



CITY OF SAN MATEO

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Agenda Report

Agenda Number: 3

Section Name: STUDY SESSION

File ID: 19-2069

TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Ron Munekawa, Chief of Planning
PREPARED BY: Community Development Department
MEETING DATE: November 12, 2019

SUBJECT:
2 West 3rd Avenue – Tentative Parcel Map, SPAR, SDPA Pre-Application (PA-2019-012)

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Planning Commission review the proposed project on a preliminary basis, receive public comments, and provide input to the applicant and staff pertaining to the two project elements:

- A. On-site parking
- B. Building design

BACKGROUND:

Project Description

This pre-application has been submitted to develop a currently vacant 11,464 square-foot lot with a new office development. The proposed 19,998 square-foot (gross) office building includes three-stories, measuring 44 feet 6 inches to the top of the highest plate. The proposed project provides several amenities such as secure long-term bike storage onsite, public seating along the frontage of El Camino Real, a third-story outdoor patio deck for office tenants, and additional site improvements including widened sidewalks, additional street trees, and new curb and gutters installations. The applicant proposes to pay fees in-lieu of providing the project's 52 (48 employee + 4 visitor) required parking spaces on-site.

The proposed architectural style is modern and is designed to provide a transition from the downtown core to the mixed residential and commercial area west of South El Camino Real, which includes the City's Main Library. The contemporary building design features rectilinear lines and flat planes that are carried throughout the building form. The window fenestration is recessed primarily from the prominent vertical columns and arranged in rectangular sets which are present on the three street-facing elevations.

The east corner (at the intersection of W. 3rd Avenue and El Camino Real) of the proposed building is distinguished by the vertical expanse of floor-to-ceiling framed door and windows which extend from the ground floor to the third-story. The rear of the building is tiered along the third-story to provide an approximately 1,800 square-foot (sf) patio, which in addition to the gated courtyard located at the rear of the building provides outdoor amenity space for tenants of the office building. The primary material and finishes for the proposed building include brick veneer, smooth troweled plaster, aluminum and steel canopies, and bronze aluminum framed windows.

Seven (7) Coast live oak and Valley oak *heritage* trees exist on the project site along the rear (west) property line. The applicant proposes to preserve four (4) of the trees and remove three (3) as part of the project's scope of work. Project Plans are included as Attachment 1 and the applicant's Project Description Letter as Attachment 2.

Site Description

The project site is a vacant lot located at the northwest corner of 3rd Avenue and South El Camino Real. A gas station was formerly on the site and demolished in early 2014. The site is located just to the west of the City's "downtown core" and together with the two other corner properties at East 3rd Avenue and South El Camino Real, the project has the potential to serve as an additional component in establishing the intersection as a major entryway into downtown.

The property is approximately 11,464 sf in area and is located on the north side of 3rd Avenue between Arroyo Court and South El Camino Real and 3rd Avenue (bordered with street frontages on three sides). The site is generally bounded by multi-family residential to the west and north, commercial uses to the east, and a Bank of America branch to the south. The project site is zoned E2-2/R5 (Executive Offices/Residential Overlay) and the General Plan land use designation is Executive Office/High Density. A Location Map is included as [Attachment 3](#).

It should be noted the same property owner received approval (PA-2015-058) from the Planning Commission on July 25, 2017, to develop the subject site with a 25,617 square-foot, four-story, office and residential mixed-use building, and included a subterranean garage that accommodated 28 standard sized parking spaces (and one on-grade accessible van parking space) via an automated parking system. However, the associated building permit was never pulled to commence construction of the project. The owner cited the costs associated with sub-surface soil cleanup and the implementation and maintenance of the mechanical lift parking system as too cost prohibitive making the project infeasible as approved.

Applicable Code and Policy Review

The City's General Plan and Downtown Area Plan include specific policies pertaining to the site. Proposed developments in the City's downtown are reviewed for conformance with applicable policies and guidelines set forth in the General Plan, Downtown Plan Area, municipal code, and other applicable regulations.

General Plan

The General Plan Land Use Diagram designates the project site as Executive Offices/High Density Multi-Family. A preliminary list of applicable General Plan policies is included in [Attachment 4](#), these include policies pertaining to encouraging a variety of uses (including office) and enhancing the pedestrian environment. The formal planning application submittal will be required to provide further clarification and/or documentation to ensure compliance with all applicable policies and guidelines.

Zoning Code

The project proposes to develop a site located in the E2-2/R5 (Executive Office/Residential Overlay District) zoning district with a commercial office building, which requires it to comply with the development standards of the E2-2 zoning district. The building can be constructed to a maximum height of 55 feet (measured from finished grade to highest plate line) with a maximum permitted floor area ratio of 2.0 (or 22,928 sf). Setbacks along any street frontage are required to provide a minimum of 7 feet 6 inches of yard area. The E2 zoning district requires a minimum of 10 percent at-grade open space be provided. This includes decorative outdoor landscape elements, water features, paved or decorated surfaces of rock, stone, brick, or other similar material (excluding driveways, parking, loading, or storage areas), and sculptural elements.

The project has been designed to generally conform with General Plan and be consistent with the Zoning Code. The formal planning application submittal will be required to provide further clarification and/or documentation as necessary to ensure conformance with all applicable policies and guidelines. A preliminary list of applicable General Plan policies and project findings is included in [Attachment 4](#) and compliance with applicable Zoning Code requirements included as [Attachment 5 Factual Data Sheet](#).

Design Review

The proposed design will be reviewed by the City's design review consultant, Larry Cannon, AIA, of Cannon Design Group, for consistency with the General Plan's Urban Design Element of the General Plan, as well as to address concerns expressed by the Planning Commission and comments received from the public pertaining to design.

Downtown Area Plan

The project site is located in the West El Camino sub-area along the western edge of the Downtown Area Plan study area. The proposed office use is consistent with the goals of the policies by providing a diverse mix of uses within the downtown area, specifically establishing offices within the Downtown Retail Core and surrounding commercially designated areas.

The subject parcel is located within the Central Parking and Improvement District (CPID) and therefore required to provide off-street parking at the general office use ratio of 2.6 stalls (2.4 employee + 0.2 visitor) per 1,000 sf of gross floor area. As such, the 19,998 sf building would require 52 total stalls inclusive of visitor and accessible spaces. The applicant is proposing to pay fees in-lieu of providing the required off-street parking on-site, as discussed in further detail in the subsequent *Discussion* section of this report.

Bicycle Master Plan

The City's Bicycle Master Plan identifies existing and proposed bike lanes within the City. Per the Bicycle Master Plan, there is an existing "Class III Signed Bicycle Route" along West 3rd Avenue. The Plan denotes an opportunity for a "Class III Shared Lane Marking" along El Camino Real in the future; however, there are current plans to install the markings. The project complies with the short and long term bicycle parking requirements, including the installation of bicycle racks in the sidewalk.

Pedestrian Master Plan

The Citywide Pedestrian Master Plan identifies design guidelines for sidewalk standards to enhance the safety, convenience, and mobility of pedestrians within the City. The applicable sidewalk standard (A.8 - Type C) requires a 4-foot furniture/planter zone and 6-foot *through zone* (i.e. accessible, unblocked right of-way for pedestrian walkability) for the frontages along 3rd Avenue and Arroyo Court; a 4-foot furniture/planter zone and 8-foot *through zone* is required along El Camino Real. The applicant will need to demonstrate compliance with the through zone width and frontage requirements of the Pedestrian Master Plan upon submittal of the formal application.

The City's Pedestrian Master Plan, A.8 Sidewalk Standard – Retail/Commercial Type C New Development is included in Attachment 6.

Sustainable Streets

The San Mateo Sustainable Streets document identifies design guidelines to create vehicular and pedestrian infrastructure to meet the needs of the City. For this particular project, the design guidelines help to create the pedestrian realm. The Guidelines identify El Camino Real as a "Downtown - El Camino Real" zone and also require a 4-foot furniture/planter zone and a 6-foot through zone. The sidewalk design is generally consistent with applicable Sustainable Streets guidelines.

Items for Discussion

Onsite Parking

The project proposes no off-street parking, as the applicant is opting to request to pay fees in-lieu of providing required parking onsite in accordance with the zoning code. The current (FY2019/2020) parking in-lieu fee is \$26,311 for each required space; the project's 52 required spaces would equate to \$1,368,172 of in-lieu fees. It should be noted payment of fees in-lieu of parking is not a *by right* provision within the CPID. The acceptance of fees in-lieu of required parking is project specific based on existing conditions subject to availability and is at the discretion of the City.

Staff has met with the applicant team on multiple occasions during the pre-application process and indicated the lack of any off-street parking as a fundamental issue. The applicant has made note that they envision those future tenants needing to drive to the office development utilizing the nearby CPID public parking garage located on 2nd Avenue at N. El Camino Real. However, this is not likely a feasible alternative as the current usage at this garage is severely impacted. Parking at the garage is provided as either short-term hourly parking (up to three hours), or as all-day (10-hour) parking, including the option of purchasing a monthly parking permit valid in the 10-hour parking spaces. Parking demand at the garage is near or above target parking occupancy thresholds (i.e. 85 percent occupancy) during standard business hours during the weekdays. This parking garage also has the longest waitlist (currently 443 at the time of this report) for monthly permit requests of all the public parking garages and lots within the Downtown. It would be infeasible for this structure to accommodate the expected parking demand from this project in addition to existing demand.

Further, the availability of on-street parking along the adjacent streets (3rd Avenue and Arroyo Court) in the immediate area is limited from utilization by residents of the nearby single-family homes and multi-family developments (Casa Baywood apartments and Towers Condominium complex) due to Residential Parking Permit Program (RPPP) parking restrictions. Parking on those streets in excess of two hours is limited to residents with parking permits. Additionally, parking in the area is utilized by visitors of the offices, restaurants, and retail shops downtown, as well as for those visiting the public library. On-street parking would not be counted toward the project's parking requirement.

A memorandum was submitted by the applicant outlining their contention why providing off-street parking is not viable for this site. The primary reasons stated include the constraints of the relatively small lot size making conventional below-grade parking infeasible; the costs associated with excavation and soils clean-up to meet required to meet the County's environmental requirements; and lack of achievable housing density on the site. The memorandum is included as [Attachment 7](#).

Building Design

The Downtown Area Plan provides the framework and policies for guiding development in the downtown area. Policy I.3 of the plan speaks to establishing the 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors as a main entry and connection into the Downtown core areas. Specifically, along the intersections at El Camino Real 3rd/4th Avenue, new developments are called to provide an architectural statement. The relatively new buildings adjacent to the subject site at 1 and 2 East 3rd Avenue provide a distinct visual presence as an entryway leading into the Downtown Retail Core area. The vacant project site provides an opportunity to further distinguish this corridor along South El Camino Real.

The proposed building's angular forms contrast with the rounded, semi-circular corner elements featured on the buildings located at 1 and 2 East 3rd Avenue. However, the subject building's proposed color and material scheme of tan/khaki earth tones and brick veneer are complimentary with the aforementioned buildings. Further consideration regarding how the proposed building relates to the adjacent buildings and surrounding area should be discussed.

Should the applicant choose to submit a formal Planning Application, the project will be reviewed by the City's design review consultant, Larry Cannon, of Cannon Design Group, for consistency with the General Plan's Urban Design Element and the Rail Corridor Plan's Community Character and Design Guidelines, as well as to address concerns expressed by the Planning Commission and comments received from the public pertaining to design.

ENTITLEMENTS

As proposed, the project is anticipated to require the following entitlement approvals:

- Site Plan and Architectural Review (SPAR) for the construction of more than 10,000 square feet of non-residential development;
- Site Development and Planning Application (SDPA) for the removal of major vegetation from a parcel of land in conjunction with its development; and
- Tentative Parcel Map to merge the three lots into one parcel.

Please see [Attachment 8](#) for more information regarding the required findings for these entitlements.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The applicant held a formal pre-application neighborhood meeting on October 16, 2019, in which approximately 35 community members attended. The questions and comments are summarized below:

1. Required Parking – where the office workers park, parking is a problem in the area, the project only compounds the parking issues.
2. Parking in-lieu fees – how much are the in-lieu fees, can parking in-lieu fees be applied to code enforcement?
3. Bulb-out – Is the bulb-out necessary, concerns of losing the third lane on 3rd Avenue due to the bulb-out, bulb-outs are a bad idea.
4. Trees – will the existing trees (oaks) along the west property line be kept? Development of the Lot – compliments on the building design, great to develop the vacant lot and complete the Gateway.

A summary of the formal neighborhood meeting is included as Attachment 9.

Additional public comments submitted into the City are included in Attachment 10. Please note, personal information has been redacted from the correspondence.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Staff is seeking the Planning Commission's comments and input on the following items:

- A. On-site Parking – Evaluation of the project's proposal to pay fees in-lieu of providing required off-street parking for the office development.
- B. Building Design – The overall architectural style and design approach, including building materials, massing and building forms.

Following this study session, the applicant will revise the plans as necessary to respond to comments from staff and the Planning Commission and submit a formal planning application.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:

In accordance with Public Resources Code Section 21065, the review of a pre-application is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because the Planning Commission is not taking action at this time. An environmental review will be conducted as part of the formal planning application in conformance with CEQA.

NOTICE PROVIDED

In accordance with Government Code Section 65091 and the City's Municipal Code noticing requirements, this study session was noticed to the following parties more than ten days in advance of the neighborhood and Planning Commission meetings:

- Property owners, residential tenants and business tenants within 1,000 feet of the project site.
- The City's "900 List" which contains nearly 100 Homeowner Associations, Neighborhood Associations, local utilities, media, and other organizations interested in citywide planning projects;
- The City's Planning "Notify Me" email list; and,
- The interested parties list, which includes interested individuals who contacted the City and requested to be added to the project notification list.

ATTACHMENTS

- Att 1 – Project Plans
- Att 2 – Project Description Letter
- Att 3 – Location Map
- Att 4 – General Plan - Applicable Policies
- Att 5 – Factual Data Sheet
- Att 6 – City of San Mateo Citywide Pedestrian Master Plan – Applicable Sidewalk Standard
- Att 7 – Memorandum
- Att 8 – Sample Findings for Project Approvals and Denials
- Att 9 – Neighborhood Meeting Minutes
- Att 10 – Public Comments

STAFF CONTACT

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