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Agenda Report

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TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Christina Horrisberger, Director
PREPARED BY: Community Development Department
MEETING DATE: May 10, 2022

SUBJECT:

Pre-Application for a Proposed Four-Story Mixed-Use Office and Commercial Building at 31 – 57 S. B Street (PA-2021-082)

RECOMMENDATION:

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

1. Rezoning – Zoning reclassification request from C1-2/R5 to CBD;
2. Building Design and Massing – Architectural style and transition with surrounding buildings;
3. Public Right-of-Way Improvements – Proposed sidewalk widths on B Street and First Avenue; and
4. Other project aspects that should be considered during the formal planning application.

BACKGROUND:

The applicant, DTSM Donut Delite Ventures, LLC, has submitted a Preliminary Planning Application (PA-2021-082) to demolish two existing commercial structures at 31 - 57 South B Street and construct a new four-story mixed-use building. The proposed building would consist of approximately 5,434 square feet of ground floor commercial space and 36,365 square feet of office space. As proposed, the project would require a Site Plan and Architectural Review (SPAR) for the proposed mixed-use building and associated site improvements, a Site Development Planning Application (SDPA) for tree removal, and a zoning Reclassification from Neighborhood Commercial/Residential Overlay – Mixed Use (C1-2/R5) to Central Business District (CBD) in order to allow a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 3.0.

As part of the Pre-Application Study Session, staff recommends the Planning Commission focus its review on the project's building design and massing with respect to the Downtown Retail Core Design Guidelines, the project's street interface and encroachments into the public right-of-way on South B Street and First Avenue, the zoning reclassification request and other site and architectural design elements necessary to make positive findings to approve the project after the formal planning application is submitted. Additionally, staff requests that the Commission provide input and direction on other project aspects, if any, that should be considered during the formal planning application.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Project Site

The project site has a General Plan Land Use designation of Downtown Retail Core and is zoned C1-2/R5 (Neighborhood Commercial/Residential Overlay – Mixed Use). The site is located within the Retail Core Sub-area of the Downtown Area Plan and is located on the same block as the Downtown Caltrain station. The land area of the site is approximately 0.37 acres, or 16,413 square feet.

The project site is bounded by South B Street to the west, a commercial building to the north, the Downtown Caltrain station to the east, and First Avenue to the south. It is also immediately adjacent to the Downtown Historic District and

located in an area of high archaeological sensitivity. The existing site consists of restaurant and retail/service spaces, a surface parking lot, and a shared alleyway providing back of house access to multiple properties. Surrounding uses include the Downtown Caltrain Station to the East, and mix of commercial uses to the north, west and south of the project site. Buildings along South B Street range between one to five stories in height (the latter with the development of 303 Baldwin Avenue at the former Trag's Market site). Buildings along Baldwin and First Avenue range between one to four stories. Additionally, the buildings across South B Street and First Ave are historic or contributor buildings to the Downtown Historic District. A vicinity map is included as Attachment 1.

Building Program and Site Plan

The proposed four-story mixed-use building has an approximate total floor area of 41,799 square feet, with 5,434 square feet of ground floor commercial space and 36,365 square feet of office space. The ground floor may be divided into multiple commercial/retail tenant spaces and the second through fourth floors consist of open floor plan that could also be utilized as multiple office spaces. The project also includes two ground level public gathering areas, and roof level common open space terraces accessible from the third and fourth floors. The proposed project does not include on-site parking; however, since the site is located within the Central Parking Improvement District (CPID), it can pay a fee in-lieu of providing the required on-site parking, provided there is sufficient capacity within the district.

The Pre-Application plans are conceptual in nature and do not contain sufficient detail to determine compliance with applicable bicycle and loading zone requirements. The applicant has stated an intention of addressing loading function and back of business functions in the shared alley or the area adjacent to the alley. The formal planning application for this project will be reviewed by city departments for conformance with applicable requirements including vehicular parking, bicycle parking and loading spaces as required by the Zoning Code.

The overall architectural style is categorized as contemporary due to its use of various building materials and massing techniques to distinguish between the ground level commercial uses and the upper level office uses in the building. A detailed discussion of the building's design and massing are included below in the *Items for Planning Commission Discussion* section. Pre-application project plans showing the proposed site plan, floor plans, elevations and architectural renderings are included in Attachment 2.

The project also proposes improvements in the public right-of-way that propose to modify the travel lane(s), on-street parking stalls, and sidewalk realm. The conceptual plans appear to conflict with city adopted plans and policies such as the Pedestrian Master Plan and Bicycle Master Plan. A detailed discussion of the public right-of-way changes are included below in the *Items for Planning Commission Discussion* section.

APPLICABLE CODE AND POLICY REVIEW:

General Plan

The General Plan Land Use Map designates the project site as Downtown Retail Core, which is intended to combine a diversity of uses to support a thriving downtown. As a mixed-use commercial-office building, the project presently conforms to Land Use Element Policy LU1.10 *Commercial Development*, in that the project appears compatible with the desired character of the area by permitting commercial-office mixed-use developments, that contributes to maintaining downtown as the economic center of the city. The preliminary list of General Plan and other adopted policies applicable to the proposed project is included in Attachment 3 for the Commission's consideration in this study session.

Zoning Code

The project site is currently zoned C1-2/R5 (Neighborhood Commercial/Residential Overlay – Mixed Use), however, the applicant is requesting a zoning reclassification of the site to CBD (Central Business District). Without the rezoning, development standards applicable to the project default to the base C1-2 zoning district in Chapter 27.30 of the Municipal Code; and the project, as proposed, exceeds the district's maximum 2.0 FAR. The /R5 overlay allows for a FAR of up to 3.0 for residential or mixed-use projects with a residential component. Since the applicant is proposing a commercial-office mixed-use project, they are also requesting a zoning reclassification of the site to CBD, which would allow for a FAR up to 3.0 and change the development standards applicable to the proposed project.

The project site is also within the limits of the Primary Benefit Zone, a sub-area of the Central Parking and Improvement District (CPID). As a project within the CPID, the Municipal Code allows the project to default to the Zoning Code's parking ratios or have a parking demand study prepared to determine project-specific parking ratios. As proposed, the applicant is requesting a parking demand study to determine the project specific parking and to pay the fee in-lieu of providing required parking spaces on-site, provided there is sufficient capacity within the CPID district to absorb the additional demand.

The conceptual plans do not contain the level of detail that is necessary for staff to complete a comprehensive review of project's conformance with applicable regulations; however, a preliminary project data sheet is included in [Attachment 4](#).

Downtown Plan

The project site is located within the City's 2009 Downtown Area Plan. The Plan establishes goals and policies to implement the overall vision of the downtown area. Applicable goals that pertain to the project include:

- Enhance Downtown's Role as the City Center and Maintain Its Unique Sense of Place
- Enhance the Vitality and Activity of Downtown by Incorporating an Overall Good Mix and Diversity of Uses
- Enhance the Downtown's Pedestrian Environment and Enhance the Safety and Attractiveness of Downtown

The project site is within the Downtown Retail Core sub-area of the Downtown Plan. Recommended future conditions include permitting a good mix of ground floor retail uses that will contribute to foster retail vitality and downtown's pedestrian oriented environment; and providing an entry feature at the entryways to downtown in the vicinity of South B Street/First Avenue intersection. Staff has communicated initial concerns regarding the project design to applicant in the pre-application comment letter dated March 7, 2022; and will conduct a more detailed review of the project's conformance to the Downtown Plan upon filing of the formal planning application. For ease of reference, excerpts of the Downtown Plan are also included in [Attachment 3](#).

Pedestrian Master Plan

The 2012 Citywide Pedestrian Master Plan contains recommendations to improve the pedestrian realm throughout the City. The Plan designates South B Street as a Greenway pedestrian corridor, which is intended to provide high quality pedestrian connections to residential areas, transit, recreation, and retail. Additional pedestrian amenities, public art, and wide sidewalks are recommended on these corridors to provide a distinguished pedestrian-friendly environment.

Based on the configuration of street parking and mixed-use building type, the applicable sidewalk standard is A.6 *Retail/Commercial Type A Parallel Parking* along the project's frontages (refer to excerpt in [Attachment 3](#)). This standard recommends an overall sidewalk width ranging from 11' to 15' (or 11 to 15 feet). As presently designed, the conceptual plan proposes a sidewalk width as wide as 22' to 24' near the South B Street/First Avenue; and narrows to approximately 16' toward the north on South B Street and to 8'-4" (or 8 feet 4 inches) east toward the Caltrain station. The wider sidewalk is proposed to be achieved through extending the sidewalk into the on-street parking spaces and vehicular travel lane, and curb extensions (aka bulb outs) into the public right-of-way (ROW) at the intersections of South B Street/First Avenue and First Avenue/Transit Center Way. This proposed configuration will require additional evaluation during the formal planning application phase.

Based on the current C1-2/R5 zoning requirements, the project is not subject to any required setback along its South B Street frontage; however, in order to achieve the objective of the Pedestrian Master Plan's 11' to 15' sidewalk the options include encroaching into the public ROW, incorporating a step back of the building line, or a combination of both. The project is proposing to encroach into the public ROW, between 16' to 22'-4" along South B Street and 8'-4" to 24' along First Avenue, which would affect the on-street parking area, travel lane and impact the City's bike lane project on First Avenue. Staff is seeking Planning Commission input on the proposed changes in the public right-of-way. Additionally, the City Council will hold a future study session to provide direction regarding use of South B Street public right-of-way. Staff expects the applicant to further develop the site plan and sidewalk designs for greater consistency with the Pedestrian Master Plan based upon input from the Planning Commission and City Council study sessions. The City will conduct a more detailed review of the project's conformance upon filing of the formal planning application.

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 bicycle network of various bicycle lanes, paths and routes. Specific to the area near the project site, the Bicycle Master Plan calls for a separated bike lane (Class IV) along the project's South B Street frontage, and a buffered bike lane (Class II) along the project's First Avenue frontage which is being implemented as part of a City project. As presently shown, the project proposes the curb lines are proposed to be relocated to accommodate wider sidewalks by narrowing the on-street parking area and vehicular travel lane. The proposed changes to the public ROW conflict with a current Bike Lane project on First Avenue and may affect the City's ability to implement a future Separated Bike Lane along B Street (refer to excerpt of Bicycle Master Plan in [Attachment 3](#)). A full evaluation of the project's consistency with the Bicycle Master Plan will be completed during the formal planning application phase.

ITEMS FOR PLANNING COMMISSION DISCUSSION:

Zoning Reclassification

The project site currently has a zoning designation of C1-2/R5 with a base Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 2.0 for commercial/office uses and up to 3.0 FAR for mixed-use that includes residential. The applicant proposes to reclassify the project site to CBD to match adjacent properties to the south and the west, that have the same land use designation (Downtown Retail Core). Following a review of city records, the proposed zoning appear to be consistent with the General Plan designation for this site and its inclusion within the Downtown Area Plan and application of the Downtown Retail Core Design Guidelines. The zoning reclassification planning application will require a recommendation from the Planning Commission with final decision by the City Council. Following the Pre-Application process, the formal planning application for the zoning reclassification may be processed concurrently with the development project or in advance, based on applicant's preference.

Staff is seeking Planning Commission feedback regarding the reclassification as the proposed building is approximately 41,700 square feet with a proposed FAR of 2.54, which exceeds the current base FAR of 2.0; but would be consistent with the 3.0 FAR allowed in the CBD designation.

- *Does the Commission have any input or feedback on the zoning reclassification request and its consistency with the General Plan? Would a CBD zoning designation be appropriate for this site?*

Building Design

The project's overall architectural style can be considered Contemporary due to its use of building materials and massing techniques to distinguish it from commercial buildings in the nearby Downtown Historic District. The ground floor consists of large glass door and windows systems separated by brick columns to express the individual commercial entrances at the pedestrian level. The design utilizes brick, glass, metal, and wood borrowing from materials found in nearby Downtown buildings. The use of these materials along the building's east, south and west frontages provides a pedestrian-scale base to the proposed building; however, the north elevation's four-story blank wall may benefit from additional detailing where it transitions from the adjacent two-story building. Staff's analysis of the conceptual design is included in the Pre-Application Comment Letter ([Attachment 6](#)).

The proposed building height of 54-foot to the plate line is within the maximum allowable building height of 55 feet for this site. The building step back at the third floor along South B Street and at the fourth floor along First Avenue appears to be consistent with the street wall requirement for properties in the Downtown Plan area.

To guide revisions to the project's design before submittal of the formal application, staff is seeking Planning Commission input on the overall style, design elements, and massing of the building, and whether the proposed project is consistent with the General Plan, Downtown Plan, and Downtown Retail Core Design Guidelines. When evaluating the design of the proposed building, staff recommends the Commission consider the following questions:

- *Would the Planning Commission recommend improving the proposed project design to address the following:*

- A. *Relate height of new buildings to pattern of Downtown;*
- B. *Design building fronts that recognize the traditional lot widths in Downtown;*
- C. *Incorporate key architectural elements common to not buildings in Downtown;*
- D. *Incorporate architectural detailing that is in scale with human proportions, adds interest and create three dimensional appearance to the building face;*
- E. *Incorporate recessed entrances to provide for window shopping, pedestrian standing room and protection from wind and rain;*
- F. *Incorporate different window sizes with larger windows at the ground floor to enhance the ground floor commercial uses and smaller windows on upper levels to distinguish it as a different use;*
- G. *Utilize awnings/canopies to add depth to ground floor storefronts and provide location for future signage; and*
- K. *Incorporate design elements that provide for alley that is architecturally attractive, safe and inviting for pedestrians, and accommodates the necessary back of house services and loading?*
- *Does the Planning Commission have other design or site comments?*

Upon filing of the formal planning application, staff will engage a third-party consultant for design review and consistency with the General Plan, Downtown Area Plan, Downtown Design Guidelines and to address any comments/concerns expressed by the Planning Commission if directed by the Commission.

Public Right-of-Way Improvements

The project proposes approximately 16' to 22'-4" of improvements along South B Street and 8'-4" to 24' of improvements along First Avenue. These improvements within the public right-of-way appear to affect the travel lane(s), on-street parking area and sidewalk area; and conflict with city adopted Pedestrian Master Plan and Bicycle Master Plan. It is important to balance the needs of a variety of users given the city adopted plans and policies. Circulation connections such as those needed for the bicycle network require a comprehensive approach to evaluating the needs of the network and where new connections are needed. This is typically done by looking at connections across multiple blocks rather than on a block by block basis; however, the conceptual plans show changes that are proposed for this one block. Therefore, staff is seeking Planning Commission input on the proposed improvements within the public street right-of-way from the perspective of the pedestrian and bicycle network, as well as, balancing other users such as SamTrans, fire trucks, delivery trucks, and other vehicles.

- *Should the proposed sidewalk width be 11' to 15' to align with the Pedestrian Master Plan, or should a wider sidewalk be considered?*
- *If wider sidewalks are desired, should that additional width be created in the public ROW, on private property or combination of both?*

It should also be noted that there will be a future City Council study session on the topic of prioritizing uses within the B Street ROW that will provide further direction.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

The applicant held a formal pre-application neighborhood meeting on April 11, 2022 in which six members of the public attended. Questions and comments regarding the following topics were expressed:

- Building design, height and size;
- Exterior materials;
- Alley as an extension of Main Street; and
- The proposed right-of-way changes.

The applicant's neighborhood meeting summary and presentation is included in [Attachment 7](#). Public comments submitted to City staff during the pre-application review are included in [Attachment 8](#). Any public comments received after publication of this report will be forwarded to the Planning Commission for consideration at the study session and posted to this item on the [City's Agendas & Minutes Public Meeting Portal](#) as "Post Packet Public Comments."

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.

NEXT STEPS:

Following this Study Session, the applicant and project architect will have the opportunity to revise the design based on feedback given by the public and the 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. Site Plan and Architectural Review (SPAR) for the construction of a new mixed-use building; and
2. Site Development Planning Application (SDPA) for tree removal.

And the Zoning Reclassification to change the zoning designation from C1-2/R5 to CBD would require City Council approval.

Sample Findings of Approval for the above planning application types are included as Attachment 9.

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'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 – Vicinity Map

Att 2 – Project Plans

Att 3 – Applicable Policies

Att 4 – Data Sheet

Att 5 – Zoning and Required Retail Frontage Zone Maps

Att 6 – Pre-Application Comment Letter

Att 7 – Neighborhood Meeting Summary and Presentation

Att 8 – Public Comments

Att 9 – Sample Findings

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