply to the CD-2 Zoning District and Urban Housing land use type. The existing development standards are in place to implement a vision for the area and to ensure compatibility between sites. As proposed, the project appears to meet the height and floor area standards in the Zoning Code, however, based on the submitted plans, a lot line adjustment is being requested that may affect the amount of allowable floor area, as well as the required setbacks for the building. The applicant has expressed willingness to explore alternative approaches to the lot line adjustment in order to maximize compliance with existing development standards. As shown in the plans, the proposed project also does not meet existing setback requirements along Ramona Street, and may not meet the required setback along the western property line adjacent to the YMCA building. The applicant is considering alternative designs to comply with these setback requirements, however the project may require concessions/incentives pursuant to the City's local Affordable Housing Concession Menu or State Density Bonus Law for these provisions. Furthermore, there are potential inconsistencies

between the proposed setbacks and the recommendations outlined in the OLIN Partnership Report. The proposed number of parking spaces does not meet the minimum required in the Zoning Code, and the residential density also exceeds the maximum allowable in the Zoning Code, but the proposed parking and density are nevertheless allowable through State Density Bonus Law.

### General Plan Vision

According to the General Plan Land Use Diagram, the subject property is designated as Medium Mixed Use (0.0-2.25 FAR; 0-87 du/ac), which is intended to support the development of multi-story buildings with a variety of compatible commercial (retail and office) and residential uses. Development in this land use designation is characterized by shared open spaces, extensive landscaping, small to medium separations between buildings, and shared driveways and parking. Sites may be exclusively commercial or exclusively residential, or with buildings vertically integrating housing with non-residential uses. Where buildings face the street frontage, they shall be designed to enhance pedestrian activity with transparent facades for retail uses and distinctive entries for housing. Parking shall be located below or to the rear of the street. Projects constructed at Medium Mixed Use densities may be required to develop pedestrian-oriented streetscape amenities along their primary street frontages, consistent with the improvement concepts and plans defined by the City.

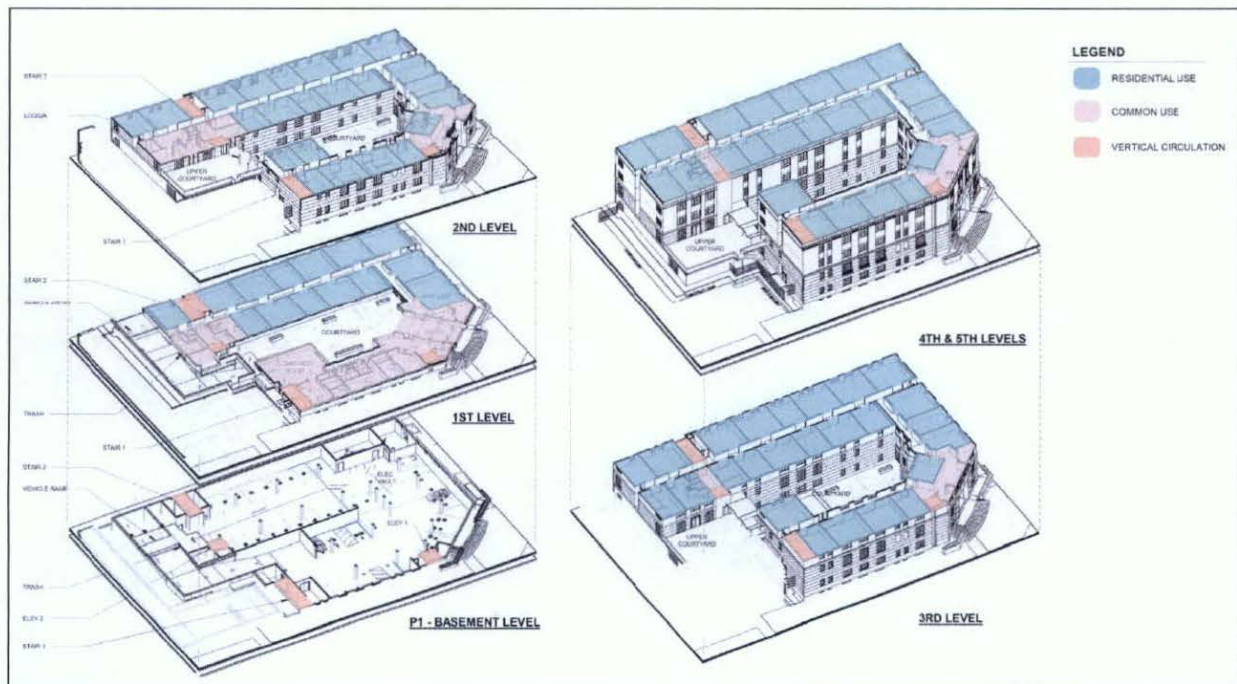
Based on the lot size, the subject property would allow up to 97,330 square feet of floor area and up to 86 dwelling units. The proposed floor area of 83,050 (gross) and 63,800 (net) square feet result in an FAR of 1.9 and 1.5 respectively, which are within the allowable maximum under the General Plan. Although the proposed 112 units exceeds the maximum density allowed by the General Plan, a 30% density bonus is being requested, which is allowed under State Density Bonus Law. Therefore, the density and intensity of the proposed project are consistent with the General Plan Land Use Map. The proposed building design is oriented toward all three street frontages, including Holly Street, Garfield Avenue, and Ramona Street, with the main entrance marked by a stairway at the corner of Garfield and Holly. The proposal includes a pair of open-air courtyards in the center of the site, one being publicly accessible from the main entrance at the ground level, and the other on an upper level that is privately accessible to future residents of the building. Private open space for each unit, such as patios or balconies, are not provided. The ground floor frontage along Holly Street is proposed to include common area uses, such as the community room, shared kitchen, and offices. The remaining frontages of the building at the ground floor include residential units, all accessed through interior hallways with no openings to the streets. A single driveway to the partially subterranean parking is provided along Ramona Street. The combination of these features results in a proposal that is consistent with the General Plan vision for the Medium Mixed-Use land use designation.



### Massing and Scale

The proposed project is 59'-9" in height and consists of five stories, with no varying roofline resulting in a flat roof with parapets. The massing presentation of the building is very similar to the adjacent YMCA building, which does not incorporate substantial articulation in its mass. The rendering provided depicts minor vertical recesses along the facades as well as applied horizontal moldings and details that provide relief to the facades. Other buildings in the surrounding context within the Civic Center provide more substantial massing articulation and, although the proposed building is immediately adjacent to the YMCA building, consideration should be given to providing simple massing articulation gestures to ensure consistency with the overall Civic Center and avoid a monolithic appearance of the new building, in conjunction with the relatively monolithic YMCA building. Although a 60' height limit is allowed, the building should incorporate articulation in the massing that would ensure that it appears subordinate to the historical buildings within the Civic Center.

**Figure 3: Preliminary Massing and Use Diagram**



### Civic Center Considerations

The proposed project is located within the heart of the Civic Center Historic District. The site design proposed is generally consistent with the City Council's requirement to provide a 45' setback along the east side of the property. However, the project as shown in the site plan and floor plans does not fully represent either of the site designs set forth in the OLIN Partnership Report that was presented to Council on April 8, 2019 when this direction was provided.

Both options also provide for alignment of the building face with the Holly Street setback of the existing YWCA building. The proposed design does not fully address either of the two options at the chamfered southeast corner of the building and does not align with the YMCA building along Holly Street. Further consideration should be given to ensuring greater consistency with either of the options presented in the OLIN Partnership Report, including a greater setback and possibly a usable paseo to the central courtyard, on the west side of the building to create greater separation between the existing YMCA building and the proposed new building.

### **ENTITLEMENT PROCESS:**

The applicant has proposed a lot line adjustment, which would require approval of a Tentative Parcel Map. However, after further discussion with staff, the applicant has expressed willingness to reconsider the proposed lot line adjustment and explore alternative approaches that would bring the proposed project into compliance with existing standards. The applicant is also considering use of concessions/incentives pursuant to State Density Bonus Law. Some of these concessions may utilize the City's Affordable Housing Concession Menu, or alternatively, the applicant may request an Affordable Housing Concession Permit. Assuming the applicant files an application for either a Tentative Parcel Map or an Affordable Housing Concession Permit, the scope of the proposed project would require the following reviews:

#### Environmental Review

This project will be subject to the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Additional environmental studies, including an Initial Study, may be needed to determine what type of CEQA analysis is required for the project.

#### Tentative Parcel Map

1. *Hearing Officer:* This project proposes a lot line adjustment that would require the creation of two parcels where there is currently one. As such, the Hearing Officer must consider an application for a Tentative Parcel Map at a noticed public hearing.

#### Affordable Housing Concession Permit

1. *Hearing Officer:* This project may request an Affordable Housing Concession Permit for one or more concessions/incentives pursuant to State Density Bonus Law. While it is unclear at this stage how many or what types of concessions/incentives may be requested, if there was a request, the Hearing Officer must consider the application at a noticed public hearing.

## Design Review

1. *Preliminary Consultation-Design Review:* This project must be reviewed by the Design Commission through the Preliminary Consultation process for preliminary advisory comments.
2. *Concept & Final-Design Review:* This project must be reviewed by the Design Commission through the Concept and Final Design Review process.

At minimum, public hearings before the the Hearing Officer for a Tentative Tract Map and/or an Affordable Housing Concession Permit, and Design Commission for Concept and Final Design Review will be required. Upon submittal of an official application, the steps included in the review process are as follows:


- Applicant submits Tentative Parcel Map and/or Affordable Housing Concession Permit application if necessary for the proposed project;
- Conduct environmental review per CEQA;
- Conduct a noticed public hearing before the Hearing Officer;
- Conduct a noticed public hearing before the Design Commission for Concept/Final design approvals.



**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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

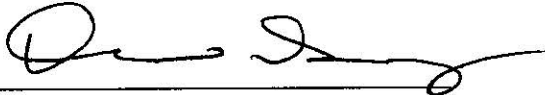
Respectfully submitted,

  
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Attachments: (3)

- Attachment A – Predevelopment Plan Review Comments to Applicant
- Attachment B – Project Summary Table of Development Standards
- Attachment C – Predevelopment Plan Review Plans