



Item No: 1
Meeting Date: December 9, 2014

To: Planning Commission

Date: December 1, 2014

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Chief of Planning

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Subject: PA 14-079, 221 South El Camino Real Pre-Application
221 S El Camino Real (APN: 034-142-160)

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Commission review the proposed commercial project on a preliminary basis, receive public comments, and provide input to the applicant and staff on the conceptual project, including its relationship to other proposed projects at the Three Corners site.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The project site is located at the intersection of East 3rd Avenue and South El Camino Real, which was formerly home to a gas station but has been vacant and undeveloped since more than 20 years ago. The site is located within the area generally known as the City's "downtown core" and together with the two other corner properties at East 3rd Avenue and South El Camino Real, the intersection has the potential to form a major entryway into downtown.

The project site is approximately 12,075 square feet in size and is located on the northeast corner of East 3rd Avenue and South El Camino Real in downtown San Mateo (refer to Attachment 1). The site borders South El Camino Real, a state highway, on the western side, the City's Second Avenue Garage on the northern side, an existing CitiBank building on the eastern side and East Third Avenue on the southern side. The subject property is adjacent to a variety of uses with Mills Hospital to the north, commercial to the east and south, and residential and

office/commercial to the west. The Caltrain Commuter Rail Line is located a few blocks to the east of the project site and the City's Central Park is located a few blocks to the south of the site. The property is zoned CBD (Central Business District) and the General Plan land use designation is Downtown Retail Core.

BACKGROUND

The Planning Commission has previously approved a planning application this project on the subject site at the May 22, 2008 Planning Commission meeting (PA07-087), but due to financial constraints and the downturn in the economy, the project was not constructed. The project in its previous form was a three-story, 33,258 square feet commercial building and was designed for retail and office uses, with retail at the ground floor and office space at the second and third floors. The development included street level improvements in the form of wood planter boxes, new street trees, and new sidewalks; and a design that provides an architectural statement at one of the main gateways into downtown. In addition to the new building, the project proposed to meet parking and loading requirements through payment of an in-lieu fee and compensating the City for the loss of meter stalls as in order to establish a new commercial loading space on East 3rd Avenue. The current proposal before the Commission is mostly unchanged from the previous proposal (refer to Attachments 2 & 3), with the exception of a reduction in proposed square footage.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A formal planning pre-application proposal has been submitted for the construction of a new three-story commercial building with ground floor retail space and two levels of office above (refer to Attachments 4 & 5). The retail space will be approximately 11,412 square feet and total office area will be approximately 21,087 square feet, for a total of 32,499 square feet (refer to Attachment 6).

The proposed architectural style is modern and is designed to relate to the rest of downtown. The design helps to preserve downtown's pedestrian scale by minimizing the building's overall massing and preserving the street wall with zero lot line setbacks and step backs at the 3rd floor building walls. Additionally, the three story building will serve as a transition from the taller Second Avenue Garage to the north down to the one-story CitiBank building to the right and two-story commercial buildings to the south.

As presently designed, the project is anticipated to require the following planning approvals:

- Site Plan and Architectural Review (SPAR) for new commercial building and proposed intrusion into street wall areas and on-street loading berth
- Environmental Review Document

CODE AND POLICY COMPLIANCE

The City's General Plan and Downtown Area Plan include specific policies that are tailored to the unique characteristics of the City's Downtown. Proposed developments in the City's downtown are reviewed for conformance with applicable polices and guidelines set forth in the General Plan, Downtown Area Plan, zoning code, and other applicable regulations (refer to Attachments 7 & 8 for applicable policies).

General Plan

The General Plan Land Use Diagram designates the project site as Downtown Retail Core. A preliminary list of applicable General Plan policies is included in Attachment 7. These include policies pertaining to commercial and economic development in downtown, traffic, parking, transportation demand, and tree preservation, encouraging pedestrian enhancements, and encouraging good urban design. The project has been designed to generally conform to the goals and policies of the General Plan. The formal planning application submittal will be required to provide further clarification and/or documentation to ensure conformance with all applicable polices and guidelines.

Downtown Area Plan

The project site is located in the Downtown Area Plan area. A preliminary list of applicable Downtown Area Plan policies is included in Attachment 8. The proposed retail and office uses are a mix of uses typically found in the downtown. Additionally, the location of the building on the site, floor area ratio, height, setbacks, and proposed uses for ground floor tenant space(s) are generally in conformance with the Downtown Area Plan. However, the project may need further refinement to conform to specific policies.

Zoning Code

The property is zoned CBD (Central Business District). The project proposes a floor area ratio of 2.69, which is under the maximum permitted floor area ratio of 3.0. The project proposes a height of 45', which is under the maximum height of 55'. No setbacks are required. The applicant is expected to provide more detail in their formal planning application submittal; which will then be reviewed for compliance with all applicable municipal code requirements.

On-Street Loading Space. The project is required to provide a loading space based on the retail floor area. Given the challenges to providing an on-site loading space, the applicant could request approval of an on-street loading space provided the requirements and findings for the SPAR approval contained in the Code are met. With on-street loading spaces, it is anticipated that some on-street parking spaces will be displaced. At the time of formal Planning Application, the City's traffic consultant and the Public Works Department will review the proposed impact. It is expected that a Loss of Meter Revenue Agreement will be required for any on-street loading berth.

Open Space. Open space is required to be provided for the project, in an amount equal to 1% of the total square footage of nonresidential area (unless the projected amount less than 200 square feet, in which case open space would not be required). Preliminary calculations indicate that a minimum of 325 square feet of open space is required subject to other provisions of the Central Business District. The Zoning Code Section 27.04.350 "OPEN SPACE" defines commercial open space as open space on the project site in the form of a plaza, square, court, or other urban space which is at least 75% open to the sky, free from automotive traffic, and accessible to the public at large. Required open space must be illustrated in the formal planning application submittal.

Downtown Design Guidelines and Design Review

The proposed architectural design is mostly unchanged from the design presented to and approved by the Commission in 2008. However, the proposed design will still be reviewed by the City's design review consultant, Larry Cannon, AIA, of Cannon Design Group, for consistency with the City's Downtown Design Guidelines and General Plan Urban Design Element and to address design concerns expressed by the Planning Commission.

The applicant is proposing a light well instead of constructing a three-story tall wall at the side property line because the light well would provide natural light to the second and third floor offices, which also has the potential to reduce reliance on artificial light and electricity usage.

Staff has reviewed the preliminary project plans and they appear to be generally consistent with the Downtown Design Guidelines (see Attachment 9); however, a detailed project review will be done once a formal Planning Application has been submitted.

Design Review

The formal planning application review of the project will also include a design review evaluation by the city's Design Review consultant for consistency with the Downtown Design Guidelines.

Green Building

The project is anticipated to be in compliance with the California Green Building Standards Code. The CALGreen Code replaces the City's Green Building Ordinance which was rescinded effective January 1, 2014. At this preliminary stage, the applicant has identified the following green building components for the project: the provision of short term and long term bike parking, roof planters, and areas for photo voltaic panels. The applicant has indicated that they are aware of the new CALGreen Code requirements and will be able to provide more detail as the project design evolves.

Additional Policies

Furthermore, the project will also be evaluated for consistency with the city's Pedestrian Master Plan and Bicycle Master Plan.

ISSUES

Feasibility of Parking Garage Connection to Site

In 2007, the Commission requested analysis into the feasibility of establishing a roof top connection between the project site and the Second Avenue garage. City staff and the applicant examined the option and identified several concerns including:

- The unknown structural design of the Second Avenue garage which limits full analysis into whether the option to connect is technically feasible without significant structural improvements to the entire Second Avenue garage. City staff does not recommend opening up the Second Avenue garage to enable the level of structural analysis that would be necessary to make a feasibility determination due to cost and safety considerations.
- The time required for the level of structural analysis would necessitate temporary closure of the Second Avenue garage, which would not be in the public interest given that the garage is currently utilized by downtown customers and employees.
- There are potentially significant costs to the City's downtown parking district fund which could be better used in the construction of new parking structure elsewhere in downtown instead of upgrading an existing garage to establish connection to a maximum of 12 new roof top parking spaces.

Payment of Fee In-Lieu of Providing On-Site Parking

The site is located in the downtown parking district (Central Parking and Improvement District - CPID) which enables property owners to meet parking requirements by providing required parking on-site, off-site or through a Parking Agreement with the City to pay a fee in-lieu of providing parking on-site. The applicants are requesting a Parking Agreement and will pay an in-lieu fee for approximately 77 parking spaces at the rate in effect at the time of building permit application. Staff will verify the exact number of required spaces during review of the formal planning application, after a thorough analysis of the project is completed.

On November 17, 2014, the City Council held a Study Session on the Downtown San Mateo Parking Management Plan Update. The purpose of the meeting was to provide City Council an update on the implementation strategy of the Parking Management Plan that was approved at the April 7, 2014 City Council meeting. A comprehensive update including parking rates, parking time limits, in-lieu of parking fees, valet parking, and other items will be brought before the Council in early 2015. Additional information regarding the update can be located here: <http://www.cityofsanmateo.org/index.aspx?NID=170>.

Public Art

The Art in Public Places fund is administered by the Civic Arts Committee, but the Commission and members of the public provide comment and input. Projects of a certain valuation are required to provide public art if the building permit valuation equals to three million dollars or more. If public art is required, an opportunity exists where the project in conjunction with the other two corner properties could be used to establish a coordinated entry feature signaling a gateway into the downtown area. An alternative would be to provide other recommendations on the nature and/or location of a public art piece.

Open Space

The proposed project does not currently comply with the open space requirement of the Zoning Code, which total 325 square feet of open space. This open space must be provided on site in the form of a plaza, square, court, or other urban space which is at least 75% open to the sky, free from automotive traffic, and accessible to the public at large. The site plan currently does not incorporate this area, and staff is seeking Planning Commission input on the location of the open space area.

NEIGHBORHOOD INPUT

The applicant held a formal pre-application neighborhood meeting on November 18, 2014 jointly with the applicants from the other two corner properties at 2 E 3rd Ave and 2 W 3rd Ave. The meeting was attended by approximately 40 community members. The comments were generally positive (refer to Attachment 10). There were a few issues raised by the public that would benefit from further analysis. Public comments are summarized below:

- Parking on-site vs. fulfilling parking requirement via in-lieu fees.
- Signage, lighting, maintain street trees and upkeep of right-of-way, potential tenants.
- Consider beveling corner of building.
- Timing of project, construction management for all three projects, completion date.
- Relationship design with this building and other two corner projects.
- Consideration to use contractors who pay area-standard wages and benefits

The Neighborhood Meeting notes and public comments the City has received regarding the proposed project are attached (refer to Attachments 10 & 11).

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Additional public comments were received by staff and are summarized below (refer to Attachment 11):

- Absence of on-site parking, ample parking should be provided and a solution must be created to address the parking issue
- Incorporate solar panels as an integral part of the project design
- Lackluster architectural design, buildings must create a big statement

BUDGET IMPACT

This project will be required to pay fees in-lieu of dedicating land for park and recreation purposes, as well as other impact fees applicable to new developments. The exact amount of these fees will be based on the formula and timing established in the city's Comprehensive Fee Schedule.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT

There are a number of environmental issues that need to be addressed during the formal review of the project including traffic, noise, air quality, and greenhouse gas emissions, and additional environmental issues as may be raised at the neighborhood meeting or study sessions. The formal planning application review phase will include an analysis of the project's effect on environmental factors as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Areas to be evaluated include, but are not limited, to:

- Aesthetics,
- Air Quality,
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions,
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials,
- Hydrology and Water Quality,
- Land Use,
- Noise,
- Public Services and Utilities,
- Transportation Circulation and Parking.

While a complete listing of all technical studies that may be necessary for the environmental review is not available at this preliminary stage, it is anticipated that the studies will include: traffic/circulation and parking study, shadow study, design review analysis, greenhouse gas analysis, and geotechnical study.

NOTICE PROVIDED

In accordance with Government Code section 65090, notice of this meeting was published in the Examiner newspaper 10 days before this Study Session. In accordance with Government Code section 65091 and the City's Municipal Code noticing requirements, this hearing was

noticed to the following parties ten days in advance of the November 18, 2014 neighborhood meeting:

- Property owners, residential tenants and business tenants within 1,000 feet of the three corners project sites;
- 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 E-Notify 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.

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION – REQUESTED INPUT AND NEXT STEPS

At this time, staff is seeking Planning Commission comments and input on the following issues:

- Building Design – The overall architectural style and design approach, including building materials, massing and building forms.
- Parking – Evaluation of the proposal to pay in lieu fees for offsite parking.
- Open Space and Public Art – Location of required open space and features, and the provision of a coordinated entry feature signaling a gateway into the downtown area.

The applicant will revise the plans as necessary or provide additional information to respond to comments from the Planning Commission's study session and submit those materials as part of the formal planning application.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Location Map
2. Elevations from Previous Planning Application Approval (PA07-087)
3. Commercial Data Sheet Form from Previous Planning Application Approval (PA07-087)
4. Preliminary Project Plans
5. Preliminary Commercial Data Form
6. Applicant's Project Description
7. General Plan – Applicable Policies
8. Downtown Area Plan – Applicable Policies
9. Downtown Retail Core & Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines
10. November 18, 2014 Neighborhood Meeting Notes
11. Public Comments
12. Sample Findings

CC (AR and attachments (hardcopy) via USPS First Class Mail)

Property Owners

Applicant

Marcus Clarke, Economic Development Manager

CC (Website link to AR and attachments via Email)

Interested Parties (if email address was provided)