



CITY OF SAN MATEO

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Agenda Report

Agenda Number: {{item.number}}

Section Name: {{section.name}}

File ID: {{item.tracking_number}}

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Christina Horrisberger, Director

PREPARED BY: Community Development

MEETING DATE: October 26, 2021

SUBJECT:
1919 O'Farrell Street – New Four-Story, 49-unit, Multi-Family Apartment Building (PA-2020-037)

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a Resolution approving the Site Plan and Architectural Review and Site Development Planning Applications for the construction of a new multi-family residential building with 49 units located at 1919 O'Farrell Street and determine the project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption from further environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) based on the Findings for Approval and as conditioned in Attachment 1.

BACKGROUND:

The applicant, Rocky Shen with DNA Design and Architecture, submitted a formal Planning Application on August 4, 2020 to demolish an existing single story, 3,975 square-foot office building located at 1919 O'Farrell Street, and construct a new four story multi-family apartment building with 49 residential units, associated parking facilities, common and private open spaces, and other common area amenities.

The Planning Commission reviewed this project at a Pre-application Study Session at its regular meeting on January 29, 2020. The items discussed at the Study Session were the project impacts on traffic generation and pedestrian/bicycle circulation, the proposed mix of uses, preservation of heritage trees, site plan, and building design. Since the Study Session, the applicant has incorporated several revisions to the project in the formal planning application in response to comments made by the Planning Commission, the public, and City staff. The revisions include the preservation of the heritage trees along the western property line, elimination of the office use to provide a fully residential development, increased open space, and a more refined building design. The applicant did not address comments to provide landscaping adjacent to State Route 92 or to provide on-site guest parking.

Site Description

The project site consists of a 0.71-acre parcel at the end of the cul-de-sac on O'Farrell Street. The project site is adjacent to office uses and the Corte Bella Condominiums to the south, the Park 20 Apartments to the east, office uses to the west, and State Route 92 to the north. City Hall is also located southwest of the project site. A location map showing the project site's vicinity is included in Attachment 2.

Project Description

The project consists of a four-story, 55,463 square-foot multi-family residential building with 49 for-rent units. The proposed architectural style is best characterized as a contemporary inspired design based on its use of brick veneer, painted concrete, combination of horizontal cement board siding and vertical standing metal seam siding, and other materials to express various building volumes. The proposed units include a mix of one-, two- and three-bedrooms with a range of 746 to 1,556 square-feet in size. The project also provides 64 off-street parking stalls in a one-level below-grade garage.

The project includes a total of 11,452 square-feet of common and private open spaces throughout the site, with 6,643 square-feet of common open space in the proposed courtyard and grove of mature Redwood trees. The courtyard is proposed to be 5,539 square-feet and includes sitting and dining areas, synthetic turf, and a community promenade while the grove of trees is proposed to be 1,104 square-feet and contains eight mature Redwood trees. A total of 4,809 square-feet of private open space is provided in the form of balconies adjacent to the units. The balconies range from 92 to 176 square-feet in size.

A full set of the project plans, which show all proposed improvements and project data, are included in [Attachment 3](#).

Applicable Code and Policy Review

General Plan and Zoning Code

The General Plan Land Use Plan designation for the project site is Executive Office/High Density Multi-Family. The Mixed-Use Incentive land use category, as defined in Appendix B of the General Plan, allows for alternative development standards, such as increased floor area, to encourage housing developments ranging from low to high densities for this property. A list of applicable General Plan policies and a discussion of the project's conformance to them is included in [Attachment 1](#).

The project site is zoned E1-1/R4 (Executive Park/Residential Overlay – Mixed Use). The R4 overlay provides development standards pertaining to density, floor area ratio (FAR), setbacks, and open space for residential projects located in commercial or office zoning districts.

The project conforms to the building height, lot coverage, and floor area ratio development standards of the City's Zoning Code, Title 27 of the San Mateo Municipal Code (SMMC). The proposed building height is 45 feet, which is in conformance with the maximum height limit of 45 feet. The project site contains approximately 44% at-grade open space where a minimum of 35% at-grade open space is required. Additionally, the project proposes a FAR of 1.79 where a maximum of 2.0 is allowed. The project's density of 50 units per acre, or 69 units per acre with the additional 35% density bonus, is the maximum residential density allowed under the City's Zoning Code and State Density Bonus Law, which is described in greater detail below. The project is also requesting one incentive/concession and three waivers from additional development standards. With the approval of the requested incentive/ concession and waivers, the project will conform to all applicable development standards. A Factual Data Sheet listing the applicable Zoning Code standards and the project's conformance to them is included in [Attachment 4](#).

Site Plan and Architecture Review (SPAR)

The project requires Site Plan and Architectural Review (SPAR) approval for the proposed site and building design, as required by the City's Zoning Code (SMMC 27.08.030). Per the City's Zoning Code, the Planning Commission shall approve the application if all of the following are found to exist:

- The structures, site plan, and landscaping are in scale and harmonious with the character of the neighborhood;
- The development will not be detrimental to the harmonious and orderly growth of the City;
- The development will not impair the desirability of investment or occupation in the vicinity, and otherwise is in the best interests of the public health, safety, or welfare;

- The development meets all applicable standards as adopted by the Planning Commission and City Council, conforms with the General Plan, and will correct any violations of the zoning ordinance, building code, or other municipal codes that exist on the site; and,
- The development will not adversely affect matters regarding police protection, crime prevention, and security.

The proposed site plan and building design are discussed in greater detail below. The Site Plan and Architectural Review (SPAR) findings for approval are discussed in detail in [Attachment 1](#).

Site Development Planning Application (SDPA)

The Site Development Code (SMMC 23.40) requires approval of a Site Development Planning Application (SDPA) when major vegetation, consisting of trees with a trunk diameter of six inches or greater measured at forty-eight (48) inches above natural grade, is removed from a parcel of land in conjunction with the redevelopment of the parcel. The project proposes to remove 11 of the existing 23 on-site trees. Of the 11 trees to be removed, nine have a diameter greater than six inches at 48 inches above grade, including two Heritage Trees, which requires the processing of a Site Development Planning Application. The two remaining trees have a diameter less than six inches at 48 inches above grade and, therefore, do not require a permit for removal.

Per the Site Development Code, Planning Commission shall approve the application if all concerns regarding surface grading, structure foundations, drainage, subsurface conditions, erosion, landscaping and tree removal are found to be addressed. The Site Development Planning Application (SDPA) findings for approval are discussed in detail in [Attachment 1](#).

Fence Exception

The applicant requests Site Plan and Architectural Review (SPAR) approval to allow for an exception to the fence height limits, as permitted by the City's Zoning Code (SMMC 27.84.020). The project proposes to locate a five-foot transformer access gate and five-foot Waxleaf Privet hedge screen within the front yard of the property in order to screen the transformer from public view and to make it compatible with the surrounding multi-family and office uses. The enclosure and screening were also recommended as part of the project's design review from Cannon Design Group. Per the City's Zoning Code, the maximum height of fences and hedges within a front yard shall be three feet; however, an exception to the height and location requirements may be granted by the Planning Commission if the following findings are made:

- The fence or wall height, location, design and landscaping are in scale and harmonious with the character of the neighborhood;
- Granting of the exception will not be materially detrimental to the public health, safety or welfare or materially injurious to other property or improvements in the neighborhood in which the property is located, and shall not limit visibility of pedestrians, bicyclists, or motorists from streets, alleys or driveways; and,
- Granting of the exception will not adversely affect or be inconsistent with the general plan.

The fence exception findings for approval are discussed in detail in [Attachment 1](#).

State Density Bonus Law

The project is utilizing the provisions of State Density Bonus and Other Incentives (Government Code Section 65915). To comply with State Density Bonus Law and to implement the General Plan Housing Element, the City is required to provide increased residential density, reduced parking standards, as well as "incentives or concessions" and "waivers or reductions from development standards" for residential projects that provide senior housing units, child care facilities, or set aside a portion of units to be affordable to Very Low, Low, or Moderate-income households.

The R4 overlay permits a maximum base density of 50 units per acre, which yields the subject 0.71-acre site 36 units. The applicant proposes to devote 11% of the base 36 residential units to the Very Low-income category (four units), which entitles the project to a 35% density bonus, resulting in a density of 69 units per acre, which permits a maximum of 49 units to be developed. As noted previously, the project is proposing the maximum of 49 units.

State Density Bonus Law also allows the applicant to request one incentive/concession, reduced parking standards, and waivers from development standards. The applicant is requesting a reduced parking ratio of 0.5 space per unit and an incentive/concession to allow for the use of an automated mechanical “puzzle” lift parking system for 39 of the 64 off-street parking stalls. The proposed mechanical parking system allows residents independent access to and from their parking space through the system’s vertical and horizontal arrangement. The applicant is also requesting waivers for reduced setbacks of five feet, a reduced sidewalk width of five feet, and to eliminate the required overhead parking space clearance for the mechanical parking system.

The applicant’s Density Bonus request letter that details the justification for the requested incentive/concession and waivers is included as Attachment 5.

Housing Crisis Act

The applicant submitted a Preliminary Application under the Housing Crisis Act (HCA) in accordance with Government Code Sections 65589.5 and 65941.1 on August 4, 2020. As a project consisting of only multi-family residential uses, the project is eligible for a Preliminary Application under HCA which prohibits the City from imposing ordinances, policies, and standards adopted after the Preliminary Application was submitted unless certain circumstances exist, including lessening impacts of the project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), or if the applicant revises the project such that the number of units or square-footage changes by 20% or more.

Housing Accountability Act

Government Code Section 65589.5 outlines application review limitations for projects subject to the Housing Accountability Act (HAA). As a development project that is at least two-thirds housing, the project is subject to the HAA, which is intended to limit a local agency’s ability to deny, reduce the density of, or render housing development projects infeasible if objective standards are met. As proposed, this project meets all applicable objective standards in the General Plan, Zoning Code, and other local policy documents, and, therefore, the local agency may only deny or reduce the density if certain findings pertaining to adverse impacts to codified, objective public health or safety standards are made.

Citywide Pedestrian Master Plan

The Citywide Pedestrian Master Plan contains sidewalk design guidelines to improve the pedestrian network citywide. Based on the project’s proposed use and street parking configuration, the applicable sidewalk standard is “A.5 Residential Type C New Development”, which consists of the following components:

- 5’-6” Sidewalk through-zone
- 6’-0” Landscape strip
- 0’-6” Curb
- 10’-0” to 15’-0” minimum Building setback

As described in the *State Density Bonus Law* section above, the applicant has requested a waiver from the sidewalk standards to provide a 5’-0” sidewalk through-zone and a 5’-0” building setback, with no landscape strip. The project conforms to the applicable sidewalk standard based on its provision of a 0’-6” curb.

Bicycle Master Plan

The City's Bicycle Master Plan provides policies and recommendations to implement citywide infrastructure improvements to support bicycle and micromobility use (e.g., bikeshare and electric scooters). In conformance with the Zoning Code and Bicycle Master Plan, the project provides short-term and long-term bicycle parking facilities on-site in excess of the required ratios outlined in the Zoning Code.

The applicant will also be required to contribute the project's fair-share to the feasibility study of an overcrossing connecting O'Farrell Street and Bovet Road via a shared-use bicycle and pedestrian path that crosses over State Route 92. Noted as a Medium-High Priority project in the Bicycle Master Plan, the overcrossing provides a pathway designed for bicyclists and pedestrians. Examples elsewhere in the City include the San Francisco Bay Trail, portions of the Foster City Levee Pedway/Bikeway north of State Route 92, and Pacific Boulevard in Bay Meadows.

Design Review

Larry Cannon of Cannon Design Group, the City's design review consultant, reviewed the project's site and building design on a preliminary basis prior to the January 29, 2020 Study Session. At that stage of the application, Larry Cannon's comments and recommendations for improvements included:

- Revise the scale and character of the building design to be more compatible with the surrounding buildings;
- Enhance the sense of entry to the building and improve pedestrian access;
- Add buffer landscaping along the highway right-of-way;
- Preserve the existing Redwood trees and provide landscaping; and
- Provide an enclosed entry lobby.

As previously noted, the Planning Commission reviewed the project's site plan and architectural design at the January 29, 2020 Study Session and provided the following comments and recommendations:

- Remove the office component to create a fully residential development;
- Preserve the Redwood trees on the west side of the site and provide landscaping adjacent to State Route 92;
- Incorporate more open space throughout the site;
- Soften the pedestrian access with different materials and more plantings;
- Provide on-site guest parking spaces; and
- Incorporate the preliminary design review comments from Cannon Design Group.

Since then, the applicant has refined the building design and site plan which have been fully reviewed by City staff and Cannon Design Group. Revisions to the project design include the elimination of the office component, the preservation of all Redwood trees, an increase in the open space, and improvements to the building entrance and pedestrian access to the site. The applicant has also revised the building design to improve the project's scale and architectural compatibility with surrounding buildings.

In his design review comment letter in response to the formal planning application, Larry Cannon notes that the project's design has greatly improved since the study session. To further refine the building design, Larry Cannon's recommendations for improvements on the design included:

- Explore more direct and accessible routes to the open space areas;
- Enclose the ground-mounted transformer and provide landscape buffers around the transformer; and
- Explore ways to add buffer landscaping along the north property line.

In the current design, the applicant has incorporated screening of the above ground transformer in consideration of Larry Cannon's comments. Larry Cannon's final design review comment letter is included in [Attachment 6](#).

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

No public comments were submitted to City Staff at the time this report was published.

Public comments received after publishing of this report will be forwarded to the Planning Commission for review and consideration at the Public Hearing.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:

A Categorical Exemption, Class 32 Section 15332 (In-Fill Development Projects), is recommended for the project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. Qualification for the exemption requires that the project is consistent with all applicable General Plan policies and Zoning Code regulations; the site is located within an urban setting on a site less than five acres in size; it has no value as habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species; and, would continue to be served by all utilities and public services. In addition, as conditioned, approval of the project would not result in any significant impacts relating to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality as discussed further below. The proposed project meets the above criteria and qualifies for the exemption.

Technical StudiesTransportation Impact Assessment

Fehr and Peers, the City's traffic consultant, conducted a Transportation Impact Assessment (TIA) to analyze the proposed project's transportation impacts in accordance with the standards of CEQA and the City's General Plan. Overall, the TIA concludes that the project is exempt from a Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) analysis and will not present any adverse Level of Service (LOS) effects.

For the purposes of CEQA, the TIA evaluates the project utilizing the metric of VMT. This analysis method is required under Senate Bill 743, effective July 1, 2020, which has a target of reducing single vehicle occupancy trips rather than increasing roadway capacity. At the time of the project's formal application and Preliminary Application under SB330 were filed, the City had not adopted its current TIA Guidelines. Instead the City followed the State's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) Updates to the CEQA Guidelines as the interim TIA Guidelines for VMT analysis. The TIA concludes that the project is exempt from a Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) analysis because it meets the interim OPR standards of being within a half mile of high-quality transit services, having a floor area ratio greater than 0.75, and providing no more than the minimum parking required by the City.

Fehr and Peers also conducted analyses for Trip Generation and Distribution and Level of Service (LOS) at the intersection of O'Farrell Street and West 20th Avenue in accordance with the City's General Plan criteria. Traffic conditions at this intersection were analyzed for the weekday AM and PM peak hours, when demands on the roadway system are greatest, and evaluated in four different scenarios: Existing Conditions, Existing Plus Project Conditions, Cumulative Conditions (2040), and Cumulative Plus Project Conditions (2040). The TIA concludes that the project would generate the following traffic conditions:

Trip Generation and Distribution

- 9 new AM peak hour trips (1 inbound/ 8 outbound)
- 12 new PM peak hour trips (9 inbound/ 3 outbound)
- 156 net new project trips

Level of Service (LOS)

- LOS for Cumulative and Cumulative Plus Project Conditions for the year 2040 decrease to LOS D for AM peak period trips.
- LOS for all other conditions remain the same at LOS C

As the project-generated traffic will not result in the study intersection operating at an unacceptable level of service, the project will not cause adverse LOS effects. Additionally, the project will not result in CEQA impacts on VMT, bicycle, pedestrian, transit circulation, or hazards and emergency access. The Fehr and Peers' Transportation Impact Assessment is included as [Attachment 7](#).

Transportation Demand Management

The project will implement a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan prepared by Steer, the City's transportation consultant. The TDM Plan includes trip reduction strategies with the goal of further reducing overall single-occupancy vehicle trips. The project site is not within a specific plan area and therefore does not have a specific minimum trip reduction goal. Further, the project is not required to implement trip reduction measures as a CEQA mitigation measure given that the project is exempt from Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) screening.

Nonetheless, the project will implement the TDM measures below, which are programmatic strategies aimed at encouraging the use of sustainable forms of transportation:

- On-site TDM Coordinator;
- Institutionalization of the TDM Program through the apartment lease;
- New Resident Packets;
- TDM Communications through a webpage, resident newsletters, and social media channels;
- Multimodal Wayfinding Signage; and Bike Education/ Workshops.

In addition, the TDM Plan includes other optional measures for the developer to utilize in the future. Other specific trip reduction measures and strategies are indicated in the project's Climate Action Plan (CAP) Checklist, included in [Attachment 8](#). The Transportation Demand Management Plan is included in [Attachment 9](#).

Noise & Vibration

Illingworth & Rodkin, Inc. (Illingworth) prepared a Noise and Vibration Assessment for the project. Illingworth identified potential noise impacts including temporary or permanent noise increases in excess of established standards and exposure to excessive groundborne vibration due to construction. Of the potential noise impacts, Illingworth determined the operational noise and permanent noise level increases to be a less-than-significant impact. Illingworth, however, found the temporary construction noise and exposure to excessive ground borne vibration due to construction to be a potentially significant impact. The project includes conditions of approval integrating Illingworth's recommendations, which reduces the excess noise and vibration levels to less-than-significant levels. The Noise and Vibration Assessment is included as [Attachment 10](#).

Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Emission

Illingworth also prepared a Construction Community Risk Assessment, or an Air Quality report. Illingworth identified potential air quality impacts from dust and exhaust fumes during the construction phase and from construction equipment that has a high level of low diesel particulate matter exhaust emissions. The project includes conditions of approval integrating Illingworth's recommendations, which will reduce the air quality impact to less-than-significant levels. The Construction Community Risk Assessment is included as [Attachment 11](#).

NOTICE PROVIDED:

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

- 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 – Proposed Resolution

Exhibit A - Conditions of Approval

Att 2 – Location Map

Att 3 – Project Plans

Att 4 – Factual Data Sheet

Att 5 – Density Bonus Letter

Att 6 – Cannon Design Group Final Review Letter

Att 7 – Transportation Impact Assessment

Att 8 – CAP checklist

Att 9 – Transportation Demand Management Plan

Att 10 – Noise and Vibration Assessment

Att 11 – Construction Community Risk Assessment

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