ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

TO:	PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
FROM:	PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
PREPARED BY:	DENNIS FRANK, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
MEETING DATE:	APRIL 1, 2015
SUBJECT:	PA14--044 CENTRAL PARK SOUTH FORMAL SPAR APPLICATION REVIEW

RECOMMENDATION
Review the selected attachments from PA 14-044 - Central Park South Formal SPAR Application submittal, receive public comments and provide comments relative to project impacts on Central Park.

BACKGROUND
It is the purview of the Park and Recreation Commission to review and provide input on planning application projects that are located adjacent to or across from a park in terms of potential impacts that the project may have on the park. Section 2.27.030 of the San Mateo Municipal Code states, "The Commission may, through the City Council, make recommendations to other boards and commission of the city with respect to any action the commission believes should be taken, or upon which it has been requested to advise." A Formal SPAR Application proposal has been submitted for the demolition of all existing structures on the project site and the construction of two four-story buildings consisting of an approximately 33,400 square foot office building at the corner of El Camino Real and 9th Avenue and an approximately 77,800 square foot apartment building with 60 new for-rent apartment units along 9th Avenue. The project site borders El Camino Real on the west, the City's Central Park to the north, an existing multi-family residential complex to the east and 9th Avenue to the south.

The project consists of 88 total parking spaces for the office building including 31 spaces at grade and 57 spaces located in one-level in an underground garage, and a total of 112 parking spaces for the residential building including 10 spaces at grade and 102 spaces located in two levels in an underground garage.

There exist 8 heritage trees on the adjacent Central Park site within 12' feet of the project's property line. All of the trees in Central Park are proposed to remain.

Ron Munekawa, Chief Planner from the Planning Division, will be present at the meeting to answer questions relative to the planning application process.

Comments and recommendations from the Park and Recreation Commission will be forwarded to the Planning Commission for their April 28, 2015 meeting. The applicant's design team will be at the Park and Recreation Commission meeting to present the drawings to the Commission and to answer questions.
The review of the Planning Application by the Park and Recreation Commission is focused on the impact of this development on Central Park. The following issues were raised by staff regarding potential impacts:

View of Project from Central Park (Please refer to the various sheets of Attachment 1 as noted in this section below.)**:** The change in the project site will alter views from Central Park as park users look towards the south. Sheets E17 thru E20 show views from the park looking towards the project site. Sheet E17 shows this view as it currently exists. Sheets E18 thru E20 consecutively show simulations of the proposed buildings on this view at the completion of the project, and after 5 and 15 years of established plant growth. Currently views towards the south consist of an important vegetative screen along the park's southern property line. Although this screen does not fully conceal buildings on the adjacent properties it does break up the views of them. Most of the vegetation that creates this screen exists on the park site although additional vegetation located mostly on the eastern half of the project site also contributes to this vegetative screen. The height of this screen varies but a substantial portion of this height, created by 4 existing large Heritage Pine trees located in the park within 12' of the park's southern property, reach to a heights that in one case (tree #1 - Plan sheets 1 & 2) is close to the height of proposed 4 story office building and for the remaining 3 trees (trees 13, 16 and 18 - see Sheets E17 & E18) are above the proposed buildings. These majestic trees provide valuable visual screening of the proposed buildings as viewed from the park, provide shade to park users, and contribute to the identification of Central Park as a peaceful and pleasant refuge for the public to enjoy. The applicant proposes to preserve these Pine trees however 3 of the 4 Pines (trees 1, 13 and 16 on Sheet 2) will be impacted by the proposed design for the office building as follows:

The wall of the proposed underground parking garage runs parallel to the park about 4' off of the property line (See Sheet 2 and Section 2 on Sheet 4) The estimated root zone for these trees have been determined to equal 10 times the diameter of the trunk by the project's arborist. Based on this determination the root zone is estimated to extend beyond the proposed cut line of the parking garage by between 14 and 18 feet (See Sheet E21).

The applicant's original proposal included the provision of a 4' deep bio-retention planter between the garage wall and the park property line. Staff expressed serious concerns about the originally proposed design's impacts on the roots of the large Pine Trees as they are more sensitive to root loss than other trees like Oaks or Redwoods. As a result of a meeting that took place to discuss these concerns the project arborist performed an exploratory root excavation by using a pneumatic air device (air spade) that exposed roots to a depth of 2' about 4 feet off of the park property line without damaging them. The exploration revealed the presence of little or no roots from the Oak tree (tree 17) and several Pine tree roots.

Revised plans were then submitted that eliminated the portions of the originally proposed bio-retention planter that was located within the root zone of the Pine trees. Although the design for the garage was not changed it was concluded by the project's arborist that the removal of the exposed roots to construct the garage would not likely affect the stability or health of the trees as long as his tree protection recommendations are followed (See Attachment 2). These recommendations include measures that are to take place as soon as possible before construction begins to prepare the trees for the shock of severing of roots, and further measures during construction and for a one year period after construction to protect and maintain the health of the trees.

Based upon the above described root excavation and the project arborist's conclusions, staff feels that although the trees will be impacted by the garage design, the Pine trees would most likely survive the root loss from the excavation necessary to construct the garage as long as the project arborist's tree protection recommendations before, during and after construction are precisely and thoroughly followed. Staff furthermore recommends attaching a condition of approval to the project as a mitigation measure for the impacts to Heritage trees within Central Park that are in close proximity of the project site. The condition requires that tree protection and care for them be implemented prior to construction with ample time for such measures to take effect in accordance to a schedule of treatments to be reviewed and approved by the City Arborist; that an updated arborist report be submitted prior to the issuance of the first permit that amends the existing arborist recommendations as needed to address additional tree protection and care measures that are to be implemented during the construction period and for a period of three years beyond construction and; a provision regarding the replacement of any of the trees whose health has declined from its current condition with approved trees of a substantial size (See Attachment 3).

In regard to the screening of the project at lower heights the project includes the following:

A. A new 6' high metal property line "Green screen" fence that will be planted with vines (Sheets 1, & E6 or E12).

B. A planting area between the park property line and on the Office building site consisting of small trees and shrubs that would grow above the height of the fence to provide an increased screening height (See Sheet 3). In addition there exists a substantial planting buffer on the park side of the fence that includes two of the large Pines (trees 1 & 13) and several other smaller trees (3 of which are Heritage Trees – trees 5, 6 and 9 per sheet 2) that provides an effective screen for the vast majority of the office building portion of the site that faces the park.

C. Substantial plantings along with the preservation of several existing trees are proposed within the 25'- 80' setback area between the park and residential building. Once these plantings become established they will extend above the 6' high fence "Greenscreen" fence to add to existing screening effect. The provision of these tall plantings and the preservation of these trees is possible because the parking garage for the residential building is substantially set back (See Sheets 6 & E20).

Wind, Shadows and Reflection: The potential impact of shadows, wind and glare has consistently been concerns that have been raised in the review of other buildings/projects located around Central Park.

The applicant contracted with a wind specialist, Donald Ballanti, Consulting Meteorologist, to prepare a wind impact analysis (Attachment 4) to examine how much, if any, discomfort will be caused to park users from changing wind patterns and speeds that may be created from the two new buildings. The report concludes that wind accelerations generated from the proposed project for the most part will be self-contained within the project site and that no change in winds speeds would be expected within the adjacent Central Park picnic area. However, a small portion of the picnic area would experience accelerated winds from the southwest to a minor degree due the large continuous west face of the residential building. Figure 1 of the wind analysis identifies four locations of the expected wind accelerations, three of which are contained within the project site, and one accelerated wind location created from southwest winds at the northwest corner residential building that encroaches slightly into the picnic area of Central Park. Southwest winds are expected about 12 percent of the time on an annual basis between 11 am and 5pm in San Mateo. Seasonally, the frequency of southwest winds range from 7% of the time in the winter to 17% of the time in the spring. It is expected that the residential building would have the potential for generating minor wind accelerations (on the order of 10 to 20%) over a small portion of the picnic area when the wind is from the southwest. With the proposed dense plantings, as described previously in the section above about views within the 25' foot setback between the Park and residential building where the expected wind acceleration would occur, the wind environment at the picnic area adjacent to the project would be essentially unchanged.

Sheets 8 thru 11 of Attachment 1 illustrate the shadow patterns generated from the proposed buildings and from existing vegetation at 9am, 12pm and at 3pm. Each sheet further illustrates the shadow patterns during different times of the year - March 21st (spring solstice – Sheet 8), June 21st (longest day of year – Sheet 9), October 21st (fall solstice - Sheet 10) and December 21st – (shortest day of year – Sheet 11). The heavy green line represents the limits of the shadow cast from the building at each date and time. The outline of the tree canopies is also shown. The shadows cast from both the building and tree canopies are shown as dark shaded areas. In examining the shadow study graphics, the shadow of the building line will be completely within the shadows that are cast from the trees. It should be noted however that the shadows of the trees typically allow some light to penetrate through to a certain degree and that the areas where shadows are cast by the buildings will be totally in shade. The worst case for shadows being cast into Central Park is shown at 9am on December 21st where more than 50% of the picnic area will be covered in a solid shadow from the proposed buildings. By 12 noon however only about 10% of the picnic area will remain in shadow from the buildings. Since it is not likely that the picnic area would be used that much in the winter time particularly at 9am, staff concludes that the shadows cast from the buildings during this time would be a minor impact. The best case for the least shadow impact is during June 21st where hardly any shadows from the building would be cast into the picnic area at all. In both March 21st and October 21st shadows from the building would be cast onto about 10 to 15% of the picnic area at 9am, and by noon, shadows cast from the building would be completely outside the park. Based on this information staff concludes that shadows impacts from the building will not be significant.

In terms of reflection from the sun off of the buildings, because the portion of the building that faces the park is in a northwest direction, this side of the building will be in shadows during the late fall, winter and early spring months. However during the late spring, summer and early fall months sun will reach this side of the building in the early to mid-afternoon hours. Shadows from tree 18 and possibly tree 16 in Central Park will however cast some shadow on the rear of the residential building. In addition the partial screening of the four heritage Pine trees designated to remain will reduce the impact of any glare from these buildings to a level staff feels is not significant.

Neighborhood Meeting: The applicant hosted a neighborhood meeting on September 12, 2013 at 7:00 pm at Central Park Recreation Center. Thirty-one (31) members of the public attended the meeting and voiced concerns about parking and safety, site access, affordability of residential units, future tenant plans for the bank, design and location of the commercial and residential buildings, and construction duration.

BUDGET IMPACT
This project will be required to pay fees in-lieu of dedicating land for park and recreation purposes. The exact amount of the fee will be based on the fee per unit in effect at the time the first building permit is issued.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION
In accordance with CEQA Guidelines section 15061(b) (3), this review and comment is not a project subject to CEQA in that it won't impact the environment, because the Parks and Recreation Commission is providing comments only. An environmental document for the project consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act is being prepared for the formal planning application.

NOTICE PROVIDED:
The Planning Division prepared the required noticing for the project which consisted of publication in the newspapers as well as sending notices to the property owners and residential and business tenants within 1,000 feet of the project as well as to other interested parties from a list that they have generated over time. The above noticing was completed 10 days prior to the Park and Recreation Commission meeting. In addition, the Park and Recreation Commission Agenda was sent to the email interest list for the Central Park Master Plan update.

No written public comments have been received prior to printing of this staff report. Comments received following printing will be provided to the Commission on the evening of the study session at their desk.

ATTACHMENTS
Attachment 1: Exhibits for Park and Recreation Commission
Attachment 2: Memorandum from Project Arborist
Attachment 3: Condition of Approval regarding Heritage Trees
Attachment 4: Wind Impact Analysis

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