



CITY OF SAN MATEO

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Agenda Report

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TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Christina Horrisberger
PREPARED BY: Community Development Department
MEETING DATE: March 22, 2022

SUBJECT:

Pre-Application Review for a Proposed Two-Story Private Indoor Tennis Court at 2164 Palm Ave. (PA-2021-062)

RECOMMENDATION:

Review the proposed use and project design on a preliminary basis, receive public comments, and provide input to the applicant and staff on the overall project as proposed with specific focus on the following project elements:

1. Proposed Use – Provide input on the proposed use and compatibility with the adjacent commercial uses;
2. Building Design – Provide input on the overall building design, massing, and materials.

BACKGROUND:

The applicant has submitted a Preliminary Planning Application (PA-2021-062) to construct a new two-story indoor private tennis facility on a vacant parking lot located at 2164 Palm Avenue. The proposed 14,673 square-foot building consists of a single clay tennis court, warmup, stretching, and backboard areas, two restrooms, storage and mechanical areas, and a second-floor clubhouse with three off-street surface parking spaces located at the front of the structure.

As proposed, the project would require a Special Use Permit (SUP) for a private non-commercial recreational use in a service commercial district and a Site Plan and Architectural Review (SPAR) for the new building and associated site improvements. At this time, the subject pre-application focuses on the use, site plan, and broader design issues. Project plans showing the proposed site plan, floor plan, building design, and materials are included in Attachment 1.

As outlined below, this project may have potential conformance issues with the intent of the C4 (Service Commercial) District, the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans, the number of off-street parking spaces provided, and the configuration of the proposed three car surface parking lot. The applicant was provided a list of potential conformance issues in an initial conceptual plan comment letter included in Attachment 7. Following the Planning Commission Study Session, it is anticipated the applicant would further develop their proposal with greater consistency to City standards and to address comments from this study session prior to submittal of the formal planning application.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Project Site

The project site is a vacant parking lot located at 2164 Palm Avenue. The site has a narrow rectangular shape with a frontage of 81 feet along Palm Avenue and a total lot area of 14,990 square-feet (0.34 acres). The site is bounded by Palm Avenue to the east, one and two-story development to the west and south, and a hotel/inn to the north. Adjacent uses include retail uses and El Camino Real to the west, the Stone Villa Inn¹ to the north, and commercial uses to the south and east.

¹ The County is pursuing a Homekey program to purchase the Stone Villa Inn and provide housing for homeless County residents.

The site's General Plan Land Use Designation is Service Commercial and it is zoned C4-1 (Service Commercial). Parcels to the north, south, and east of the project site share the same C4-1 zoning designation and Service Commercial General Plan Land Use Designation. Adjacent parcels to the west, which front El Camino Real, are zoned C3-1/R4 (Regional/Community Commercial with a R4 high-density residential overlay) and have a General Plan Land Use Designation of Regional/Community Commercial/High Density Multi-Family). A project vicinity map is included as [Attachment 2](#).

Building Program and Site Plan

The subject pre-application proposes a new 14,673 square-foot, two story, indoor clay tennis court for private, personal recreational use and is not intended for commercial purposes or for use by the public. Further discussion, regarding the proposed use of the site can be found in the *Items for Planning Commission Discussion* section below. The ground floor consists of a clay tennis court, warm-up backboard area, turf area, lobby, restroom and storage shed. Additional storage, a mechanical room, clubhouse, and second restroom are located on the second story. The project provides three off-street surface parking spaces located at the front of the building. Sidewalk improvements such as adding a 4-foot planting strip along the front property line, additional landscaping within the surface parking lot and a 7-foot entry fence and gate along the front property line serve to soften the appearance of the parking lot and structure as viewed from the street.

The architectural style of the proposed building is best characterized as industrial based on the rectangular massing of the building, use of brick veneer, cement panels, aluminum windows, steel canopy, and flat roof form at the front of the structure. An arched fabric roof assembly is proposed at the rear of the structure over the tennis court to provide the vertical height necessary for a regulation tennis court. A discussion of the building's design is continued in the *Items for Planning Commission Discussion* section of this report. Project plans showing the conceptual site plan, floor plans, and elevations are included in [Attachment 1](#).

APPLICABLE CODE AND POLICY REVIEW:

General Plan

The General Plan Land Use Map designates the project site as Service Commercial, which is intended to provide a broad range of city-wide or regional services and small manufacturing that are usually not available in neighborhood shopping areas. Service Commercial zoned areas comprise less than 1% of all commercially zoned land within the City and are concentrated along Palm Avenue, Amphlett Boulevard, and Claremont/Railroad Avenue. Identified as providing a mix of commercial and vital community services, General Plan Land Use policy LU-1.13 specifically seeks to promote the retention of Service Commercial areas and businesses by prohibiting residential uses within these districts. A preliminary list of applicable General Plan policies is provided in [Attachment 3](#).

Zoning Code

The project site is zoned C4-1 (Service Commercial), which implements the goals of the General Plan in encouraging the continuation of commercial uses and accommodating manufacturing and service uses of community-wide and regional significance along Palm Avenue. As further discussed in the *Items for Planning Commission Discussion-Proposed Use* section below, while commercial recreation is an allowable use in the C4-1 zoning district (San Mateo Municipal Code Chapter 27.36), staff is seeking Planning Commission guidance on whether the proposed private, non-commercial, recreational use of the property can be considered a compatible district use allowed with the issuance of a Special Use Permit (SUP).

The project is subject to the development standards of the C4-1 zoning district, found in Chapter 27.36 of the Zoning Code and conforms to the floor area ratio, setback, and height development standards of the C4-1 zoning district. The project proposes a FAR of 0.97 where a maximum of 1.0 is allowed and the proposed building height of 30 feet conforms with the maximum district height limit of 30 feet. The Municipal Code does not require setbacks for properties located in commercial zoning districts. While Section 27.36.060 of the Municipal Code requires buffers or transitional yards be provided when a service commercial property adjoins a residential district, the project site does not adjoin a residentially zoned parcel² and is not required to provide transitional yards. The project proposes zero rear and side yard setbacks and

² Properties along El Camino to the west of the project site are zoned Commercial with a residential overlay (C3-1/R4). With no residential uses on these parcels, the adjacent C3-1/R4 zoned parcels are not considered a residential district for the purpose of determining yards.

a zero-to-36-foot angled front yard setback and is in conformance with the zoning code.

For the purposes of calculating required off-street parking, the project most closely aligns with commercial ‘tennis, handball, and racquetball facilities’ which requires ‘three spaces per court plus stalls required for the additional uses’ on site as outlined in Municipal Code Chapter [27.64.160.4.\(i\)](#) (Off-Street Parking and Loading). Uses on site in addition to the proposed private tennis court include a 927 square-foot second story clubhouse, a 1,718 square-foot backboard/exercise area, and a 1,097 square-foot turf area. The applicant has proposed to provide three off-street parking spaces at the front of the structure for the tennis facility. Per Municipal Code Chapter 27.64, ancillary uses on site most closely align with ‘health studios and spas’ (i.e. gyms) and would require an additional 25 parking spaces. As the project is not intended to be used as a public or commercial recreational facility but for private and personal use only, the applicant has elected to perform a site-specific parking study to determine if the additional uses on site generate the need for 25 additional parking spaces. The City intends to conduct a parking study during the formal application stage and the site plan may shift pending the results of the study to accommodate additional on-site parking. The project is also required to provide two short-term bicycle parking. Currently, no onsite bicycle parking is proposed.

A project data sheet outlining the applicable Zoning Code standards and the pre-application’s conformance to them are included in [Attachment 4](#).

Pedestrian Master Plan

The 2012 Citywide Pedestrian Master plan contains recommendations to improve the pedestrian realm throughout the City. Upon filing of the formal planning application, staff will evaluate the project for consistency with the Pedestrian Master Plan, particularly for sidewalk standards. Based on the type of development, the applicable sidewalk standard is A.8 Retail/Commercial Type A New Development. This standard recommends a minimum overall sidewalk width of 14 feet along the Palm Avenue street frontage which includes a planter/furniture zone, a sidewalk through zone, and a frontage zone which is necessary for commercial areas with a mix of uses and high pedestrian traffic.

The project site is located along Palm Avenue which sees little pedestrian traffic and is surrounded by service commercial uses. Adjacent sidewalks are approximately 5-feet wide with paved over 3 to 5-foot buffer zones between the sidewalk and the front property lines of adjacent properties. As presently designed, the project proposes an overall sidewalk width of 13-feet 6-inches which includes a 5-foot sidewalk through zone, a 4-foot frontage zone, and a 4-foot planter and furniture zone along Palm Avenue. This width is less than the 14-foot width recommended in the Pedestrian Master Plan. In the formal planning application review, staff expects the applicant to further develop the site plan and sidewalk designs within the context of the site for greater consistency with the Pedestrian Master Plan and to address comments from the study session.

Bicycle Master Plan

The 2020 Bicycle Master Plan provides policies and recommendations to implement citywide infrastructure improvements to support bicycle use. The Bicycle Master Plan also lays out a proposed network of various bicycle lanes, paths, and routes. Currently, there is a bicycle boulevard along Palm Avenue where bicyclists share road with vehicular traffic. Instead of a bicycle boulevard, the Bicycle Master Plan anticipates a future bicycle lane (Class II) in which bicyclists do not share the road but ride adjacent to vehicular traffic in a designated lane along Palm Avenue.

Compared to existing conditions, the project’s proposed sidewalk improvements extend the width of the sidewalk approximately four additional feet into the vehicular right-of-way. This results in a potential conflict with the anticipated bicycle lane along Palm Avenue. Other options, such as pushing a portion of the proposed sidewalk improvements inward onto the project parcel may be a way to accommodate both the Pedestrian Master Plan and avoid conflicts with the Bicycle Master Plan. Such plans, however, would necessitate adjustments to the proposed building and site layout - including on-site parking.

A full evaluation of the project’s consistency with the Bicycle Master Plan will be completed during the review of the formal planning application.

ITEMS FOR PLANNING COMMISSION DISCUSSION:

Proposed Use

As indicated in the *Project Site* Section, the project is located along Palm Avenue which consists of parcels zoned C4-1 (Service Commercial) from 25th Avenue to 20th Avenue. The intent of the Service Commercial District is to provide and maintain access to a broad range of commercial uses, provide convenient vital services of community-wide and regional significance, generate tax revenue, and contribute to a diverse employment base within the City. Per the 2030 General Plan, approximately 4.5% of the land area within the city allows for commercial uses. Of that, Service Commercial districts account for 0.83% of all commercially zoned land. General Plan Land Use Policy 1.13 further seeks to preserve service commercial areas within the City by prohibiting new residential development within these limited areas.

Existing uses in the Service Commercial (C4) district along Palm Avenue include a mixture of warehouse, automotive repair, small scale manufacturing, and other compatible regional community serving uses located in one to two story buildings.

As outlined in Municipal Code Section 27.36.010 all uses in the C1, C2, and C3 districts are permitted in the C4 district. Specific uses such as office and residential uses are prohibited on Palm Avenue between 20th and 25th Avenues. Similarly, any special uses permitted in the C1, C2, and C3 zoning districts are also permitted as a special use in the C4 Zoning District. Residential and secondary unit special uses are specifically prohibited in the C4 zoning district (Municipal Code Section 27.36.020).

Commercial recreation (which includes tennis courts/facilities) is identified as an allowable special use in the C2 District. As such, a commercial recreational use could be permitted within the C4 District with the issuance of a Special Use Permit (SUP). The C2 District (and by extension the C4 District) also allows other non-designated compatible uses as determined by the Zoning Administrator with the issuance of a Special Use Permit (SUP). Per Municipal Code Section 27.74.020, the Planning Commission has the power to grant identified special uses. When granting other non-designated special uses, the Planning Commission must conclude and find that:

- The use is so similar to any specifically allowed use in the district as to be virtually identical in terms of impact and land use requirements; and
- That the proposed use will not have an adverse effect on the general health and/or welfare of the community, and that it will not cause disturbance to the adjacent properties by traffic or by excessive noise, smoke, odor, noxious gas, dust, glare, heat, fumes, or industrial waste.

The proposed indoor tennis facility is for the private personal use of the property owner and any invited guests and is not intended for commercial purposes or a use of community or regional significance. While private and commercial tennis recreational facilities host similar activities, there are some differences including, but not limited to, operational characteristics, people served, number of people visiting the facility, hours of operation, parking, etc. A non-commercial recreational use is not typically seen in the C4-1 zoning district and there are no other indoor private personal tennis facilities located in commercial zones within the City.

Given the unique nature of the proposed Special Use, staff is seeking early direction from the Planning Commission on whether the proposed non-commercial use may be a compatible use in the C4 district. If deemed a compatible use, the project would require the approval of a SUP as part of the formal planning application.

Staff requests that the Planning Commission provide input on the proposed private indoor tennis facility use. When considering the proposed use, the Commission should consider:

- Does the proposed project meet the General Plan's intent to preserve Service Commercial zoned parcels, which provide commercial services and services of community and regional significance?
- Is a private non-commercial tennis recreational use similar to a commercial tennis recreational use? Could that use be considered a compatible use in the C4 (Service Commercial) District and virtually identical in terms of impact and land use requirements to a commercial recreational use?
- Does the Planning Commission have any preliminary concerns relating to the SUP finding that the use would not have an adverse effect on the general health and/or welfare of the community, and that it will not cause

disturbance to the adjacent properties by traffic or by excessive noise, smoke, odor, noxious gas, dust, glare, heat, fumes, or industrial waste?

Site Plan

As currently proposed, a three-space on-site surface parking lot is proposed at the front of the building. To soften the appearance of the parking lot and structure as viewed from the street, a 4-foot planting strip along the front property line, additional landscaping within the surface parking lot, and a 7-foot entry fence and gate along the front property line have been proposed. At this time, the conceptual plans do not specify the exact type of landscaping proposed nor provide elevations of the proposed entry fence.

As mentioned above, additional parking may also be required pending the results of a parking demand study which will be conducted during the formal planning application phase. The current configuration of this conceptual surface parking lot does not meet the minimum vehicle backup standards required by the City's parking standards. A reconfiguration of the parking lot will be required upon formal planning application submittal and may include the reduction of the building footprint.

In an effort to meet the sidewalk standards outlined in the City's Pedestrian Master Plan, the applicant has proposed to expand the sidewalk 4 feet into the right-of-way to accommodate a planter and furniture zone. Further expansion into the right-of-way may result in a conflict with an anticipated bicycle lane proposed along Palm Avenue. Options such as reducing the width of the overall sidewalk or pushing a portion of the proposed sidewalk improvements inward onto the project parcel may be potential ways to accommodate both the Pedestrian Master Plan and avoid conflicts with the Bicycle Master Plan. Such methods may result in sidewalks that do not meet the goals of the Pedestrian Master Plan or may further constrain on-site parking and could result in the elimination of an on-site parking space or spaces, or a reduction in the footprint of the proposed structure to accommodate required on-site parking.

At this time, staff requests the Planning Commission provide input on the conceptual building site plan which includes proposed sidewalk improvements and the configuration of onsite parking. When considering the proposed project, the Commission should consider:

- Is the building's footprint appropriate in terms of the overall size of the parcel?
- Is there adequate parking and circulation in terms of parking lot configuration and usability?
- Does the proposed building footprint and surface parking lot allow for sidewalk improvements that meet the goals of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans? Are any design modifications suggested to increase compatibility with the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans?

Building Design

The project site is located in a semi-industrial area along Palm Avenue comprised of various building forms and architectural styles. Adjacent development consists of a two-story stucco inn to the north, two-story rectangular stucco and brick commercial/automotive repair building to the south, and a mix of one and two-story rectangular brick and stucco automotive repair and commercial buildings to the east.

The overall architectural style of the proposed building is best categorized as industrial based on its rectangular massing, use of red brick veneer, cement board cladding, steel canopy, aluminum windows and flat roof form at the front of the structure. Instead of incorporating physical wall articulation, the illusion of articulation is created by a change in roof forms with a flat fabric roof located at the front of the building over the turf, warmup, and clubhouse areas and an arched fabric roof assembly at the rear of the building over the tennis court. The arched roof form over the tennis court, which is visible beyond the proposed flat roof over the front of the structure, is located 50-feet from the front property line and was incorporated into the building to provide the vertical height necessary for a regulation tennis court.

At this time, staff is seeking Planning Commission direction on the design and architectural style of the building. The Planning Commission should consider:

- If the overall architectural design and materials employed are appropriate and for this area?
- Are any design modifications suggested to increase neighborhood compatibility?

- Should the project be reviewed by the City's third-party design review consultant during the formal application submittal?

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

The applicant held a formal pre-application neighborhood meeting on Monday February 28, 2022 in which three members of the public attended. After a presentation by the applicant in which they described the proposed project, building design, and proposed materials no comments or questions were raised by the attendees. Staff received one public comment following the neighborhood meeting (see [Attachment 8](#)). Concerns were raised about the current maintenance/upkeep of the property, a lack of on-site parking, and that the facility looks to be is more commercial nature than for personal use. As of the date of this report, no further public comments have been received.

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.

NEXT STEPS:

Following this Study Session, the applicant and project architect will have the opportunity to revise the design based on feedback received by the public and Planning Commission. As currently proposed, the project is anticipated to require the following planning applications, which would be subject to approval by the Planning Commission:

1. Special Use Permit (SMMC 27.36.020) to permit a private indoor tennis court for personal use as a compatible use on a parcel zoned C4-1; and,
2. Site Plan and Architectural Review (SMMC 27.08.030) for new non-residential development over 10,000 square-feet.

Sample Findings of approval for the above planning application types are included as [Attachment 5](#).

NOTICE PROVIDED

In accordance with Government Code section 65091 and the City's Municipal Code public noticing requirements, this Study Session was noticed to the following parties at least 10 days in advance of the neighborhood meeting and 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' 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 – Location Map
Att 3 – Applicable General Plan Elements and Policies
Att 4 – Preliminary Data Sheet
Att 5 – Sample Findings for Approval
Att 6 – Neighborhood Meeting Summary
Att 7 – Initial Comment Letter
Att 8 – Public Comment

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