

September 5, 2019

Mr. Rendell Bustos
Department of Community Development
City of San Mateo
330 West 20th Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94403-1388

RE: 180 East Third Avenue

Dear Rendell:

I reviewed the drawings, evaluated the site context, viewed the video of the November Planning Commission Study Session and prepared review letters on April 11, May 27 and August 6. My comments on the revised plans and elevations for this project are as follows:

SITE CONTEXT

The site is located on a prominent corner site in the heart of Downtown San Mateo. The site is immediately adjacent to the central public garage. Other nearby structures range from small one-story structures to taller commercial buildings. Photographs of the site and surroundings are shown on the following page. The site is within the Downtown Historic District. Photographs of some of the prominent buildings within the district are shown on page 3.





The Site



The Site (Right) and view down Ellsworth Avenue



Adjacent retail immediately to the right on Third Avenue



Other nearby retail to the right on Third Avenue



Adjacent retail immediately across Third Avenue



Adjacent retail immediately across Ellsworth Avenue



Nearby multi-story structure across Third Avenue



View east on the block immediately adjacent to the site

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT EXAMPLES



PLANNING COMMISSION CONCERNS AND COMMENTS

In the Planning Commission Study Session on November 27, commissioners largely expressed support for the project, but did voice a few concerns as noted below.

- Generally liked the proposed Contemporary Style of the building (multiple commissioners).
- Concern for how trash would be taken out to the curb for pick up
- Concern with the tall mechanical screen.
- Building seems too tall.
- Would like to see more emphasis on the corner.
- Not enough effort to fit into the historic context of the Downtown.
- Would like to see more detail related to other buildings in the Historic District.
- Stone or brick facing would be preferable to stucco.
- Would like to see more vegetation.
- Design seems too much like other newer buildings in the Downtown area.
- Some concern expressed about basement office space.

IDENTIFIED ISSUES (APRIL 11 REVIEW LETTER)

The primary concerns raised included the following:

The proposed building is contemporary in style with design elements and features intended to respond the *Downtown Retail Core & Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines*. The challenge is to maintain the freshness of the Contemporary Style while incorporating materials and design feature that strongly relate to the historic and contributing structures within the Downtown Historic District. The *Retail Core & Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines* specifically address design objectives in a chapter entitled *Non-Historic Buildings Within the Downtown Historic District* (pages 23-26) which apply to both new buildings and remodeling work on non-historic buildings within the Downtown Historic District.

In general, the proposed designs had a number of elements that appear to meet these objectives and the Downtown Retail Core Design Guidelines, but there are a few issues that were not addressed. General design comments and issues included the following:

1. Trash removal through the Office Lobby didn't seem consistent with high quality office space.
2. The large open well to allow light into the basement office space seemed like it might compromise the successful layout of the retail space.
3. The retail and office lobby entries were not recessed as much as illustrated in the Downtown Design Guidelines (page 10).
4. The transition on East Third Avenue between the taller facade element at the corner and the adjacent one-story storefronts was awkward.
5. The large horizontal second story windows were not typical of buildings in the Historic District, and were not consistent with Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines (*EE Architectural Rhythms of Historic Buildings - Design Objective: The design of new buildings should acknowledge the rhythm established by facade widths, window patterns or other architectural elements*).
6. The limited reference to common Historic District details seemed inconsistent with the intent of the Historic District Design Guidelines.
7. The light colored infill panels on the roof top mechanical screen drew too much attention to that element at the expense of the overall design.

APPLICANT'S CHANGES FOLLOWING THE STUDY SESSION AND APRIL 11 REVIEW LETTER

- **Trash Room: A door has been added to the rear alley facade.**
- **First Floor Light Well: No changes made.**
- **Third Avenue Transition:**
 - **Molding Trim height adjusted.**
 - **Second floor window transom detail added**
 - **Brick detail added.**
- **Second floor window proportions: No changes made.**
- **Brick in lieu of stucco on third floor and tall wall at Office Lobby: No changes made.**
- **Deeper vestibule recesses at entries: **Entries recesses depth increased.****
- **Lower height of the mechanical screen: **Screen lowered by approximately 2'-0".****
- **Limit color contrast between mechanical screen frame and infill panels: **Color changes made.****
- **Use brick on the alley facing walls: **Some additional brick added and color contrast of infill panels reduced.****

MAY 27 REVIEW LETTER ISSUES AND APPLICANT'S RESPONSE

Applicant's responses are shown in red.

Overall, the design is well done. In the study session, some commissioners were concerned that the design was too similar to the recent 405 East Fourth Avenue and 406 East Third Avenue structures. That may still be an issue for individual commissioners to decide.

Other issues raised by the Planning Commission that may need further consideration:

1. The building seemed visually too tall.

Possible changes: Set the third floor back further from the lower floors.

Add detail at the second floor to minimize the prominence of the upper floor - see Review Letter Issue #2 below

Applicant's Response: The height of the building has been adjusted to the fullest extent possible while conforming to the required setbacks and height restrictions per zoning. In addition, we have reduced the mechanical screen by 2'-0" since the initial submittal and study

2. Not enough effort to fit into the historic context of Downtown.

Applicant's Response: We have worked with staff to create a design that meets the historic guidelines while not copying existing details. Per the review and response from the historic design consultant, the design responds to the character of the historic district and meets the required standards for the Downtown Historic District. Details include soldier coursing at the window openings and base of the pilasters, decorative brick details in the frieze, metal kickplate at the openings, and small muntins in the second-floor window. These details and elements tie the building to the historic character without copying details.

3. Would like to see more detail related to other buildings in the Historic District.

Possible changes: Increase brick detailing and add second floor awnings.

Applicant's Response: We have worked with staff to create a design that meets the historic guidelines while not copying existing details. Per the review and response from the historic design consultant, the design responds to the character of the historic district and meets the required standards for the Downtown Historic District. Details include soldier coursing at the window openings and base of the pilasters, decorative brick details in the frieze, metal kickplate at the openings, and small muntins in the second floor window. These details and elements tie the building to the historic character without copying details.

4. Stone or brick facing would be preferable to stucco.

Possible changes: Use all brick facades where stucco is now shown.

Applicant's Response: The careful layering of the materials along the first and second floors creates a focus at the pedestrian level and reduces the scale of the building. The clean stucco forms at the third level and the office entry create a backdrop for the details at the pedestrian level. The use of stucco is also included within the historic design guidelines.

OTHER ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE MAY 27 REVIEW LETTER NOTED AS NEEDING FURTHER PLANNING COMMISSION DISCUSSION:

Applicant's responses are shown in red

1. Basement light well.

Possible changes: Eliminate the light well to allow a more functional ground floor retail space.

Applicant's Response: While we understand the challenges that the lightwell presents in relationship to the retail frontage, it is a critical aspect of the design in order to create a viable space in the lower level. We have further analyzed the light study at the opening and are reducing the light well by 1'-6" in depth. In addition, to the reduction in depth, the refinement of the design includes a display window at the back of the light well. This will be developed in conjunction with the future tenant/s to provide space for merchandise, signage, or other items to be displayed. Finally, the goal of the retail along the street frontage is to promote an active and pedestrian friendly experience throughout the downtown area. The unique feature of the lightwell opening into the lower level will create a visually interesting space for pedestrians to look into along the street.

2. Third Avenue transition to adjacent development.

Possible changes: Add wood wall cap to relate to corner white frame and add sloped awning.

Applicant's Response: The design includes specific elements that respond to the height of the 1-story adjacent building and create a transition. These include accent banding that aligns with the cornice, metal canopies that align with the adjacent awnings, and increased brick detailing in the frieze to highlight the first level. It is important for the building to provide transitional elements noted above while still maintaining the appropriate scale and massing for a 3-story building.

3. Second floor window proportions.

Possible changes: Use vertical proportioned paired windows in lieu of the horizontal windows.

Response: Looking throughout the downtown historic district, the window patterns on the second floor windows vary greatly. While some windows follow the proposed paired windows, there are many instances of the windows matching the width between the first and second levels. In looking to maintain the close connection between the first and second floors in the massing and detail, the design continues the width of the windows on the two floors. The second level windows have added detail including the muntins in the upper portion. This enhanced detail provides a cap to the second floor windows and further connects the design to the historic district.

CURRENTLY PROPOSED DESIGN



Original Design

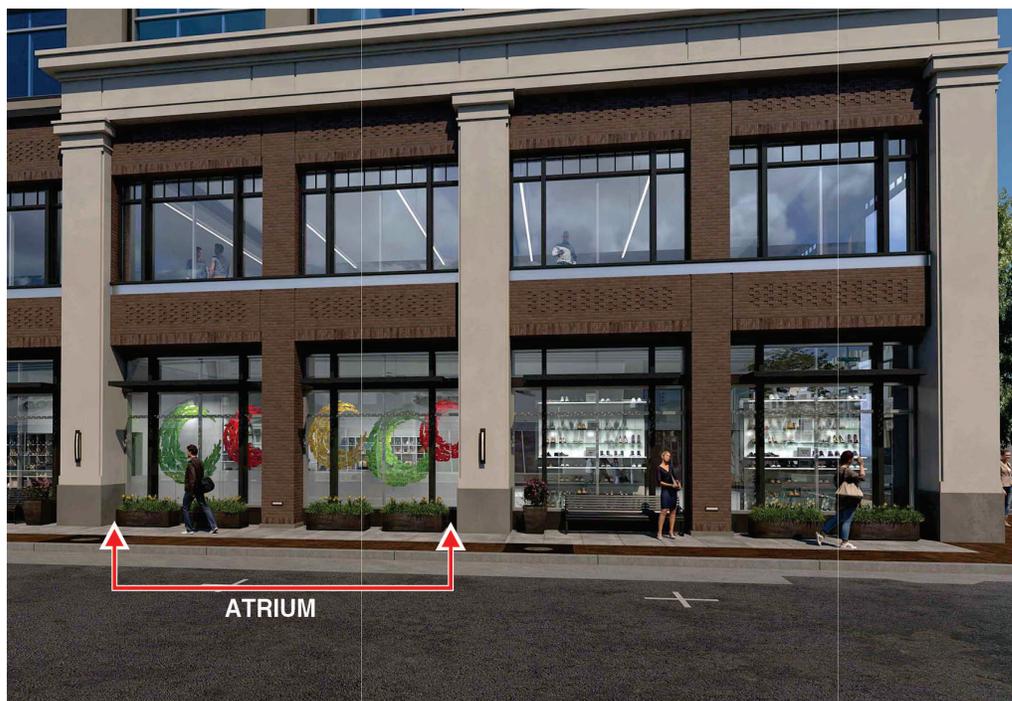
Current Design

STREET FACADES COMPARISON

REMAINING ISSUES

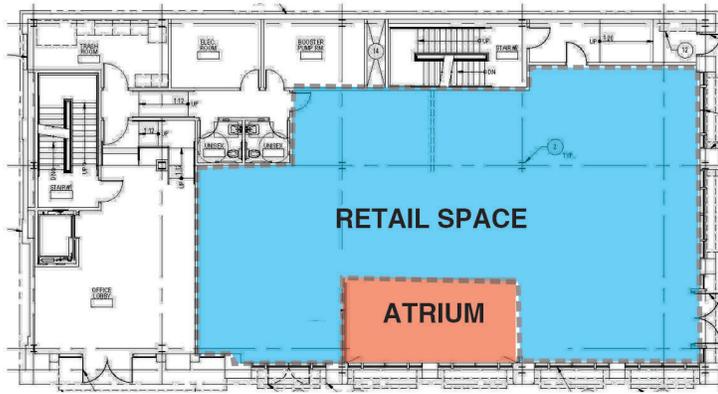
1. Atrium intrusion into the ground floor retail space

Planning staff has continued to work with the applicant on this issue. New sketches have been provided to better illustrate the impact of the atrium on the pedestrian experience along the Ellsworth Avenue frontage. These sketches are shown below and on the next page.





NOTE: Red and green elements hanging in the atrium are one possible example of public art that the applicant has committed to supplying within the store and visible from the street.

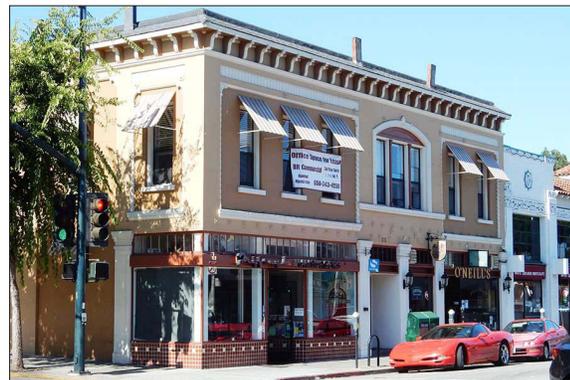
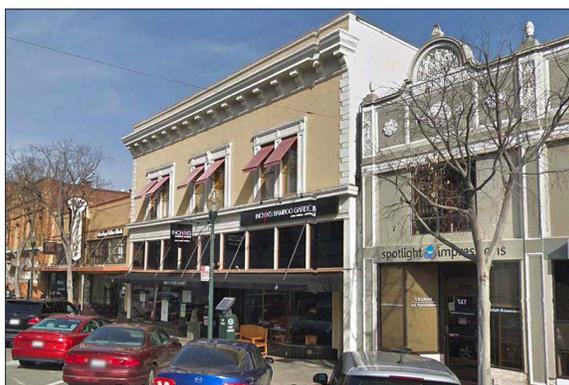


Current Atrium Ground Floor Plan

Recommendation: Staff feels comfortable with the proposed atrium as it relates to its impact on the pedestrian experience.

2. Second story window proportions

The recommendation in both the April 11 and May 27 review letters was to reduce second floor window sizes and add interesting architectural details in order to place greater emphasis on the second floor street facades to lessen the prominence of the third floor stucco facades - see previous recommended East Third Avenue illustration below and Downtown San Mateo examples.



Examples of Historic District structures with paired second floor vertical windows and awnings

Planning staff has continued to work with the applicant over the past month to resolve the second story window issue. The applicant has prepared two alternative approaches. Their preferred approach is to retain the wide windows previously proposed in earlier submittals (see elevations below). They have provided photo examples of other Downtown buildings to support the decision on sheet A0.10 of the submittal drawings.



NORTH ELEVATION - PREFERRED WINDOW LAYOUT 2
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

APPLICANT'S PREFERRED EAST THIRD AVENUE ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION - PREFERRED WINDOW LAYOUT 1
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

APPLICANT'S PREFERRED ELLSWORTH AVENUE ELEVATION

Staff continues to support smaller, paired second story windows. The applicant has prepared alternative elevations showing the smaller windows without the awnings recommended in earlier review letters (see elevations below).



NORTH ELEVATION - ALTERNATE WINDOW LAYOUT 4
SCALE: 3/8" = 1'-0"

STAFF'S RECOMMENDED EAST THIRD AVENUE ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION - ALTERNATE WINDOW LAYOUT 3
SCALE: 3/8" = 1'-0"

STAFF'S RECOMMENDED ELLSWORTH AVENUE ELEVATION

The paired windows are somewhat wider than the previously recommended windows.

Recommendation: After consultation with planning staff, my recommendation would still be to provide the smaller paired windows at the second floor.

Rendell, please let me know if you have any questions, or if there are specific issues of concern that I did not address.

Sincerely,
CANNON DESIGN GROUP


Larry L. Cannon