

# Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL                      DATE: NOVEMBER 22, 1999

FROM: CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: APPEAL OF CONCEPT DESIGN DECISION FOR THE BROAD  
CENTER FOR THE BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES BUILDING,  
360 SOUTH WILSON AVENUE, CALTECH

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## CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Adopt the conclusions of the **draft initial environmental study** that construction of the Broad Center for the Biological Sciences Building at Caltech, with mitigation measures, will not create any significant adverse effects on the environment;
2. Approve a Mitigated **Negative Declaration** and mitigation monitoring program for the project;
3. Direct the staff to file a Notice of Determination with the County Clerk;
4. Find that the design of the project complies with the Citywide Design Principles and Criteria and Objective #5 (character and scale of Pasadena) in the Land Use Element of the General Plan; the Purposes of Design Review in §17.92.010 of the Zoning Code; and the Design Guidelines in the Caltech Master Development Plan; and
5. Approve the application for concept design with the following conditions:

### Recommended Conditions of Approval for Concept Design of Broad Center

1. To provide for articulation that is compatible with the surroundings, the final design of **window details** shall include a significant articulated feature for the south elevation's windows, such as the deeply recessed metal trim element described by the architect. [*Purposes of Design Review- 17.92.010.B*]
2. To insure that the building is inviting to pedestrians, the final design shall clarify how the **entries** clearly invite attention and entry by pedestrians by using elements such as canopies, recesses, and distinctive colors. [*Citywide Design Principles and Criteria*]

3. The inclusion of interconnecting arcades and pavilions for the Broad Center (cited on page 88 of the master plan) shall be deferred until Caltech either presents a thematic design—with structural arcades and pavilions—for new construction along the east-west axis on Wilson Avenue or applies to the City for an amendment to the master plan to modify or omit this requirement from the plan due to the more recent open space context created by the February, 1999, Master Development Plan amendment. (*Caltech Master Development Plan pages 88 and 99*)
4. **Final Design** review shall be conducted by the Planning and Permitting Department according to the procedures in §17.92.070 (B) of the municipal code.

**DESIGN COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

The Design Commission has the same recommendation as the City Manager except that Conditions Nos. 3 and 4 are replaced by the following Conditions:

3. To provide consistent thematic elements and proper pedestrian circulation within the University, incorporate an **arcade** along the northern edge of the building and to the east of the building where it will interconnect to a future arcade or building. (*Caltech master Development Plan pages 88 and 99*)
4. To establish consistent encoding of gateways into the campus, provide for a **pavilion** similar to those seen at Bechtel Mall at or near the northwest corner of this building and a twin on the north side of the mall. (*Caltech Master Development Plan page 88*)
5. To assure compatibility of **materials**, the color of the stone material shall be compatible with the plaster color and Spanish Colonial Revival features of the Beckman Institute, and the metal shall be brushed metal rather than highly polished. (*Caltech Master Development Plan page 99*)
6. To assure **architectural treatment** that is compatible with nearby buildings and to unify the architectural character of surrounding buildings, provide additional design references to these nearby buildings. (*Caltech Master Development Plan page 99*)
7. **Final Design** review and approval shall be conducted by the Design Commission.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In August, 1999, Caltech applied to the City for entitlements, including design review and environmental approvals, for construction of a 103,000 square foot biological sciences building on Wilson Avenue at the western entry to a new east-west mall on the north campus.

The proposed building has three stories above grade and two basement levels. The modern style building has metal and stone facades, numerous windows for lab rooms around the building, four entries, and two glass towers. There is also a one-story café with a curved glass façade framing a courtyard and a one-story loading/storage wing.

The Design Commission met twice (on September 29 and October 11) in a public hearing to review the project. The Commission found that the project lacked the entry pavilions and the interconnecting arcades that are required by the Master Plan. As a result, it adopted conditions to their approval of the concept design to address these issues. The Commission also required changes to the building elevations to include additional treatments to tie the modern design to the existing architecture of the campus, while leaving the choice of features to the architects.

In response to these arguments, Caltech contended that an arcade of trees down the center of the mall and two groves of palm trees would satisfy the provisions in the master plan for arcades. Caltech representatives were also concerned that some of the conditions of design approval would disturb the architectural composition of the project, that an arcade would dim the light into some of the labs, and that an arcade invited unwanted pedestrian views into the 12 lab windows along the mall. Consequently, it appealed the decision to the City Council.

Staff met and spoke several times with Caltech representatives in an attempt to narrow the issues. Staff recommends that the arcade and pavilion issues be postponed to a later date and construction can proceed without them. Staff agrees with Caltech's interpretation of the design flexibility in the Master Plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

The project is within the scope of Caltech's current Master Development Plan, which was approved by the City in 1989 and amended in 1997 and 1999. The Master Plan has the force of the Zoning Code in terms of Caltech's plans. The Broad Center will be the third of approximately ten buildings that will line a new east-west mall shaping the northern campus of Caltech. The plans received Predevelopment Plan Review on September 8, 1999. The Master Development Plan requires design review by the Design Commission for projects of 70,000 square feet. The Design Commission met in hearings on September 29 and October 11, 1999, and approved the project 4-2 with seven conditions of approval.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The project consists of a three-story research building that will be highly visible from Wilson Avenue where Wilson passes through the Caltech campus. The building walls are clad in stone on the south and metal on the west and north. A rooftop screen and parts of the service wing have stucco walls. Walls are to be pierced with monolithic windows that are to be flush or nearly flush with the walls.

Windows are accented in different ways to provide some articulation along the façade surfaces.

Glass towers form two focal points for the building, one on the north side, and one in the southwest portion of the building. The proposed massing on the southwest portion of the building erodes from three stories to one story in three incremental steps, creating another focal point.

On the rear of the building, there are two flying walkways and an underground tunnel connecting to a one-story service portion of the building that will be used as a shipping/receiving facility. It sits 35 feet from the rest of the building.

North of the loading facility is a second, one-story accessory portion of the building, which contains a café with indoor and outdoor seating areas for eating and gathering. Several existing trees will be preserved to enhance the café's courtyard. The café has a curved glass wall facing the courtyard. The courtyard's main feature, other than the existing trees, is a pergola with two curved rows of round columns.

To the north of the proposed building, the project will include construction of the western portion of the new east-west mall. An entry statement will consist of two groupings of 15 palm trees. The mall will be comprised of two rows (an allee) of deciduous trees, three walkways that widen into courtyards, and other landscaping.

## **ANALYSIS:**

### **Environmental Assessment**

Initial study. The draft initial study concludes that any adverse effects would be temporary, or resolved by the requirements of local ordinances (e.g., noise, hours of construction, etc.), or would be reduced to a level of insignificance through the incorporation of mitigation measures concerning protection of native oak trees. Therefore a mitigated Negative Declaration is recommended.

### **Design Issues**

Building location, orientation, landscaping, height and massing: The Commission found that these issues were generally fulfilled by the project's design. To further comply with the guidelines, the architects agreed to strengthen the distinctiveness of the entries. To provide compatible modulation, the architects agreed to articulate the windows more in the final design. The Commission found that the unusual stepped massing on the southwest corner of the building was compatible in addition to being a visually interesting feature for motorists and pedestrians.

Courtyards: The Master Plan requires that the buildings along the east-west mall be designed so that courtyards are created for pleasant gathering spots. The

design fulfills this requirement well by providing the outdoor café's eating area to the east of the main portion of the building.

Arcades and Pavilions: Caltech proposed to provide two rows of tree and clusters of palm trees instead of attaching a structural arcades and pavilion on the north side of the building. The Master Development Plan calls for arcades that interconnect the various buildings along the new east-west mall and create courtyards along the mall. (The Broad Center is at the western edge of this mall.) The importance of the east-west mall is emphasized throughout the Master Plan as a key organizing feature of the new north campus. Two previous buildings, Moore Lab and Avery House, were constructed along the east-west mall as part of the Master Plan in 1995 and 1996 respectively. They both include structural arcades along the mall, and Avery House has a tall pavilion attached to the arcade at the entry to the mall.

On page 88, the Plan says "buildings....will be clustered to form courtyards and interconnected by a system of arcades....." On page 99, it states, "[new] building[s]...should be designed not as individual architectural statements, but as parts of a larger whole to be interconnected with arcades to form courtyards and a consistent architectural environment."

Page 88 of the Plan says, "The arcades will be terminated at small pavilion structures (similar to those seen at the Bechtel Mall) at their intersection with Wilson Avenue and Holliston Avenue, to promote a consistent encoding of the gateways into the campus." The pavilions where Bechtel Mall meets Wilson Avenue are attached to the buildings flanking the mall. They are square in plan with blue-tiled domes. At Holliston Avenue, Avery House, which was built in 1996 at the eastern gateway to the new east-west mall, does have a strong corner pavilion. In the Broad Center plan, the architects use two groves of palm trees to act as entry features similar to pavilions.

*Caltech's Position:* The applicant proposed that an allee (two parallel rows) of trees in the mall be considered a natural version of an arcade. They proposed that two groupings of palm trees at the western edge of the mall serve as the pavilions. They argued that Caltech should have the flexibility to interpret the Master Plan in this manner. They expressed concern that a structural arcade would harm their goals by reducing light into the ground floor labs on the north side and by encouraging people to walk next to the windows and peer into the windows on this side. In meetings since their appeal, they have also made the point that, since the Master Plan was amended in February, 1999, to create a large open space to the south of the Broad Center, the arcade and interconnecting courtyard is no longer needed. Thus, this portion of the Master Plan has not caught up with other recent amendments to the Plan.

*Commission's Position:* The Commission, after lengthy discussion at two meetings, decided that the Master Plan, as quoted above, requires a structural

arcade similar to the ones existing on the south campus, rather than a natural arcade. Not only does the lack of a structural arcade diminish the organizing aspect of the east-west mall, but the Commissioners also pointed out that the existing arcades are outstanding distinguishing features of Caltech's campus. The Commission majority found that the lack of a systematic, easy-to-visualize arcade does not seem to achieve the letter or the intent of the Plan. Furthermore, the Commission majority found that the design needs to provide for structural pavilions that are more like the existing ones on Bechtel Mall.

The Commission stated that an attached arcade with modern styling can fit compatibly with the existing design. The arcade can be added along the northern side of the building without relocating or reducing the size of the building. The Commission emphasized that the addition of arcades and pavilions to the design does not necessitate changes in the modern architectural style of the building. The materials can be similar to those on the Broad Center rather than those of the south campus. The Commission believes that Caltech's other option, besides redesign, is to propose an amendment to the Master Plan.

The Commission voted 4-2 to approve two conditions of approval related to this interpretation of the Master Plan. The two Commissioners in the minority agreed with Caltech's position.

*City Manager's Position:* The staff believes that the real issue is the Master Development Plan and Caltech's ability to request an amendment to the approved Plan. Staff recommends that Caltech apply for their desired amendment and that this issue be deferred until that process is completed. If the City Council does not approve the desired amendments, the physical arcade and pavilion could be added later.

#### Architectural Treatment:

*Caltech's Position:* Caltech sees the location of this building as a focal point on the western end of the campus due to the new grassy area planned to the south of the building. They believe they should be permitted to deviate from the architectural styles of surrounding buildings. They are striving for a design that reaches for architectural excellence, imagination and creativity, which are all sought by the Citywide Design Principles in the General Plan. They also pointed to statements in the Master Plan cautioning against architectural monotony and to ambiguities in the Plan that imply that the intent is to allow some freedom.

*Commission Position:* A majority of the Commission was concerned that the architecture steered away from the Master Plan's recommendations regarding overall design. The issue relates to guidelines on page 99 that say:

- New buildings should not be designed in isolation, but address and seek to unify the architectural character of surrounding buildings.

- New buildings should be designed to be compatible with the massing, scale, architectural treatment, and materials of nearby buildings and places.

Consequently the Commission asked for more obvious references to existing architecture for design compatibility. Stylistically, and in terms of design details, the Commission found that there were few, if any, references either to the Spanish Colonial Revival style that characterizes much of the campus or to the adjacent buildings.

The Commission supported the proposed stone and metal façade materials in Condition #5 and urged their use in the final design

Final Design Review: The Final Design review is conducted by the Planning and Permitting Department, according to Code. The Design Commission has requested that it conduct final design review. The Commission included this request in its conditions of approval for the Broad Center.

In this report, the staff recommends that the Planning and Permitting Department conduct final design review for two reasons. First, the complexity of remaining issues with this project is limited and well within the range of project reviews routinely delegated to the staff, as intended by the municipal code in assigning this review to City staff. There do not appear to be a range of issues that require the full participation of the Commission. Second, the Planning and Permitting Department can complete this review more quickly and expeditiously than the alternative of presenting the application to the Commission. This project has already been in process with the City for 13 weeks, and the design review portion has already taken 10 of those weeks. The University still needs to submit the plans through plan check. This plan check procedure should add another eight weeks. The additional delay of referring final design review to the Commission (when the code authorizes the Planning Director to conduct these reviews) appears to be unnecessary. Additionally, it has been necessary to cancel Commission meetings because of lack of a quorum.

#### **CITY COUNCIL OPTIONS**

In its decision, the Council may: 1) approve the application as submitted with no conditions; 2) approve the recommendation from the City Manager; 3) approve the application with some or all of the conditions adopted by the Design Commission; 3) modify the approval to include new or modified conditions; or 4) remand the application back to the Commission with directions regarding reconsideration.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The City Manager's recommendation upholds much of the Design Commission's decision. The primary change involves the addition of arcades and pavilions. Due to timing imperatives for Caltech, it is recommended that the issue of arcades and pavilions be postponed until additional buildings on the east/west

mall are proposed. At that time there will be an opportunity to look at the Broad Center and other buildings in a new context and decide whether arcades and pavilions are appropriate for this setting. Then Caltech may choose to either amend the Master Plan or to develop a design for arcades and pavilions along the east/west axis.

#### **HOUSING IMPACT**

A decision on the appeal will have no effect on housing. The new biological sciences building is an institutional building. Any housing impacts related to expansion of the Caltech campus are addressed in the Master Plan.

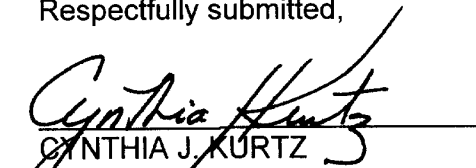
#### **IMPACT ON THE CITY'S REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS**

The appeal will not affect the City's review and approval process.


#### **FISCAL IMPACT**

A decision on the appeal will have no effect on revenues to the City. Construction of the Broad Center is entitled in the Master Plan, and Caltech has paid fees to the City for design review.

Respectfully submitted,

  
CYNTHIA J. KURTZ  
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#### **Attachments:**

1. Caltech Master Development Plan Map
2. Project Plans (dated July 27, 1999)
3. Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring Program
4. Photos of Bechtel Mall