ATTACHMENT C

PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: OCTOBER 28, 2025

TO: DESIGN COMMISSION

FROM: JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

ADDRESS: 511 SOUTH OAK KNOLL AVENUE

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR CONCEPT DESIGN REVIEW (DHP2024-00261) NEW FOUR-STORY, 56,019 SQUARE-FOOT, 46-UNIT RESIDENTIAL PROJECT WITH ONE LEVEL OF SUBTERRANEAN PARKING

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Design Commission:

Environmental Determination

1. Find that the proposed project is consistent with the General Plan designation, with the General Plan goals and policies for the site, and with the applicable zoning designation and regulations; and that the project site has no value as habitat for endangered or threatened species, and can be served by utilities and public services.

2. Find that approval of the project will not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, water quality or cultural resources.

Conclude, therefore, that the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under §15332, (Class 32) “in-fill development projects” and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances.

Findings for Compliance with the Tree Protection Ordinance

1. Acknowledge that a tree inventory (Attachment B) identifies removal of three protected native trees.

2. Find that the removal of three protected trees meets finding 6 of the Tree Protection Ordinance (PMC Section 8.52.075.A): *“The project, as defined in Section 17.12.020,*

includes a landscape design plan that emphasizes a tree canopy that is sustainable over the long term by adhering to the replacement matrix prepared by the city manager and included in the associated administrative guidelines;" and, therefore,

Approve the removal of three protected trees.

Findings for Concept Design Approval

Find that the project, upon implementation of the conditions of approval, will comply with the purposes of design review, the design-related goals and policies of the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the design-related goals and policies in the Central District Specific Plan, and the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts; and

Based on these findings, approve the application for Concept Design Review subject to the conditions in Attachment A, which shall be further reviewed during Final Design Review.

BACKGROUND:

Project Overview

- General Plan Designation: High Density Residential (0 – 48 du/acre)

- Zoning: CD-RM-48 (Central District, Multi-Family Residential, City of Gardens)

- Design Guidelines: The applicable design guidelines are the design-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the design-related goals and policies in the Central District Specific Plan and the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Districts.

- Site: The site is on the west side of South Oak Knoll Avenue, between East Del Mar Boulevard and East California Boulevard, and is comprised of a vacant lot totaling 28,370 square feet. There are 13 trees on the site, three of which are protected under the Tree Protection Ordinance. There is also an existing protected Canyon Live Oak tree (Quercus chrysolepis) with a 25-inch DBH on the adjacent property to the south, whose canopy extends over to the subject property and two public street trees in front of the property.

- Surroundings: Surrounding properties include primarily single-family and multi-family residential uses ranging from one to four stories. The properties immediately to the south (541 S. Oak Knoll Avenue, Engine Company #34, constructed ca. 1917, and designed by J.J. Blick) and to the west of the site (500 S. El Molino Avenue, Cornish Manor Court, constructed ca. 1923) are individually designated landmark properties. To the west of the 541 S. Oak Knoll Avenue property is an electrical substation (525 S. Oak Knoll Avenue).

- Project Description: The project involves construction of a four-story, 46-unit residential project with one level of subterranean parking. Three protected mature trees, as well as eight non-protected trees, are proposed to be removed to accommodate the project.

- Tree Removals: All private trees on the site are proposed to be removed, including the three that are protected under the City's Tree Protection Ordinance, which are all native

Coast Live Oak (Quercus agrifolia) trees: tree #8 (DBH 18.5”), tree #11 (DBH 9”), and tree #12 (DBH 16”). The two protected public street trees and the protected tree at the adjacent southern property will remain.

- Site Design: The new building is proposed to generally maintain a U-shaped footprint with five-foot, three-inch setbacks at the north, south and west sides of the lot and a 22-foot, six-inch setback at the east side (front). At the southeast side of the project site, there is a 15-foot setback proposed from the south property line to provide relief to the adjacent protected Canyon Live Oak tree on the adjacent property. The center of the site will be occupied by the required main garden, with pedestrian access from South Oak Knoll Avenue via a smaller ancillary garden at the east side. A driveway and ramp are proposed along the north side of the site, leading to a subterranean parking garage. The units at each end of the U-shape will front South Oak Knoll Avenue and maintain direct access from the street, with the remainder of the units at the ground floor accessed through the main garden. The building is proposed to have enclosed corridors along the exterior of the building at floors two through four to provide access to the upper floor units. Each unit on the upper floors is proposed to include a balcony that overlooks the central main garden. The project is designed to comply with the City’s multi-family residential (“City of Gardens”) development standards with residential units lining a central courtyard that will be visible from South Oak Knoll Avenue through a gated opening. The project provides affordable units and makes use of State Density Bonus Law to achieve a density bonus and requests one concession to increase the allowable building height from 40 feet to 47 feet, 10 inches.

- Architectural Style: Contemporary

- Developer: K27 Capital, LLC – Kevin Cao

- Architects: LCRA Architects

- Landscape Architect: L.A. Group Design Works, Inc.

ANALYSIS:

Design Commission Comments from Preliminary Consultation

On September 4, 2024, the Design Commission reviewed an application for Preliminary Consultation for this project. The Commission’s comments from that meeting, with excerpts from the design team’s responses, and staff’s comments, are detailed in the chart below. The design team’s full responses are incorporated into the set of plans in Attachment C.

Preliminary Consultation Comment 1
Create meaningful but simple modulation and articulation of the massing throughout that responds to the surrounding context. Specifically, the design should acknowledge and respond to the two adjacent historic resources at 541 S. Oak Knoll Avenue and 500 S. El Molino Avenue, both individually designated landmarks. As the design develops, the project should express a simple yet elegant design that does not meld or combine features from the varied styles in the surrounding context. The design should articulate a compatible relationship overall to the context without combining specific features of various styles.

Excerpt from Applicant Response
"Modulation and articulation of the massing has been revised to better acknowledge and respond to the two adjacent historic resources. Sloped roofs with tile roofing and traditional architectural elements such as vertical siding have been added to the architectural design (without combining specific features) to be more compatible…"
Staff Analysis: *Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval no. 1.*
The design has been modified to incorporate referential features and materials based on the surrounding historic context such as mansard roof forms, projecting volumes, and recessed and projecting outdoor spaces. However, the project should study and refine these features within the overall Contemporary design to improve their integration and cohesion throughout. In particular, staff recommends further study of the integration of the mansard roof forms into the building massing rather than applying the mansards directly to the flat-roofed volumes, and a more consistent application of the proposed brick material (both height and extent) at the front of the building (including the brick archway) and continuing to the easternmost portion of the north elevation. Staff is recommending condition no. 1 to study and refine the integration of these features and materials.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 2
Explore ways to ensure cohesive treatments at all facades that provide simplicity, depth, and a connection to the context, particularly to avoid overwhelming adjacent historic resources.
Applicant Response
"Façade design has been updated to provide better connection without overwhelming the existing context. The combination of parapet roofs and sloped roofs allow better connection to the adjacent buildings. The roof eaves and canopies provide shadow and depth on the building façade. Deeply recessed covered outdoor spaces (balconies and porches) provide further connectivity to the outdoor areas and to the street.
Staff Analysis: *Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval no. 1.*
Similar to the first comment, the proposed design references some materials and features found in the surrounding context such as brick cladding and references to Tudor Revival features. However, staff recommends that this comment continue to be addressed through condition no. 1 as described above.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 3
Consider the building's siting and the main garden's relationship to the public right-of-way. The design should provide a strong visual connection between the main garden and public right-of-way that enhances the pedestrian experience from within and from outside. In particular, views from the public right-of-way into the main garden should be more direct and unobstructed by building volume, solid fencing, and overhead circulation corridors.
Excerpt from Applicant Response
"Visual connection between the public right-of-way and the main garden has been enhanced with the removal of the overhead circulation (bridge walkway). Entry feature has also been modified to allow more direct views into the courtyard and garden areas…"
Staff Analysis: *Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval no. 1.*
The revised design has eliminated the above-grade covered walkways across the front, providing a stronger visual connection between the main garden at the interior and the public right-of-way. The entry into the main garden from the street has been modified to include a gate and a rectangular brick archway above. While this feature helps to define this point of entry, it may benefit from further refinement to ensure maximum visual connection into the central gardens, compatible proportions, and pedestrian orientation. This may include lowering it to better align with the façade brick treatment as discussed in condition no. 1 or adjusting its size/thickness.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 4
The enclosed circulation corridors at the outer edges of the building should be further studied to maximize the units' access to light and air, which may warrant a variation in unit plans and/or types, creation of open-air circulation zones, or provision of additional variety in the means of accessing units. Ensure that façade treatments on the sides and rear of the building relate to the interior programming of the building.
Applicant Response
"The enclosed circulation corridors at the outer edges of the building have been maintained for (2) specific reasons. 1) Provide privacy to adjacent neighbors from corridors. 2) Due to noise from existing power plant sub-station light and air is provided from windows and doors with balconies at the enclosed circulation corridors. The façade treatments at the sides and rear of the building relate to the interior programming of the building."
Staff Analysis: *Comment to be addressed through recommended condition of approval no. 2.*
The project has not modified or eliminated the closed corridors along the north and south perimeters of the building, which the applicant has determined to be necessary for noise mitigation and privacy. The treatment of the exterior of the corridors provides for windows and balconettes that break up the solidity of these elevations but in a simpler manner in comparison to the east or front facing elevation. While the interior programming has not

changed, the treatment of the north, south and rear elevations should be integrated with the overall design to provide a high-quality experience of these exteriors. Staff is recommending condition no. 2 to study the treatments and features at the north, south and west elevations and to incorporate similar treatments, including solid-to-void proportions and bay window features, as the front façade to ensure these secondary elevations, which will be visible due to lower-scaled development and adjacent historic resources, are designed with similar quality and features as the front elevation.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 5
Units at the ground floor that front South Oak Knoll Avenue should be articulated as primary entrances rather than secondary/patio access points.
Applicant Response
"Ground floor units have been revised to provide direct front door access from South Oak Knoll Avenue. Secondary access is provided from the corridor. Front porch entries have been further enhanced by replacing sliding doors with windows."
Staff Analysis: *Comment satisfactorily addressed.*
The design of the two front (street) facing units has been modified to incorporate entries at each respective location. The entry of unit 101 includes a front-facing entry door within the recessed entryway and unit 111 incorporates a side-facing entry door within the recessed entryway. Both units have been modified to provide direct access from the street while maintaining the character of a front porch and covered entryway with pathways extending to the entries from the main entry path.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 6
Ensure that the communal open spaces for the project include some amenities that will allow for use by the residents of the project, which may include discreet seating areas or other amenities that will help balance the generally passive intended use of the spaces.
Applicant Response
"Three communal open spaces at the main garden – provided (seating at planters, outdoor kitchen/BBQ and dining/Lounge seating)."
Staff Analysis: *Comment satisfactorily addressed.*
Landscape is provided throughout the site. The main garden and ancillary gardens are located at the center of the site and will maintain direct access from ground-floor units. The proposed central gardens include a number of amenities accessible by all residents, including seating areas and an outdoor BBQ space. The combination of landscaping, hardscaping and amenities will ensure the gardens are utilized as active spaces.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 7
Ensure that the residential portion of the project includes the required Pasadena Building Elements and Craftsmanship Element, identified in the plans submitted for Concept Design Review.
Applicant Response
"Craftsmanship Elements – the project includes decorative iron work for balcony and stair railings. The proposed design is a modern interpretation of Craftsman Design (simple geometry and modular design). The front and side gates and fence also provide a unique geometric pattern inspired by Craftsman architecture. Building Elements – this project includes numerous roofed balconies supported by posts on the ground floor. There are outdoor living areas (loggias) with orientation towards the street and main garden. In addition, we have an exterior staircase adjacent to the main garden/ancillary garden."
Staff Analysis: *Comment satisfactorily addressed.*
The project incorporates features and materials that meet the Craftsmanship and Building Elements requirements. Design details of these features will be reviewed during Final Design Review.
Preliminary Consultation Comment 8
Study the organization of the internal programming and ensure a strong relationship between the programming and exterior. This may include re-examining the unit types and locations, the enclosed corridor locations and connections, locations of vertical circulation and access points. Consider incorporating a communicating stair near the front of the building to encourage its use for primary access to the upper floors by pedestrians.
Applicant Response
"New staircase has been added at the front of the building (near main garden/ancillary garden) to encourage primary access to the upper floors by the pedestrians. Visual connectivity is provided by large openings into the stairwell."

Staff Analysis: *Comment satisfactorily addressed.*
The proposed project incorporates several staircases at the front, rear and within the central gardens to encourage equitable access from various locations. While the interior programming has not changed, the applicant has incorporated a staircase near the front of the building, which adds to the variety of access points throughout the site.

Programming and Circulation

The project proposes one building in a U-shape to be generally sited at the north, south and west perimeters of the site and around a central main garden and ancillary gardens. The building will maintain five-foot, three-inch setbacks at the north, south and west sides of the lot and a 22-foot, six-inch setback at the east side (front). At the southeast corner of the project site, the building is proposed to have a 15-foot wide by 64-foot-deep setback from the south and east property lines to provide relief to the adjacent protected Canyon Live Oak tree on the adjacent property. This carve-out spans the entire height of the project at this location and at the parking level as well. A 21-foot-wide driveway is proposed at the north side of the site to provide access to the subterranean parking level. The 46 units are proposed to be stacked with variations in the layouts and pedestrian circulation to the units at floors two through four through enclosed corridors at the north and south sides of the building. Elevators and stairwells are proposed at the northwest corner, southwest corner, and near the front of the building within or facing the central gardens. Primary access to the ground floor front-facing units is provided and a pedestrian gate is proposed at the front between the two building ends for access to the interior of the site from the street.

Overall, the programming of the building and site is consistent with the applicable design guidelines and as responsive as possible to the Commission's Preliminary Consultation comments. While the interior programming, specifically to address eliminating the closed corridors at the north and south sides, has not changed since Preliminary Consultation, the constraints of and concerns related to privacy and noise from the adjacent power plant sub-station are understandable and staff is recommending condition of approval no. 2 to study the treatments and features at the north and south elevations and to incorporate similar treatments as the front façade to ensure consistency in the design throughout.

Orientation

The proposed building has a strong orientation to the central main and ancillary gardens and to the street. The front-facing units will primarily be oriented with large windows and entries facing east toward South Oak Knoll Avenue. The remaining units will be oriented to primarily overlook the central main and ancillary gardens. Covered balconies and loggias are proposed at the front and overlooking the central gardens. The exteriors of the north and south elevations incorporate fenestration and balconettes to break up the solidity of these elevations in response to the enclosed corridors along these facades. Entries to individual units at the upper floors are proposed to be within the closed corridors. Overall, the orientation of the proposed building is in keeping with the applicable design guidelines as it provides for maximum visual and physical access to the street and main and ancillary gardens.

Height, Massing and Modulation

The height limit at this location is 40 feet (or up to 45 feet with height averaging), measured from the lowest point of existing grade. The project proposes an overall maximum height of 47 feet,

10 inches. In order to achieve the proposed height, the applicant is requesting a density bonus concession since the project provides on-site affordable units.

The proposed four-story building will include some modulation through recessed entries and projecting and recessed balconies. Projecting volumes are proposed at the front and rear and facing the courtyard, with some spanning two floors. Overall, the modulations depicted in the elevation drawings are appropriate and responsive to the design guidelines and previous comments from the Commission.

Architectural Style and Detailing

The proposed building is of a contemporary design and incorporates flat roofs with additional flat concrete tile mansard roof forms set below the roof cornice, articulated massing, stacked punched window and door openings and a combination of stucco, brick veneer, and cement board exterior wall materials. The design references materials and features seen on the surrounding historic properties including the mansard roof form, brick veneer, trellis structures, and design of cement board siding with vertical dimensional pilasters. The proposed contemporary style is compatible with the surrounding context, which includes a variety of architectural styles and periods of construction. The combination of materials and features that are both unique to the proposed style and reference similar features and materials of the surrounding historic properties, but should be studied to ensure appropriate integration, transitions and applications. Staff is recommending condition of approval no. 1 requiring further study of the integration of the mansard roof forms into the building massing rather than applying the mansards directly to the flat-roofed volumes, and a more consistent application of the proposed brick material (both height and extent) at the front of the building and continuing to the easternmost portion of the north elevation. Upon implementation of this condition, the project will be consistent with the applicable design guidelines.

Compatibility

The proposed new building is generally compatible with its immediate surroundings in terms of massing, setbacks and architectural design. The proposed four-story building utilizes a concession for height, creating a taller building on the block. In addition, the design references some features and materials found on the two adjacent historic properties but as applied in a contemporary manner. With recommended conditions of approval nos. 1 through 3, the design shall continue to be refined moving into Final Design Review such that its overall compatibility will be enhanced.

Conceptual Landscape Design

The landscape plans provided outline an extensive program of landscaping that would soften the existing streetscape and enhance the network of pathways and open spaces within the project site. the central main garden and ancillary gardens are proposed to be designed with hardscape and plantings that will contribute to the experience of the gardens, along with usable amenities such as seating and a BBQ area. An area with turf is proposed for the south side of the site as a pet area. The conceptual landscape design appears to be in keeping with the applicable guidelines as it will provide for a lush array of plantings, amenities and hardscaping.

Protected Tree Removal

The proposed project necessitates the removal of three protected native trees, all Coast Live Oaks: tree #8 (DBH 18.5”), tree #11 (DBH 9”), and tree #12 (DBH 16”). All trees are in good condition, but are located within or near the building footprint of the proposed development and need to be removed to accommodate the project. The removal can be approved under finding #6 of the Tree Protection Ordinance, which states, “the project, as defined in Section 17.80.020, includes a landscape design plan that emphasizes a tree canopy that is sustainable over the long term by adhering to the replacement matrix prepared by the city manager and included in the associated administrative guidelines.”

The landscape plans indicate a number of trees proposed to be planted throughout the site, which could potentially comply with the replacement requirements. The replacement requirements are as follows:

Existing Tree DBH	Replacement Tree Type	Replacement Tree Number and Size
Tree 8 (18.5”) and Tree 12 (16”)	Native	(16) 15 gallon; or (8) 24-inch box; or (4) 36-inch box
Tree 11 (9”)	Native	(6) 15 gallon; or (3) 24-inch box

The applicant is proposing to plant four 36-inch box Coast Live Oak trees on site and a variety of other specimen trees (including five 36-inch-box King Palm trees, four 36-inch-box Olive trees, and five 24-inch-box Brisbane Box trees) that exceed both the size and quantity requirements of the replacement matrix as outlined on sheet LP-1.0 of Attachment C. The applicant has requested a density bonus waiver from the requirement to replace native trees with native species due to root growth structures of native species and planter size, depths and orientations required to support their growth and maturity.

The proposed landscape design is appropriate and complementary to the architectural style and will create visual interest throughout the year as demonstrated by the plant palette. The design, selection and placement of plant materials are cohesive and consistent throughout all landscape areas. It should also be noted that in addition to new trees to be planted, two existing public street trees, and a Canyon Live Oak at the adjacent property to the south, with root structure extending onto the subject property, will be retained. The tree and its relationship to the proposed project was evaluated by three consulting arborists – one hired by the applicant, one hired by the adjacent property owner, and one hired by the City. All three arborists visited the project site and the Canyon Live Oak and inspected the tree’s root system to understand how the project may or may not impact it. Based on assessment and recommendations by the City’s consulting arborist (see Attachment F), the applicant has modified the parking plan to relocate parking space no. 48 so that trenching can be extended another eight to nine feet to the west and occur approximately 17 feet from the trunk of the tree. This change has already been addressed and is reflected in the drawings in Attachment C. The standard tree protection requirements by the City are also required to be met to ensure preservation and protection of the tree and are included as recommended condition no. 4 along with additional condition nos. 5 through 7 as recommended by the City’s consulting arborist.

City of Gardens Architectural Standards:

Craftsmanship Feature

PMC Section 17.22.080.E.1 states, “Each project shall incorporate into the design at least one feature such as iron grates, tile fountains, cast terra cotta, woodwork, stenciled ornament or other elements as approved by the Design Review authority.”

The proposed project includes decorative iron work for balcony and stair railings. Details of these elements will be provided in the drawings submitted for Final Design Review as required by recommended condition of approval no. 3.

Pasadena Building Elements

PMC Section 17.22.080.E.2 states, “In addition to the above requirements, each new project shall incorporate at least two building elements. Building elements include: upper floor loggias, roofed balconies supported by brackets or by columns at the ground floor, exterior wooden or masonry stairs with closed risers, or tile or masonry fountain.”

The project incorporates roofed balconies supported by posts at the ground floor and an exterior staircase adjacent to the main garden/ancillary garden. Additional details are required to ensure both of these features meet the requirements of this section as outlined in recommended condition of approval no. 3.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

Staff routed the project for comment to several City departments, as well as other divisions of the Planning & Community Development Department, including the Public Works, Transportation, Fire and Housing Departments and the Building, and Current Planning Divisions of the Planning & Community Development Department. Recommended conditions from all reviewing City Departments are included in Attachment A. The Local Mobility Analysis that is the basis for some of the conditions from the Department of Transportation is included in Attachment E.

Density Bonus

The Current Planning Section determined that the project is eligible for a 42.5% density bonus and is eligible for concessions and waivers as afforded by State Density Bonus Law. The development will include a total of 46 residential units, including six affordable housing units (five very low income and one moderate income). The applicant requested and the project qualifies for the following:

Concession: To allow a building height of 47 feet, 10 inches, where the maximum allowable height is 40 feet (or up to 45 feet with height averaging) pursuant to PMC Section 17.30.060.C.2.

Waiver: To allow for planting of three 24-inch-box (or greater) specimen trees rather than three 24-inch-box native trees per the Tree Replacement Matrix.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The project will be constructed on a vacant site in an urbanized area and is consistent with the General Plan, Central District Specific Plan and Zoning designations that apply to the property. Staff engaged EcoTierra Consulting, Inc., an environmental consulting firm, to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the project and determine whether it would meet the required findings for a Categorical Exemption under class 32, “infill development projects.” Based on the documentation prepared, which is included in Attachment D, the project would not have the potential to result in significant impacts related to noise or air quality. Potential water quality impacts will be alleviated through existing regulations and the site is vacant and, therefore, would have no impacts to cultural resources. With respect to traffic impacts, it should be noted that the project is below the Department of Transportation’s established threshold for requiring a CEQA-level traffic study and, therefore, is within a class of projects that have been determined to have less than significant impacts on traffic. Based on this analysis, staff recommends that the Commission determine that the project is Categorically Exempt from CEQA under class 32, “infill development projects.”

CONCLUSION:

Upon implementation of the recommended conditions, the project design will satisfactorily address the comments provided during Preliminary Consultation and be consistent with the design-related goals and policies in the Central District Specific Plan and the Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial & Multi-Family Residential Districts. Staff recommends approval of the application for Concept Design Review for the project with the conditions of approval described above and included in Attachment A, which will be reviewed during Final Design Review.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Paige, AICP
Director of Planning and
Community Development

Prepared by:

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Senior Planner

Reviewed by:

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Attachments (7):

A. Recommended conditions of approval
B. Tree inventory and exhibit; Private Tree Removal application
C. Current plans and elevations
D. Environmental documentation
E. Local mobility analysis
F. Dudek Tree Report (dated August 27, 2025)
G. Tree Protection Guidelines