



# City of Culver City

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## Staff Report

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**Conformance Review of Comprehensive Plan Amendment No. 6 for the Culver Studios, to determine whether revised plans for Building Y and the Van Buren Parking Structure provide additional visual enhancements and minimize potential impacts to adjacent residential uses pursuant to Condition No. 106 of Planning Commission Resolution No. 2015-R098**

**Contact Person/Dept:** Thomas Gorham, Planning Manager  
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**Phone Number:** (310) 253-5710

**Fiscal Impact:** Yes  No

**General Fund:** Yes  No

**Public Hearing:**

**Action Item:**

**Attachments:**

**Public Notification:** On May 26, 2016, a notice was mailed to all the property owners and occupants within an extended 500 foot radius of the project site and emailed on May 26, 2016 to recipients of Planning Commission notices/GovDelivery.

**Department Approval:** Sol Blumenfeld, Community Development Director (05/30/16)

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### RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission conduct a conformance review of Comprehensive Plan Amendment No. 6, P2015-0069-CP/MAM (Project) to determine whether the revised Plans for Building Y and the Van Buren Parking Structure (Attachment No. 1) provide additional visual enhancements and minimize potential impacts to adjacent residential uses through the use of additional building setbacks and step backs and similar measures, pursuant to Condition No. 106 of Planning Commission Resolution No. 2015-R098 (Attachment No. 3). Any Commission action on the conformance review will be recorded by motion in the approved minutes of the June 8, 2016 meeting.

### BACKGROUND

At its November 18, 2015 meeting, after considering the staff report, applicant presentation and public testimony regarding the Project, the Planning Commission adopted Resolution No. 2015-R098 (Attachment No. 3) recommending to the City Council approval of Comprehensive Plan Major Modification, P2015-0069-CP/MAM, and Historic Preservation Program Certificate of Appropriateness, P2015-0069-HPCA, subject to conditions of approval to allow the following at the Culver Studios, located at 9336 Washington Boulevard in the Studio Zone (Applicant):

- Three new production office buildings ranging in heights of 52.5' to 56' and resulting in a net increase of 180,093 sq. ft. of office facilities (297,965 sq.ft. of office total).
- The demolition of 41,096 sq.ft. of support and stage facilities (188,581 sq.ft. of stage and support

facilities to remain).

- A new 56' high multi-level (6 levels above grade and 2 levels below grade) parking structure located off of Van Buren Place containing 1,408 parking stalls (total spaces onsite is 1,875 spaces) (Van Buren Parking Structure).
- The relocation of four historically designated bungalows.

As part of its recommendation, the Planning Commission included additional conditions to further enhance neighborhood compatibility and minimize impacts to the adjacent residential and school properties. Specifically, the Commission recommended Condition No. 106 to require the Applicant, prior to building permit issuance, to submit plans for review and approval by the Planning Commission that demonstrate additional visual enhancements to the adjacent residential uses specifically from the construction of the Van Buren Parking Structure and Building Y. Condition No. 106 requires that such additional measures shall include additional building setbacks, step backs and/or landscaping.

On December 14, 2016 the City Council adopted a resolution approving the Comprehensive Plan Major Modification, P2015-0069-CP/MAM, and Historic Preservation Program Certificate of Appropriateness, P2015-0069-HPCA, subject to conditions of approval contained in Planning Commission Resolution No. 2015-R098, including Condition No. 106..

## DISCUSSION

Over the past several months staff has worked with the Applicant on revisions to Building Y and the Van Buren Parking Structure to address the Planning Commissions direction to provide further visual enhancements pursuant to Condition No. 106.

### Building Y

Building Y is an 84,700 sq. ft. five-story (56 foot tall) office building at the southern end of the property where currently there are three support buildings; Stage 10, Building Y and Building Z. Building Y also includes a 27,300 sq. ft. basement level, located entirely below grade, to be used for infrastructure utility rooms only and will have limited access. Building Y is proposed to be located in the same footprint of the existing Building Y with zero building setbacks to the abutting residential property lines to the south and west. Building Y is setback 1.5 feet on the east elevation to allow for the installation of ornamental landscape planting at the base of this building along Ince Boulevard. Consistent with Commission direction in Condition No. 106, staff has suggested redesign measures including additional step backs, setbacks or landscaping from those originally proposed.

The Applicant has made the following design revisions to Building Y:

- Relocation of Building Y five feet from the Studio property line through a ground level setback;
- Elimination of the basement level;
- Redesign of stairways and core functions at the east and west ends of the floorplate on each floor;
- Creation of a new roof line which "wraps" the building and covers the exterior stairways, shielding neighbors from any possible noise/light spill. This roof line is further angled toward the east to allow additional light and views of the sky from the adjacent properties to the west;
- Full enclosure of the 2<sup>nd</sup> level with a wall at the building edge, extending up to the height of the 3rd floor level;

- Setback of the usable areas of the upper floor exterior decks from the building edge through the use of planters to preclude sight lines into adjacent properties;
- Additional tree planting along the westerly property line, north of Building Y, where existing Building Z will be removed, to limit sight lines beyond the Studio property.

### Van Buren Parking Structure

The Van Buren Parking Structure is a 56 foot high, multi-level parking structure (1,408 spaces) replacing an existing 2.5 story parking structure. Area residents and staff expressed concerns regarding the proposed size, height and visual impacts of the parking structure upon adjacent residential uses. Consistent with the Commission direction in Condition No. 106, Staff suggested that the applicant consider additional parking structure step backs, setbacks and/or landscaping.

Staff suggested that the applicant consider removing the roof top level line of parking closest to Van Buren Place to reduce the building profile and massing visible from the street. Staff also suggested that the applicant further study the building facade of the parking structure to make it more varied and reduce its monolithic appearance by consolidating and staggering the compact and standard parking stall layout closest to Van Buren Place on floor levels 2-5 as a means to reset the building line and not reduce any parking. The façade would vary by an additional 3 feet with the reconfigured building façade.

The applicant declined to make the recommended changes because of structural design constraints and indicated that in order to remove the top level line of parking and stagger the building line, it would be necessary to include a transfer beam at each floor level thereby increasing the overall building height (above 56') due to the increased nominal dimension of the structural components at each floor level and reduce the necessary floor height at the ground level to accommodate emergency vehicle access. (Please see Attachment No. 2)

Staff also reiterated resident concerns raised during the Commission and City Council hearings regarding the potential impacts to the root system of the mature street trees along Van Buren Place created by the two levels of subterranean parking that extended to the property line. Staff suggested that the applicant remove the first line of subterranean parking closet to Van Buren Place to avoid potential damage to the street trees and the applicant has agreed.

In summary, the applicant has proposed the following revisions to the Van Buren Parking Structure to address the neighborhood compatibility concerns:

- Set back the 6th level deck of the parking structure along the north edge to limit the shade/shadow impacts (resulting in a loss of 9 spaces);
- Set back the subterranean parking levels 15 feet from the property line along Van Buren Place to protect the existing street trees (resulting in a loss of 46 spaces). The applicant has submitted an arborist report (Attachment No. 4) with tree protection recommendations/construction guidelines and specifications to ensure minimal impacts to the existing street trees which staff will implement as part of the building permit process;
- Enhance the Van Buren Place facade with a series of "pop-outs", constructed of aluminum louver-like panels projecting 36" and laid out in a diagonal pattern to break up the scale of the façade. The "pop-outs" will include returns to create a continuous screen that minimizes light spill to the street;
- Aluminum panel colors similar to the colors of the existing street trees to help camouflage the panels;
- 6th floor level screen, of a light color palette, to help camouflage that level, as it is above the canopy of the existing street trees;

- Relocation of the existing mature trees within the Van Buren Parking Garage site to the parkway and/or to the 18' setback along the south side.

The Van Buren Parking Structure will have minimal openings on the north, south and east sides per building and fire codes due to proximity to the existing sound stage buildings. The north and south sides of the parking structure will be completely enclosed with pre-cast concrete panels and will have no openings. The west elevation of the parking structure facing Van Buren Place will be constructed with pre-cast concrete panels with openings above the 3-4 foot level on each floor. In order to provide visual relief for this elevation, which measures 415 feet long, an architectural screen made up of vertical aluminum louver like panels will be attached to the façade of the structure. These aluminum panels will be rendered in muted colors, compatible to the coloration of the drought tolerant landscape that will be installed at the base of the parking structure along Van Buren Place.

### Public Comments

Staff received two public comments (Attachment No. 5) prior to this report publishing. The first comment is from a resident, Mr. Stephen Michael, and is related to the protection of the street trees and includes an arborist report commissioned on behalf of himself and residents on Van Buren Place with concerns about the proposed new parking structure, specifically the health and survival prospects of the City parkway trees on Van Buren directly in front of the parking structure. Staff has reviewed the this arborist report and will work with the applicant, the City's landscape architect, the City's arborist to implement the recommendations of both the applicants arborist report and the report submitted by the Mr. Michael. In addition, Mr. Michael previously submitted a comment (dated January 26, 2016) addressing various issues including vehicle fumes, noise, lighting, visual impacts, and the parkway trees. As the Commission is aware, these issues were discussed at the Planning Commission hearing on the application on November 18, 2016 and the Commission recommended conditions of approval and adopted CEQA mitigation measures to deal with these issues including the requirement for this conformance review to address scale and visual impacts of Building Y and the Van Buren Parking Structure. As the project moves forward through the building permit, construction, and occupancy stages staff will enforce the applicable conditions, CEQA mitigation measures, zoning code standards, and any other applicable law or regulation pertaining to the issues identified.

### CONCLUSION

The enhancements to Building Y are significant and reduce the building massing, soften the facades and provide a larger setback buffer to address both visual and operation impacts to the abutting residential uses. The proposed revisions the Van Buren Parking Structure attempt to soften the building façade along Van Buren Place, protect the existing street trees and reduce shade and shadow issues to the abutting residential property to the north.

As required by Condition No. 106, the Planning Commission must review determine whether the revised Plans for Building Y and the Van Buren Parking Structure provide additional visual enhancements and minimize potential impacts to adjacent residential uses through the use of additional building setbacks and step backs and similar measures. A determination that the revised plans conform to the requirements of Condition No. 106 must be made prior to the issuance of a building permit for the Project.

### ATTACHMENTS

1. Revised Plans for Building Y and the Van Buren Parking Structure
2. Exhibit Reflecting Design Constraints for Van Buren Parking Structure
3. Planning Commission Resolution No. 2015-R098 And Exhibit A - Conditions of Approval

4. Culver Studios Tree Preservation report
5. Public Comments

**MOTION**

That the Planning Commission:

1. Approve the conformance review if they find the proposed revised plans provide the additional visual enhancements and minimize potential impacts to adjacent residential uses as required by Condition No. 106 of Planning Commission Resolution No. 2015-R098.

OR

2. Disapprove the conformance review if they find the proposed revised plans do not provide the additional visual enhancements and/or do not minimize potential impacts to adjacent residential uses as required by Condition No. 106 of Planning Commission Resolution No. 2015-R098.

\*Planning Commission's action shall be recorded by motion in the approved minutes of the June 8, 2016 meeting.