

Agenda Report

October 16, 2023

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: CENTRAL DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Adopt the Addendum to the 2015 Pasadena General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and find that the Addendum properly discloses only minor technical changes or additions to the EIR, and none of the conditions triggering a subsequent or supplemental EIR are present, as set forth in State CEQA Guidelines Section 15164;
2. Make the Findings for Approval for the General Plan Land Use Map Amendment, Specific Plan Amendment, Zoning Map Amendment, and Zoning Text Amendment to adopt the Central District Specific Plan Update. The Zoning Text Amendment also includes technical changes in the previously adopted Lincoln Avenue, East Colorado, and South Fair Oaks Specific Plans for internal consistency;
3. Adopt a resolution approving the General Plan Map Amendment;
4. Adopt a resolution approving the recommended Central District Specific Plan; and
5. Direct the City Attorney to prepare an ordinance for the Zoning Map and Text Amendments within 120 days consistent with the provisions set forth herein.

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

On June 28, 2023, by a vote of 8-0, the Planning Commission recommended that the City Council approve the proposed Central District Specific Plan (CDSP), as presented by staff, with recommended changes, outlined in Attachment A.

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETINGS:

The Planning Commission held three study sessions on December 8, 2021, June 22, 2022, and February 22, 2023 and one public hearing on June 28, 2023 on the CDSP update. The proposed CDSP incorporates feedback received from the Planning

Commission in the previous study sessions, including the integration of the 2004 Design Guidelines into the plan document as goals, policies, or objective standards and the addition of a new action item to the implementation chapter requiring staff to provide an annual update on the status of the plan implementation. This will be done for all specific plans moving forward.

BACKGROUND:

In 2018, the City initiated the Our Pasadena – Putting the Plan in Motion program to update the City’s eight specific plan areas. The program’s primary goal is to establish objective regulations and standards that will shape the built environment within Pasadena’s eight planning areas in accordance with the General Plan and its guiding principles. Three of the eight specific plan updates have been adopted by the City Council (Lincoln Avenue [2021], East Colorado [2021], and South Fair Oaks [2022]). The North Lake and Lamanda Park Specific Plan areas have had study sessions with the Planning Commission in 2023 and are anticipated to be presented to the City Council in 2024. Study sessions on the East Pasadena and Fair Oaks/Orange Grove Specific Plans are anticipated to commence in 2024.

STAFF RECOMMENDED CENTRAL DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN:

The following is an overview of the recommended CDSP, organized by topic. It highlights significant changes between the 2004 CDSP and the recommended CDSP, as well as key changes made to address Planning Commission feedback. Refer to Attachment B for the recommended CDSP. The 2004 CDSP is included as Attachment C.

Plan Boundary:

The recommended CDSP generally encompasses the area bound by the I-210 freeway to the north, Pasadena Avenue to the west, California Avenue to the south, and Wilson Avenue to the east (See Map 1). The plan area includes two Metro A Line Stations (formerly Metro L and Gold Line); Del Mar and Memorial Park. Lake Station is located just outside of the plan area. The South Fair Oaks and East Colorado Specific Plans border the CDSP area. The Fair Oaks/Orange Grove and North Lake Specific Plan areas are north of the I-210 freeway.

The following changes were incorporated into the recommended CDSP plan boundary to address Planning Commission feedback:

- Added the parcels between Mentor and Wilson Avenue, north of Cordova Street, into the CDSP area.
- Removed the parcels located south of California Boulevard, near Lake Avenue, from the CDSP area to end the plan boundary at California Boulevard.

Map 1. Recommended CDSP Area

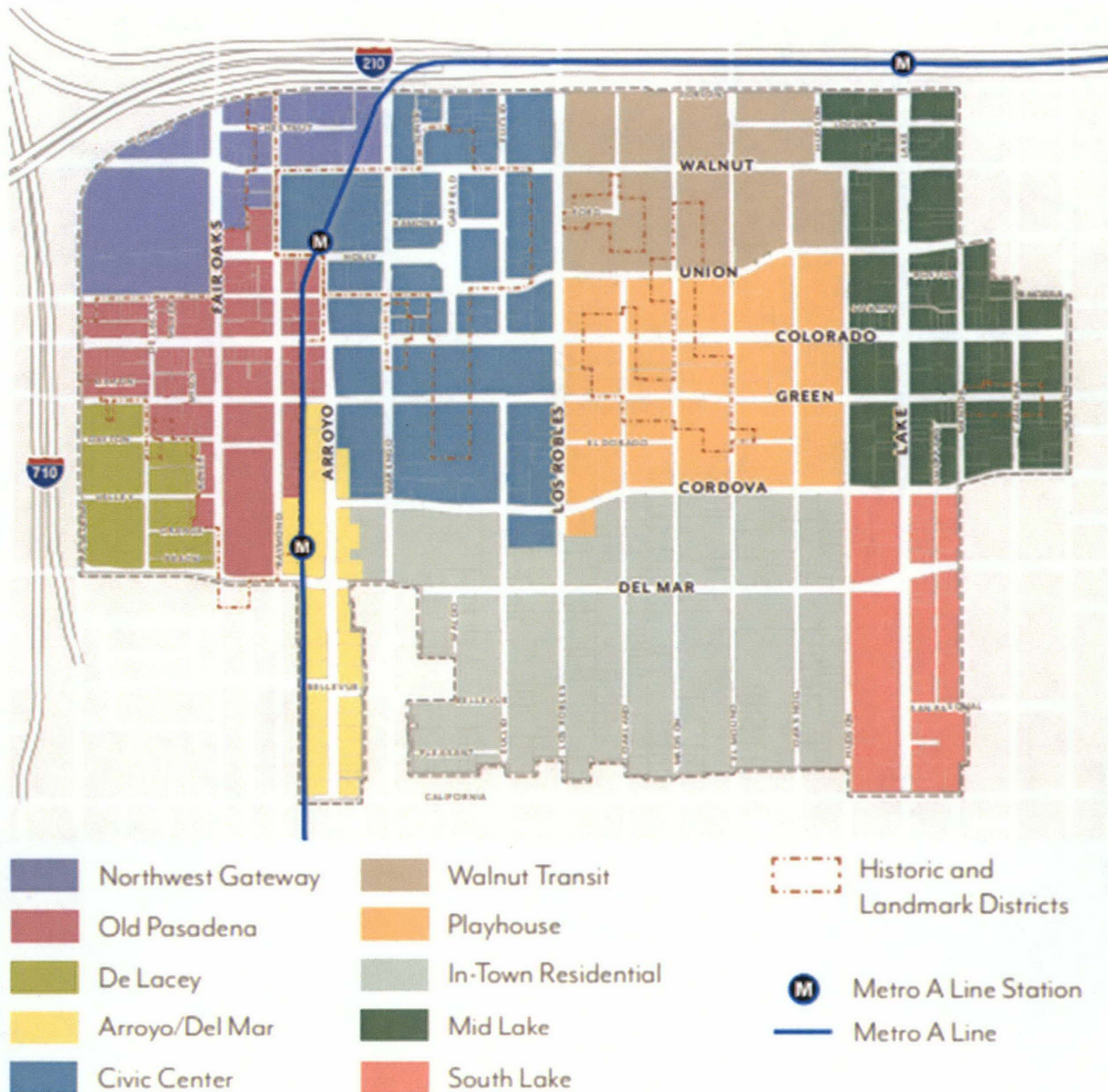


Plan Vision, Goals, and Policies:

The CDSP area is envisioned as the City’s vibrant downtown, providing diverse economic, civic, cultural, entertainment, and residential opportunities. This district is intended to be a place to work, live, shop, learn, and play for all generations and abilities. The vision builds on the 2004 CDSP and the 2015 General Plan. It also reflects the ideas and feedback from a multi-phase community engagement effort between 2018 and 2021. Information on the engagement process, including public outreach methods and workshop meetings and materials, is provided in Attachment D.

The recommended CDSP includes plan-wide goals and policies that are grouped by topic. The plan also contains ten subareas (See Map 2). Each subarea includes goals and policies to guide decision-makers when reviewing development and public improvement projects within a more defined geographic area.

Map 2. Recommended CDSP Subareas



Regulations and Standards:

The following key changes were incorporated into the recommended CDSP. Refer to Attachment E for maps comparing current and recommended standards.

Land Use Regulations and Density (Chapters 3 and 6 of the recommended CDSP)

The most significant land use change in the recommended CDSP, compared to the 2004 CDSP and the 2015 General Plan, is allowing residential uses, at a density of 87 du/ac on Lake Avenue, north of Green Street, to provide new housing opportunities near public transit. This is an area of the plan that was previously envisioned as

commercial only. Allowing denser housing near transit supports many of the plan goals and policies and expands housing opportunities in a targeted area with access to transportation, services, and amenities. This is also an area that may see adaptive re-use of underutilized office space in the future.

The 2004 CDSP generally allows 60 or 87 dwelling units per acre (du/ac) north of Cordova Street, with a few areas allowing 48 du/ac. The recommended CDSP sets the density at 87 du/ac for most of the area north of Cordova Street. Density is set at 64 du/ac on the east side of Arroyo Boulevard, south of Bellevue Street, and east of Mentor Avenue to transition from residential neighborhoods. Outside of the areas noted above, there are no other proposed increases in density within the CDSP. Refer to Figure 1 in Attachment E for a comparison of existing and recommended residential densities.

The Planning Commission recommended the following change, which staff has not incorporated into the recommended CDSP. Additional information is provided on pages 9 and 10 of this report.

- Allow residential uses, except on the ground floor of a building on Lake Avenue between Cordova and San Pasqual Street, and rezone from CD-CL (commercial) to CD-MU-N (mixed-use) with a density of 48 du/ac.

Building Height (Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP)

The recommended CDSP:

- Generally maintains the current building height limits throughout the plan area. The tallest building height allowances are located near the Metro Del Mar and Lake Stations and along the eastern portions of Colorado Boulevard at 75 feet, with heights tapering down in areas south of Cordova Street at 36 or 40 feet (55 feet with height averaging). Refer to Figure 2 in Attachment E for a comparison of existing and recommended heights.
- Maintains the required protections for the City Hall view corridor, with clearer definitions of what is protected.
- Maintains the height averaging provision in most of the plan area, allowing additional height over 30% of the building footprint, if other portions of the building are lowered to achieve the required average height.

No changes to the proposed building height limits were recommended by the Planning Commission.

Setbacks and Stepbacks (Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP)

The 2004 CDSP requires a 0-foot setback throughout most of the plan area. The recommended CDSP refines the street setback requirements to enhance the pedestrian experience by:

- Allowing a 0-foot setback only in limited areas, such as Old Pasadena, to reinforce the existing historic character. Outside of the historic areas, the plan establishes setbacks with ranges between 3' and up to 15' in certain areas. The additional setbacks are provided to transition between public and private realm and support a public tree canopy.
- Inclusion of an upper-story stepback and subterranean parking setback requirement along Green Street to minimize building mass and allow Ficus trees to mature.

Refer to Map 6.1-4 of Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP for street setbacks (Attachment B). No changes to the proposed setbacks and stepbacks were recommended by the Planning Commission.

Sidewalk and Street Trees (Chapter 5 of the recommended CDSP)

The 2004 CDSP only requires minimum sidewalk widths for certain streets in the plan area. The recommended CDSP:

- Establishes new minimum sidewalk widths throughout the plan area.
- Along certain corridors, like Green, Walnut, and Union Street, the plan will require wider sidewalks to support pedestrian mobility and amenities within the public realm.
- The plan introduces new standards for parkways, street trees, tree-well dimensions, and root volume to improve tree health and increase tree canopy, which was incorporated in other recently adopted specific plans as well.

Refer to Map 5.1-1 of Chapter 5 of the recommended CDSP for minimum sidewalk widths (Attachment B). No changes to the proposed public realm chapter were recommended by the Planning Commission.

Historic Adjacency (Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP)

The recommended CDSP introduces objective standards for new development adjacent to historic resources, such as street and interior setbacks, interior stepbacks, and a maximum streetwall height. The standards are designed to complement and enhance the area's historic character. Refer to Figure 6.1-7 of Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP for setback and encroachment plane requirements (Attachment B).

No changes to the proposed historic adjacency standards were recommended by the Planning Commission.

Modulation (Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP)

The recommended CDSP introduces objective design standards intended to reduce the scale and “blockiness” of new construction through façade breaks and modulated facades. The standards do not mandate a particular architectural style. Modulation standards may be modified through the Design Review process with required findings. A project may be exempt from the modulation standards if a project includes traditional architectural features such as 4-inch recessed windows, the use of brick or stone, and the building includes a base, middle, and top. Refer to Section 6.1.7 of Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP for modulation requirements and the required findings (Attachment B).

No changes to the proposed modulation standards were recommended by the Planning Commission.

Ground Floor Frontages and Objective Design Standards (Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP)

The recommended CDSP introduces pedestrian-oriented ground floor standards for mixed-use areas to promote frontages that engage the public realm and contribute to the Central District’s overall sense of place. Objective design standards, such as pedestrian entrances, minimum ground floor height, ground floor transparency, shade structures, raised stoops, patios, and arcades/galleries, are included in the recommended CDSP to implement the existing 2004 Design Guidelines based on the work of the Planning Commission. Refer to Section 6.2 of Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP (Attachment B).

Private/Common Open Space and Publicly Accessible Paseos and Plazas (Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP)

Consistent with what has been included in the other updated Specific Plans, the recommended CDSP revises current open space requirements:

- Private and common open space requirements for residential development are based on the number of bedrooms in each proposed unit, ensuring adequate open space for residents within each building.
- Common open space is also required for commercial projects, creating amenities for visitors and employees.
- The Publicly Accessible Open Space (“PAOS”) requirement builds on the historic legacy of the Central District’s network of publicly accessible open spaces, commonly known as paseos and plazas. The standards may be modified through the Design Review process, so long as the open space is accessible to the public, functional and includes features such as trees and landscaping. Refer to Section 6.3 of Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP for the open space requirements (Attachment B).

The Planning Commission recommended the following change, which was not incorporated into the recommended CDSP. Additional information is provided on page 9 of this report.

- Remove the requirement for a new publicly accessible plaza at the northeast corner of Lake Avenue and California Boulevard from Map 6.3-1 (Publicly Accessible Open Space) due to the size of the parcel and the relatively small plaza space that could be provided.

Parking, Vehicle Access, Layout, and Design (Chapter 6 of the recommended CDSP)

The recommended CDSP:

- Requires less parking for certain uses and no additional parking for projects within designated historic resources or changes of use in structures built before 1970.
- Shared and unbundled parking is permitted. Where parking minimums conflict with state law, state law shall control.
- Objective design standards, like vehicle access, layout, and the design of new parking structures.

Refer to Section 6.4 of Chapter 6 for the parking requirements (Attachment B). The Planning Commission recommended no changes to proposed parking-related standards.

Implementation and Administration (Chapter 7 of the recommended CDSP)

The Implementation Chapter of the CDSP includes targeted action items with a corresponding timeline and potential funding sources intended to guide decision-makers and prioritize the implementation of the plan. These action items reflect feedback received from the various City commissions and the community. Refer to Table 7.1-1 of Chapter 7 of the recommended CDSP (Attachment B).

The following changes were incorporated into the recommended CDSP to address Planning Commission feedback:

- Revised implementation action item IMS-6 (Streetscape Programs) to add a pedestrian action strategy be prepared for the CDSP area.
- Revised implementation action item IMS-7 (Adaptive Reuse Program) to incorporate language from the adopted Housing Element's program on adaptive reuse.
- Revised implementation action item PA-7 (Community Parks) to prioritize identifying opportunity areas for future park space(s) in a 'Near-Term' timeframe (0-5 years) and eliminate the identification of any type of needs assessment or related study or plan.
- Revised the timeframe of implementation action items PA-3 (Pedestrian-Oriented Art in Public Realm) and PA-4 (Paseo Activation) from 'Medium-Term' to 'Ongoing'.

The following recommendation by the Planning Commission was not incorporated into the recommended CDSP. Additional information is provided on page 10 of this report.

- Add a new implementation action item to create an interdepartmental team led by a “Chief of Placemaking”, appointed by the City Manager, to manage, facilitate, and coordinate activities in the Central District area to create great places, in coordination with the appropriate Business Improvement District(s), property owners, and other stakeholder, including Pasadena Heritage and the Complete Street Coalition. Also included in this task, the City Manager shall, within one year of the adoption of the CDSP, prepare a budget proposal for initial funding of the improvements in the plan.

Additional revisions addressing feedback from the Planning Commission, and comments from the public, are highlighted in Chapter 7 of the recommended CDSP (Attachment B).

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS NOT RECOMMENDED BY STAFF:

On June 23, 2023, the Planning Commission voted 8-0 to recommend approval of the CDSP as proposed by staff, with modifications as outlined in Attachment A. Staff supports incorporating all of the Planning Commission recommendations with the exception of three items which are further explained below. Attachment A details each Planning Commission recommendation, with information on where recommended changes were incorporated into the CDSP by staff.

- **Planning Commission Recommendation:** Remove the requirement for a new publicly accessible plaza at the northeast corner of Lake Avenue and California Boulevard from Map 6.3-1 (Publicly Accessible Open Space) due to the size of the parcel and the relatively small plaza space that could be provided.

Staff Response: Although the plaza is relatively small in size at 400 square feet this is in proportion to the size of the parcel and a publicly accessible plaza at this location presents an opportunity to demarcate the entryway into South Lake Avenue at this key intersection. It provides an opportunity to create synergy with the existing plaza at the southwest corner of the intersection. The plaza would provide an opportunity for placemaking, establishing a functional amount of space for outdoor seating and a gathering place, with landscaping and a tree canopy.

- **Planning Commission Recommendation:** Allow residential uses, except on the ground floor of a building, on Lake Avenue between Cordova and San Pasqual Street, and rezone from CD-CL (commercial) to CD-MU-N (mixed-use) with a density of 48 du/ac.

Staff Response: The General Plan land use diagram designates the east side of Lake Avenue, between Cordova and San Pasqual Street, as Medium Commercial, with no residential density allocated to this segment of Lake Avenue. The

recommended CDSP does not allow housing in alignment with the General Plan, to retain this area as an important local commercial corridor that provides service and employment opportunities. The recommended plan proposes additional housing opportunities in the plan area further north on Lake Avenue (north of Green Street) near the transit station and retains housing in all areas where currently designated by the General Plan.

- **Planning Commission Recommendation:** Add a new implementation action item to Chapter 7 (Implementation and Administration) to create an interdepartmental team led by a “Chief of Placemaking”, appointed by the City Manager, to manage, facilitate, and coordinate activities in the Central District area to create great places, in coordination with the appropriate Business Improvement District(s), property owners, and other stakeholders, including Pasadena Heritage and the Complete Street Coalition. Also included in this task, the City Manager shall, within one year of the adoption of the CDSP, prepare a budget proposal for initial funding of the plans' improvements.

Staff Response: The Planning Commission felt strongly that it is important to ensure the adopted Specific Plans include implementation actions that are prioritized properly with appropriate staffing and funding. It is staff's position that the recommended implementation action item is not under the scope of a single specific plan document. The establishment of an interdepartmental team and budget programming are policy decisions under the purview of the City Council and City Manger that might be addressed through the annual operating budget, CIP and/or other related policy discussions.

CONCLUSION:

The recommended CDSP seeks to facilitate and encourage both commercial and residential development and improvements to realize the vision for the plan area. The recommended CDSP reflects community and commission feedback and the desire to build upon existing conditions, supporting new development that is contextually appropriate and enhances the area. It also stimulates economic development and balances housing and employment opportunities in the area, promoting sustainable neighborhoods that are walkable and support public transit.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

An Initial Study and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared for the Pasadena General Plan in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and certified by the City Council on August 17, 2015. An addendum to the EIR has been prepared analyzing the update to the CDSP in compliance with Section 15164 (Addendum to an EIR or Negative Declaration) of the CEQA guidelines (Title 14, Chapter 3, Article 11). The addendum found that the project revisions will not result in any potentially significant impacts that were not already analyzed in the EIR. Refer to

Attachment F for the Addendum to the General Plan EIR. For information on the 2015 General Plan EIR refer to Attachment G.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact on the City by adopting the recommended CDSP. Costs related to some implementation action programs are expected to be partially or fully offset by grant funding as available. The recommended CDSP is designed to encourage the retention of existing businesses and spur additional development and public realm improvements within the plan area, which may result in increased revenue to the City's General Fund helping to offset costs related to public realm improvements.


Respectfully submitted,


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Attachments: (9)

- Attachment A – Planning Commission Recommendations
- Attachment B – 2023 Recommended Central District Specific Plan
- Attachment C – 2004 Central District Specific Plan
- Attachment D – Community Engagement Process and Public Feedback
- Attachment E – Comparison Maps of Current and Recommended Standards
- Attachment F – Addendum to the General Plan Environmental Impact Report
- Attachment G – 2015 General Plan Environmental Impact Report
- Attachment H – Recommended General Plan and Zoning Code Amendments
- Attachment I – Required Findings