



# City of Culver City

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## Staff Report

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**File #:** 15-616, **Version:** 2

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Administrative Site Plan Review, P2015-0122-ASPR, Tentative Parcel Map, P2015-0122-TPM, and an exception to certain subdivision requirements for the development of a 3-Unit Townhome Style Subdivision at 4241 Duquesne Avenue in The Medium Density Multiple-Family Residential (RMD) Zone

**Contact Person/Dept:** Jose Mendivil - Associate Planner  
**Phone Number:** (310) 253-5757

**Fiscal Impact:** Yes ☐ No ☐

**General Fund:** Yes ☐ No ☐

**Public Hearing:** [X]

**Action Item:** ☐

**Attachments:** [X]

**Public Notification:** Mailed to all the property owners and occupants within a 500 foot radius extended to the end of the block; Emailed to the City's Master Notification List; and Posted on the City's website on February 17, 2016; Sign Posted on the subject property on February 17, 2016

**Department Approval:** Sol Blumenfeld, Community Development Director  
Planning Approval: Thomas Gorham, Planning Manager

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Planning Commission:

1. Adopt a Categorical Exemption as stipulated in CEQA Section 15303, Class 3 - New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures, finding that there are no potentially significant adverse impacts on the environment.
2. Approve Administrative Site Plan Review, P2015-0122-ASPR and Tentative Parcel Map, P2015-0122-TPM, subject to the Conditions of Approval as stated in Resolution No. 2016-P003 (Attachment No. 1).
3. Recommend to the City Council approval of an exception to a subdivision design standard (CCMC Section 15.10.700.C) requiring lot frontage along a dedicated public street or access to same via a certain sized "stem" of a "flag lot".

### **PROCEDURES:**

1. Chair calls on staff for a brief staff report and Planning Commission poses questions to staff as desired.

2. Chair opens the public hearing, providing the applicant the first opportunity to speak, followed by the general public.
3. Chair seeks a motion to close the public hearing after all testimony has been presented.
4. Commission discusses the matter and arrives at its decision.

## **BACKGROUND:**

### Request

On October 23, 2015, Work Plays Architects (Applicant) submitted an application was submitted for an Administrative Site Plan Review and Tentative Parcel Map to allow the development of 3 detached townhome style residential units.

### Existing Conditions

The site is located on the west side of Duquesne Avenue, south of Farragut Drive and approximately 35 feet north of Lucerne Avenue, as shown on the Vicinity Map (Attachment No. 2). The site is generally flat in topography, rectangular in shape, and with dimensions of 50 feet in width by 135 feet in depth. It contains a single 3-bedroom house and a detached garage. All structures on the site are proposed to be demolished.

### Surrounding Area/General Plan/Zoning

The surrounding area includes a mix of 1 and 2 story single family and multi-family apartment and condominium dwellings. The City's General Plan Land Use Element designates the site as Medium Density Multiple Family and the site is zoned Medium Density Multiple-Family Residential (RMD). Surrounding zoning and existing land uses are outlined below (Duquesne Avenue is considered north/south orientated):

| <u>Location</u> | <u>Zoning</u> | <u>Land Use</u>                                                     |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| West:           | R2            | 1 & 2 story single & two family dwellings.                          |
| East:           | RMD           | 1 & 2 story multi-family dwellings                                  |
| North:          | RMD           | 2-story pre-school and 1 & 2 story single & multi-family dwellings. |
| South:          | RMD           | 1 & 2 story single & multi-family dwellings                         |

### Project Description

The 3 proposed dwelling units are designed as detached two-story structures atop a semi-subterranean driveway and parking garage level that will project a maximum of four (4) feet above grade, with a maximum overall height of 28 feet. At the front facade the height is tiered down to 23 feet for a depth of 11.5 feet. Two of the units will have their own covered 2-car garage and the 3<sup>rd</sup> unit (located at the rear) will have one covered parking space and one semi-covered parking space. All parking spaces will be located below their corresponding units and will be accessed via a single driveway along the south side of the project site. The dwellings are arranged in a linear pattern from the front of the parcel to the rear and each unit will be accessed from individual private foyers located on the north side of the site. The 2 units closest to Duquesne Avenue have secondary entrances from the garage to the foyer.

Data for each unit is listed in the table below;

|                                                   | Unit 1<br>(Front) | Unit 2<br>(Middle) | Unit 3 (Rear) |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Size                                              | 1,842 sq.ft.      | 1,899 sq.ft.       | 1,803 sq.ft.  |
| Bedrooms <sup>1</sup>                             | 4                 | 3                  | 3             |
| Bath                                              | 3                 | 2.5                | 3.5           |
| Private Open Space Ground & 1 <sup>st</sup> floor | 695 sq.ft.        | 368 sq.ft.         | 661 sq.ft.    |
| Private Open Roof                                 | 412 sq.ft.        | 422 sq.ft.         | 402 sq.ft.    |

1) Rooms identified as “flex space” are considered bedrooms

### **ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION:**

The RMD Zone allows 1 unit per 1,500 square feet of net lot area, up to a maximum of 9 dwelling units. Based on the lot area of 6,250 square feet, a maximum of 4 units may be allowed on the site; the applicant is proposing 3 units. As illustrated in the Project Summary (Attachment No. 3), the proposed development conforms to all regulations of the RMD Zone.

## 1. ADMINISTRATIVE SITE PLAN REVIEW

### Architectural Design

The structures are designed in a modern style with straight lines and multiple surfaces positioned at right angles creating articulated facades thereby avoiding a box like look. The three units make use of large window surfaces on the south elevation and significant window surfaces on the remaining elevations allowing a considerable amount of natural light into the dwellings. The historic designated grayish wood-sided craftsman house, directly south of the project, with its porch, angled roof lines and use of dark green trimming contrasts with the box like, avocado green, stucco pre-school located directly north of the project. The project’s articulated surfaces

and its mix of wood sidings, stone tiles, and plaster, with colors ranging from white, to off-white, to wood are meant to create a transition between the two adjoining properties. White finished metal panels along the front and rear facades provide accents to the buildings. Roof top decks are set in from the roof edges and are bounded by parapet walls, trellises, roof top landscaping, and mechanical equipment. These perimeter features enhance privacy for the both project residents and neighboring properties because they obscure line of site in both directions. The project massing is broken up by the separation of the project into 3 townhome style dwellings that have a narrow and tall look but that are still below the 30 foot maximum height limit for the RMD zone. Perimeter landscaping and the use of articulated surfaces and multiple material elements noted above further diminish the massing of the project. The proposed semi-subterranean garage is accessed by a 10 foot wide driveway and the entry into the first garage is set back approximately 32 feet from the front property line, thus minimizing the visual impact of the off-street parking. Overall, the design of the proposed project is deemed to be compatible with other residential structures in the neighborhood and the building height and massing is consistent with the zoning standards of the RMD Zone.

### Landscaping

The landscape plan provides for sustainable features including a grass-crete concrete driveway along the south side of the site, a permeable concrete and gravel with a standard concrete pedestrian walkway along the north side. Trees will be planted along the south side and existing trees are proposed to remain in place in the front and rear; shrubs and grasses will be planted in the front and rear portions of the property. The project is subject to the City's Street Tree Master Plan and will provide street tree and parkway landscape improvements. As noted above the roof top decks will include planter boxes. The use of existing trees in the rear and new trees along the south side screen the project from the adjoining properties.

### Open Space

In the RMD a minimum of 100 square feet of open space is required per unit. As noted in the project description data table above and below each unit provides more than the minimum open space requirement.

| Private Open Space             | Unit 1 (Front) | Unit 2 (Middle) | Unit 3 (Rear) |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Ground & 1 <sup>st</sup> floor | 695 sq.ft.     | 368 sq.ft.      | 661 sq.ft.    |
| Private Open Roof              | 412 sq.ft.     | 422 sq.ft.      | 402 sq.ft.    |
| Total                          | 1,107 sq.ft.   | 790 sq.ft.      | 1,063 sq.ft.  |

Private open spaces for each unit include ground and first floor private decks as well an open-to-the-sky roof top decks that include BBQ and sink facilities; the private decks are accessed from the units with no shared common entry. In addition 2 of the units have master suite terraces while

the unit fronting Duquesne Avenue has a Juliette balcony.

### Neighborhood Compatibility

The proposed development is in Block D of the Gateway Neighborhood Design Guideline area. Below is a comparison of the project against Block D's guideline variables:

| Guideline Variable | Project          | Average | Prevailing |
|--------------------|------------------|---------|------------|
| Lot Coverage       | 39%              | 46%.    | 41-60%.    |
| Units Pattern      | 3*               | 3.2     | 2          |
| Front Setback      | 20 ft.           | 24.ft.  | 20.ft.     |
| Building Height    | 28 ft./2 stories | 20 ft.  | 2 stories  |

\*The Code allows up to 4 units for this lot.

Overall the project is compliant with guidelines; its massing is separated with the design of 3 detached dwellings and private entrances do not directly face neighboring properties. In regards to the design guidelines and average and prevailing heights, the guidelines are intended to be used as a baseline to inform the design of the project to ensure compatibility in scale and massing with other buildings on the block and on adjacent lots. The goal is to make sure that new structures are not out of scale with the block and adjacent parcels. The overall height of 28 feet is taller than the majority of the buildings on the block where the average height is 20 feet and. In this regard, the guidelines would dictate that the height of the project be closer to the height of the structures on the block at the front elevation. This can be achieved by stepping back the second floor to a height more commensurate with the adjacent buildings. As such, the applicant has designed the project with a reduced height of 23 feet fronting Duquesne Avenue for a depth of 11.5 feet before extending to 28 feet. This tiered strategy is consistent with the design guidelines which call for achieving consistency with prevailing height of the subject block through the use of a stepped façade.

As noted in the Architecture section above the project's articulated surfaces and its mix of wood sidings, stone tiles, and plaster, with colors ranging from white, to off-white, to wood are meant to create a transition between the two adjoining properties consistent with the design guidelines. Additionally the subject block contains a mix of single and multi-family dwellings of 1 and 2 stories in height. According to the guideline table above, the average use pattern for this block is 3.2 units but there are several apartments and condominiums with 4 or more units along Duquesne Avenue. The project's density and number of stories is compatible with surrounding areas based on existing use patterns. Also several older multi-family buildings along the street have a mix of box like and articulated architecture. Overall the project incorporates architectural features and materials that break-up the massing and bulk of the development and which are compatible with the various development types in the adjoining neighborhood.

### Traffic, Parking, and Circulation

The Engineering Division determined Duquesne Avenue, which is 35 feet wide, to be adequate in width to serve the site and the proposed development. As required for all new development on Duquesne Avenue, the project will require a 10 foot wide dedication for future widening of Duquesne Avenue. The City has not yet scheduled the widening of Duquesne Avenue and not all properties along the street have dedicated the first 10 feet of their lots. In the meantime the dedication area will act as a front lawn. The curb, gutter, sidewalk, and driveway approach along the project's frontage will be removed and replaced; the driveway will be shifted from the north to the south side of the project.

The code requires 6 parking spaces for 3 units (2 per unit) and 6 are provided. The common driveway will provide vehicular access to the off-street parking located in the semi-subterranean garage. The garages provide the code required minimum width, length, and overhead clearance. A minimum code required 24 foot back-up drive aisle is provided allowing a sufficient turning radius and circulation area to maneuver in and out of each parking stall, and exiting in a forward manner onto Duquesne Avenue.

An at-grade pedestrian walkway on north side allows residents to enter off of the sidewalk and into the foyer of each unit and another walkway leading from the garage to the sidewalk is provided on the south side adjacent to the driveway. The parking level is semi-subterranean extending about 4 above grade; residents must step up into the foyer when entering off of the north side walk way. Entering off of the south side walkway leads to garages and a "flex space" in the semi-subterranean level; this south side pedestrian access leads to corridors that lead to the entrance foyers. In either pedestrian access route, the walkways are at or below grade instead of above grade at a podium level.

The proposed means of vehicle and pedestrian ingress/egress to and from the site and units provides adequate access for emergency vehicles and services. The configuration of the proposed onsite driveway and vehicle maneuvering area are designed in accordance with all applicable CCMC standards. There is no required guest parking for 3 units or less and guest parking is not provided. The density of the development will not create significant traffic impacts and is below the threshold for requiring a traffic study.

## 2. TENTATIVE PARCEL MAP

The State Subdivision Map Act and CCMC Chapter 15.10 regulate land subdivisions and require the submittal of a tentative parcel map for subdivisions. In addition, CCMC Section 17.210.020 - Table 2-4, Residential District Development Standards (RLD, RMD, RHD), requires a minimum lot area of 5,000 square feet or the average area of residential lots within a 500-foot radius of proposed subdivision. However this section also states that condominium, townhome, or planned development projects may be subdivided with smaller parcel sizes for ownership purposes, with the minimum lot area determined through the subdivision review process, provided that the overall development site complies with the minimum lot size requirements of the Zoning Code. The overall project will maintain its current 6,750 square foot lot area with a reduction to 6,250 square feet after a 10 dedication for future widening of Duquesne Avenue. The overall 50 foot lot

width will not change and the overall lot length of 135 feet will be reduced to 125 feet after the 10 foot dedication noted above. Thus the overall project lot configuration - area, width, and length will comply with the RMD development standards. Through the subdivision process 3 small land lots for townhome style development will be created within the existing conforming lot.

A key objective of the tentative parcel map process is to allow the City to review the proposed subdivision to ensure all necessary improvements and requirements are provided. The Public Works Department has reviewed the tentative parcel map (Attachment No. 5) for the proposed subdivision and found it to be in compliance with all applicable State and local regulations as more specifically outlined in the recommended conditions of approval. However the middle and rear lot will not have the City Subdivision standard minimum street frontage of a 10 foot stem each (for adjoining lots that provide street frontage through a stem or flag (CCMC Section 15.10.700.C). City Subdivision ordinance section 15.10.085 provides an Exception process if the Planning Commission determines that conditions affecting the site warrant such exceptions to portions of the Subdivision ordinance. The Commission makes findings and recommends approval of the exception to the City Council.

The project is providing a 12 foot wide driveway easement for all three lots on which the dwellings will be located. If the project were a standard condominium or townhome development wherein all three units are attached, the project as designed would not require an exception. In condominium or townhome developments the driveway along with the land surrounding the units are held in common and vehicular access easements would be secured through the condominium association Covenants, Restrictions, and Conditions (CC&Rs). CCMC Section 15.10.700.C requiring street frontage or street frontage for land lots through a stem or flag with a minimum 10 foot wide stem for adjoining lots is more applicable to single family lots. This project is consistent in design and function with condominium and attached townhome developments. The key difference is that each resident will own the dwelling as well as the land around it as opposed to all 3 residents owning the land around the dwellings in common. The 50 foot lot width does not allow for two 10 foot wide stems because the driveway would be 20 feet, diminishing the ability to provide a viable living space. The Exception findings are in the Resolution No. 2016-P003 (Attachment No.1)

### 3. SUBDIVISION DESIGN STANDARD EXCEPTION

Applicant is requesting that an exception to the subdivision requirements be made, pursuant to CCMC Section 15.10.085, because the conditions affecting the Project site warrant and require that an exception be made to certain subdivision design standards set forth in CCMC Section 15.700.C.

CCMC Section 15.10.700 sets forth general design standards governing the approval of any subdivision map. Specifically, CCMC Section 15.10.700.C, requires that all lots front on a dedicated public street or have access to same via a private street or the "stem" of a "flag lot". The Project's middle and rear lots, which do not front on a dedicated public street, cannot accommodate the City Subdivision standard minimum of a 10 foot stem each (for stems which are contiguous for 50% or more of their length) per CCMC Section 15.10.700.C.

The Project is providing a 12 foot wide driveway easement for all three lots on which the dwellings will be located similar to a standard condominium or townhome development wherein all three units are attached. The Project is consistent in design and function with condominium and attached townhome developments. The key difference is that each resident will own the dwelling as well as the land around it as opposed to all three residents owning the land around the dwellings in common. The 50 foot lot width does not allow for two 10 foot wide stems because the driveway would be 20 feet, diminishing the ability to provide a viable living space.

An exception may only be made if it is not an exception to any requirement of the Subdivision Map Act. The requested exception does not violate the Subdivision Map Act because a 12 wide easement for common driveway purposes is provided assuring public right-of-way access for each lot within the development.

All required subdivision findings can be made for the Project and all required vehicular, pedestrian, and utility/drainage easements will be made a part of the final map assuring all three lots have required access to the public right-of-way. This exception will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare nor injurious to the property or improvements in the immediate vicinity.

For these reasons, findings can be made that the conditions affecting the property warrant and require that an exception be made to the requirement for public street frontage and the minimum stem size required for access to the public street via a flag lot.

If the Commission approves the requested exception, it will be subject to final approval by the City Council.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

As part of the project review process, a community meeting was held on Thursday, October 29, 2015 at 7:30 pm, at Veterans Memorial Complex. The applicant invited interested persons to learn about the development project, provide comments and feedback, and share any concerns regarding the proposed project. About 9 people who live in the immediate neighborhood attended the community meeting. After the applicant gave a presentation on the project attendees provided general comments related to the following:

Density - several people expressed concerned about density in Culver City but were glad to see the applicant was only proposing 3 units;

- Massing - attendees expressed appreciation over the proposed design and massing and positively reacted to the separations between the dwelling units;
- Landscaping - the architect reviewed several of the landscaping ideas for the Project and attendees liked the landscaping buffers; there was some concern about the landscaping along the south side. The applicant's landscape architect subsequently met with the directly adjacent neighbors to the south and west and all three neighbors were satisfied with the screening, architectural elements and outdoor spaces separating the properties.

Other issues involved the setbacks, some concern over the project's modern design, compatibility



with the design guidelines, the ability to build the existing house under today's Building Code, privacy issues with the roof top deck, noise, visibility of mechanical equipment, construction time and phasing, construction hours, and dust control during construction. Overall the attendees did not express opposition to the project and felt the applicant was listening to their concerns. More detailed notes are provided in Attachment No.6.

#### Comments Received During Public Comment Period

As of the writing of this report, staff has not received any written public comments on the proposed project.

#### **CONCLUSION/SUMMARY:**

This is a unique project for Culver City in that it is providing townhome style development on separate land lots as opposed to the more common condominium type on a common lot with airspace units. Staff worked closely with the applicant to design a project that is compatible with the neighborhood and the immediately abutting properties. The applicant followed staff direction to redesign and modify the project to meet both the specific Code requirements and the spirit and intent of the design guidelines including unit separation, massing towards the center of each unit, and use of materials to create a design transition between buildings on either side of the project site. The project is less dense, has less height, and is fully parked and overall fits exceedingly well with respect to the prevailing scale and development patterns of the neighborhood. As noted, the Zoning Code permits this type of subdivision and the project results in far less impacts to the neighborhood and to the environment than a maxed-out, higher density condo/apartment project on this parcel.

Based on the proposed preliminary development plans and recommended conditions of approval, staff considers the project: compatible with the surrounding neighborhood; adequately served by public facilities; and, consistent with the General Plan, Zoning Code, and all CCMC and State subdivision requirements. Staff believes the findings for Administrative Site Plan Review, P2015-0122-ASPR, Tentative Parcel Map, P2015-0122-TPM and the exception to certain subdivision design standards can be made as outlined in Resolution No. 2016-P003 (Attachment No. 1).

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:**

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines, initial review of the project by staff established that there are no potentially significant adverse impacts on the environment and the project has been determined to be Categorically Exempt pursuant to Section 15303, Class 3 New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures, because the proposed project involves the construction of a limited number of small structures, such as a duplex, or similar residential structural totaling no more than six (6) dwelling units. As outlined herein, the project consists of the construction of three detached townhome style residential dwelling units, therefore, the project is categorically exempt.

### **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:**

The following alternative actions may be considered by the Planning Commission:

1. Approve the proposed project with the recommended conditions of approval if the applications are deemed to meet the required findings.
2. Approve the proposed project with additional and/or different conditions of approval if deemed necessary to meet the required findings and mitigate any new project impacts identified at the meeting.
3. Disapprove the proposed project if the applications do not meet the required findings.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Draft Resolution No. 2016-P003 and Exhibit A Conditions of Approval
2. Vicinity Map
3. Project Summary
4. Preliminary Development Plans dated February 29, 2016
5. Tentative Parcel Map No. 73789
6. Applicant Summary of Community Meetings
7. Public Comments (if received prior to final drafting of staff report)