

February 5, 2013

Ms. Christine Usher
Department of Community Development
City of San Mateo
330 West 20th Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94403-1388

RE: Cal Water Office Building

Dear Christy:

I reviewed the drawings, visited the site, had a telephone conversation with the architect to better understand their approach to the project, and prepared a review in September of last year. Since that time, the applicant has worked with staff on further refinements to the design. This letter is my follow up review on the new drawings that are to be reviewed by the Planning Commission.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The site is a large, lightly developed parcel surrounded by a mix of single family and multifamily housing. All street frontages adjacent to the site have substantial mature tree landscaping. Photos of the site and existing buildings are shown below and on the following page.





View along the N. Delaware Street site frontage



Nearby High School



Existing single family homes across N. Delaware Street



Existing single family home and apartment complex across N. Delaware Street



Existing Cal Water structure and trees fronting on N. Delaware Street



Adjacent residential neighborhood southeast of the site



Existing single family homes across N. Claremont Street



Existing apartment complex across N. Claremont Street

DESIGN CHANGES SUMMARY

While the project will be modest in size compared to the large site, the new building will have a much stronger presence on North Delaware Street than is currently the case. Impacts on North Claremont Street and Poplar Avenue should be minimal. My thoughts, concerns and recommendations were as follows:

SITE LANDSCAPING AND FENCING

The proposed design and detailing for landscaping and fencing around the edges of the site are well done, and should result in a much better neighborhood-friendly appearance than currently exists. The applicants have greatly improved the fencing design since the Planning Commission last reviewed the project in their Study Session in June.

GUEST PARKING

The earlier site plan showed a dead end parking aisle in the Guest Parking Lot on the southeast side of the new building which was highly undesirable. Visitors who entered, and were unable to find an empty space would have been unable to easily turn around, and would have to back out to the street. The applicant was able to block out one space to allow a vehicle turn-around.

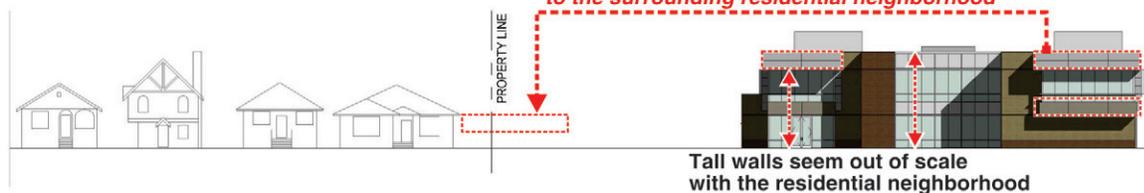
BUILDING SCALE AND DESIGN

The new structure seemed to me at first viewing to be rather large within its context of the surrounding residential neighborhood. However, in speaking with the architect, I could see how they were drawing their contextual inspiration from several paired apartment complexes near the site. In looking at the building and site plan within the context of the aerial photo of the surrounding area, it does seem that the building footprint works well, and results in a street module with narrow projecting building element frontages separated by recesses that are similar to much of the North Delaware Street frontage. This is shown in the context illustration below.

I did, however, have concerns about the visual scale of the structures as related to the smaller scale of the nearby residences - especially the original rather top heavy massing of the two projecting portions and the two-story tall glass walls facing North Delaware Street (see elevation diagram below).



Horizontal modulation seems to be appropriate for the surrounding neighborhood (see red dots on air photo and site plan above)
But the facade treatment is quite heavy relative to the surrounding residential neighborhood



Tall walls seem out of scale with the residential neighborhood

My review letter in September recommended some changes, and the applicant has further refined the design to reduce the visual heaviness at the top of the building and break up portions of the two-story walls. These changes included the following:

- Decreased the overall height of the roof overhang elements from 5'-4" to 3'-6" at both the main entry and at the 2nd level conference room.
- Reduced the roof projection element with a 2'-0" setback from the edge of the parapet to the face of the perimeter wall to lighten the appearance of the building's top.
- Reduced the projection of the roof overhang at the main entry from 8'-0" to 4'-0" to match the roof projection at the 2nd level conference room.
- Reduced the cantilevered dimension of the 2nd level conference room by 2'-0" from 4'-8" to 2'-8".
- Added an entrance canopy that will better define the public entry, break up the two-story wall, and provide protection from inclement weather. The steel and glass canopy will be in keeping with the architectural character of the two-story glass expression and maintain a light and translucent appearance to the street facade.

Changes to the original Delaware Avenue facade and the refined design sketch are shown below.



Original Delaware Avenue design



Current Delaware Avenue design

BRICK WALL FACING

The proposed two-story brick walls were originally proposed as *Brick Faced Precast Concrete Panels*. Because this system would have had a number of continuous vertical joints, the applicant has changed the design to a dimensional brick veneer which will provide a similar appropriate functional solution, but will be more consistent with the look and feel of this material in the surrounding neighborhood.

PLAZA LIGHTING

The only issue for which I still have a concern is the lighting at the entry plaza. The proposed vertical light pole is inoffensive, but I don't feel that it brings much extra to the space or the neighborhood. The applicant supplied the photograph below to illustrate the concept.



My feeling is that a softer approach to the plaza lighting would be a better match with the predominantly residential character of the surrounding area, and be less visually intrusive at night. If it were my decision, I would opt for soft down lights in the entry canopy soffit together with either low bollard lights along the edges of the plaza or lights integrated into the sides of low plaza walls or benches. Examples of these approaches are shown below.



Bollard light example



Seat light example

Christy, 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