



City of Culver City

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Staff Report

File #: 19-660, **Version:** 1

Item #: 2.

PC: Tentative Parcel Map No. 82444, P2018-0243-TPM, and an Exception to Certain Subdivision Requirements for the Development of a Two (2) Unit Townhome Style Subdivision at 4225 La Salle Avenue in the Two-Family Residential (R2) Zone.

Meeting Date: January 9, 2018

Contact Person/Dept: William Kavadas, Assistant Planner;
Michael Allen, Current Planning Manager

Phone Number: 310-253-5706 / 310-253-5727

Fiscal Impact: Yes ☐ No ☒

General Fund: Yes ☐ No ☒

Public Hearing: ☒ **Action Item:** ☐ **Attachments:** ☒

City Council Action Required: Yes ☒ No ☐ **Date:** TBD

Public Notification: (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - Planning Commission (January 2, 2019); (Posted) City Website (January 2, 2019); (Published) in Culver City News (December 13, 2018); (Sign Posted) on Project Site (December 19, 2018)

Department Approval: Sol Blumenfeld, Community Development Director (X)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission 1) Adopt a categorical exemption as stipulated in CEQA Section 15303, Class 15, Minor Land Divisions, finding that there are no potentially significant adverse impacts on the environment, 2) Approve Tentative Parcel Map No. 82444, P2018-0243-TPM, subject to the Conditions of Approval as stated in Resolution No. 2019-P001, and 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 the Planning Commission poses questions to staff as desired.
2. Chair opens the public hearing, and receives comments from 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 18, 2018, WDEM, LLC (Applicant) submitted an application for a Tentative Parcel Map to allow the development of two (2) attached townhome style residential units within the project site located at 4225 La Salle Avenue in the Residential Two Family (R2) Zone. The demolition of an existing single-family home, and the construction of a new two-story duplex with two (2) attached two-car garages at the project site is permitted by the R2 zoning through a building permit.

Existing Conditions

The site is located on the west side of La Salle Avenue, south of Farragut Drive and north of the Ballona Creek, as shown on the Vicinity Map (Attachment No. 2). The site is generally flat in topography and rectangular in shape with dimensions of 50 feet in width by 135 feet in depth. The subject site is currently developed with a single-family residential structure. No garage exists and there is an existing tree in the rear of the lot.

The surrounding neighborhood consists of largely rectangular parcels, similar in size, and developed mostly with single family and duplex units in both single story and multi-story designs. The City's General Plan Land Use Element designates the site as Low Density Two-Family and the site is zoned Two-Family Residential (R2). Surrounding Zoning and existing land uses are the same as the subject property.

Project Description

The proposed project is designed as a small lot subdivision with two-story structures and parking in private garages at grade level. The lot layout and project design permits smaller than typical lot size, minimizes property grading and provides building orientation to La Salle Avenue consistent with the neighborhood. The applicant proposes to create two (2) townhome style single-family homes as shown on the Tentative Parcel Map (Attachment No. 5). Pursuant to Zoning Code Section 17.540.010, a Site Plan Review is required for the construction of new residential projects of three (3) or more units. This code section further states that any construction, addition, or alteration to an individual single-family or two-family dwelling is exempt from Site Plan Review. Therefore, the two (2) residential dwelling units are not subject to any discretionary review and will be reviewed for compliance with applicable Zoning Code development standards and Gateway Adjacent Neighborhood Design Guidelines, as part of the City's Building Permit Process. The Planning Commission is only required to take action on the proposed subdivision, and the preliminary plans for the proposed two (2) unit development are for reference purposes only.

The smaller lot subdivision allows a front unit of 2,094 square feet and a rear unit of 2,098 square feet. The units have a contemporary design, each with three (3) bedrooms and three and one-half bathrooms. The attached two-car garages will be accessed from a side loaded parking court. The building incorporates ample breaks in the façade and appropriate setbacks on all sides to create interesting building massing and provides variety in building finishes includes smooth stucco, stone veneer, and stained wood. The maximum height of the structure is twenty-two feet and five inches (22'-5") to top of plate and twenty-five feet (25') to top of parapet.

All improvements shown in the preliminary development plans are consistent with the provisions of the Culver City Municipal Code (CCMC). The proposed subdivision will create two small lots that will require exception

from the subdivision regulations as noted below.

ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION:

The R2 Zone allows up to two dwelling units on one property. The minimum required setbacks in the R2 Zone are fifteen (15) feet, four (4) feet, and ten (10) feet, for the front, sides, and rear respectively. The maximum allowable dwelling unit area is 40% lot area plus 1,500 square feet, and the maximum allowable height is two (2) stories and thirty (30) feet. The minimum lot size and area are fifty (50) feet in width, one hundred (100) feet in depth, and 5,000 square feet in area. As illustrated in the project summary (Attachment No. 3), the proposed development conforms to all regulations of the R2 zone.

SUBDIVISION, DENSITY, AND LOT AREA REQUIREMENTS

CCMC Section 17.210.020 - Table 2-3, Residential Districts Development Standards (R1, R2, R3), requires a minimum lot area of 5,000 square feet or the average area of residential lots within a 500 foot radius of the proposed subdivision, whichever is greater. 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 State Subdivision Map Act and CCMC Chapter 15.10 regulates land divisions and requires the submittal of a tentative parcel map for subdivisions of land.

The overall project will maintain its current 6,750 square foot lot area. The overall 50 foot lot width will not change and the overall lot length of 135 square feet will not change. Other parcels in the neighborhood have a similar lot area of 6,750. Thus, the overall project lot configuration - area, width, and length - will comply with the R2 development standards. Through the subdivision process, 2 small land lots for townhome style development will be created within the existing conforming lot.

The 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 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 the conditions affecting the site warrant such exceptions to portions of the Subdivision ordinance. The Commission makes findings and makes a recommendation of the exception to the City Council.

The project provides an 11 foot wide driveway easement for the two lots on which the dwellings will be located. If the project were developed as a standard condominium or townhome wherein both units are airspace units, the project would not require an exception. The proposed townhome development includes a common driveway with vehicular access easements 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 projects. The key difference is that each resident will own the dwelling as well as the land around it as opposed to both 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. 2019-P001 (Attachment No. 1).

The 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. 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 an 11 foot wide easement for common driveway purposes is provided assuring public right-of-way access for both lots 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 both 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 the reasons, an exception can 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.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY

The proposed development is located along the 4200 block of La Salle Avenue, which is a local residential street developed with a variety of one-story and two-story, single-family and duplex units. The block and surrounding streets (Madison Avenue and Baldwin Avenue) have been transitioning to two-unit developments consistent with density designations (Low Density Two Family) envisioned for the neighborhood by the City's General Plan Land Use Element.

The proposed subdivision to create two small lots for the future development of a duplex will be consistent with the existing density and land use patterns in the neighborhood. As shown on the "Site Development Standards" of the preliminary development plans, the future development complies with the Zoning Code requirements, including development standards for the R2 Zone, as well as the average and prevailing conditions related to lot coverage, front setback, building height, and density as identified in the Gateway Adjacent Neighborhood Multi-Family Residential Design Guidelines (Guidelines) that mirror prevailing neighborhood development conditions on surrounding blocks. The applicant has proposed a creative interpretation to calculate average and prevailing conditions for front setback. The subject property lies in Block I of the Gateway Adjacent neighborhood. The average setback for Block I is 22 feet and the prevailing setback is 25 feet. The applicant has proposed 19 foot setback consistent with the average setback on their side of Block I. The average setback of properties along the west side of La Salle Avenue is approximately 19 feet 5 inches. If the Planning Commission favorably considers the proposed interpretation, the 19 foot setback may be applied to the project.

The building design incorporates architectural features and materials that break-up the massing and bulk so as to be compatible with development in the neighborhood and is sensitive to the preservation of privacy including the consideration of window locations.

LANDSCAPING AND OPEN SPACE

As required by the CCMC, the applicant must landscape all front, side, and rear yards not devoted to paved driveways, walkways or patios; these setback areas are also required in order to meet the open space requirements of the R2 Zone. The front and rear yard setbacks will provide approximately 749 and 915 square feet of open space respectively; second floor balconies will provide additional open space for each unit. Landscape will include a variety of plant materials including trees and color accent planting to soften the building façade. An existing tree will be preserved in the rear yard. Preliminary landscape information is included in the preliminary development plans attached to this report (Attachment No. 4).

TRAFFIC, PARKING, AND CIRCULATION

The existing sixty (60) foot wide public right-of-way, La Salle Avenue, has been deemed by the Engineering Division of the Public Works Department to be of adequate width to serve the site and the proposed subdivision and associated two-unit development. The gutter, curb, sidewalk, and driveway approach along the project's frontage are required to be removed and replaced, while preserving existing street trees, as more specifically outlined in the recommended conditions of approval. The density of the overall development will not create any significant traffic impacts and is below the threshold requiring a traffic study or off-site improvements related to traffic.

In accordance with the Zoning Code requirements, each unit will be provided with the minimum required two (2) parking spaces in a standard side-by-side configuration, and designed to provide the minimum required width, depth, and height clearances. The proposed twelve (12) foot wide common driveway along the southerly edge of the site will provide vehicular access to both units and pedestrian access to the rear unit. A back-up clearance of 25 feet 6 inches is provided, exceeding the minimum requirement of 24 feet and allowing sufficient turning radius and maneuvering area in accordance with all applicable CCMC standards. Based on the above, the proposed subdivision project is in conformance with all applicable CCMC requirements relating to parking, circulation, and traffic.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

As part of the project review process, a community meeting was held on Wednesday, August 15, 2018 at 6:30PM, at Veterans Memorial Building. The applicant invited interested persons to learn about the development project, provide comments and feedback, and share any concerns regarding the proposed project. Approximately eleven (11) 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:

- Height and Massing - Attendees expressed concern that the style of the home was too large and took up too much of the lot. Attendees also wanted more variation on the facades especially facing south.
- Design - Residents like the design of the style overall but were concerned with privacy and wanted to ensure that viewsheds from second story windows did not encroach onto neighboring properties.

Other issues involved an overall concern that Culver City was losing a small town feel and that they did not want to see Culver City start to look like Santa Monica or West Los Angeles. Overall, attendees seemed to support the project as a whole, but wanted to make sure the single-family aspects of the neighborhood were preserved. Attachment No. 6 includes detailed notes from the public meeting.

The developer believes that smaller lot subdivision and project design with the side loading garages and building orientation to La Salle Avenue provide an attractive street frontage that helps maintain the neighborhood character. Staff worked with the applicant to minimize the project mass and create greater building articulation. Adjacent property privacy will be preserved by use of clerestory windows on the second floor and installing landscaping along the rear property lines.

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

The proposed project is unique as it varies from the traditional airspace condominium/townhome style development with smaller lot sizes. However, staff worked with the applicant to design a project that is compatible with the neighborhood and immediately abutting properties and is consistent with the prevailing

pattern of development in the neighborhood in terms of building height and massing.

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 that findings for Tentative Parcel Map P2018-0243-TPM and the exception to certain subdivision design standards can be made as outlined in Resolution No. P2019-001 (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 proposed project has been determined to be a Class 15 Categorical Exemption as a "Minor Land Division" (Section 15315) project. Specifically, as outlined herein, the project consists of the subdivision of the site into two (2) small lots, thereby establishing one residential unit on each small lot. The project is deemed consistent with the applicable General Plan and R2 zoning designation and regulations without any variances or exceptions to said General Plan or Zoning Code, does not involve a parcel from a larger subdivision within the previous two (2) years, and will not result in a parcel with an average slope of greater than 20 percent. In addition, the project will be adequately served by all required utilities and public services; and will have all services and access to local standards. Therefore, the project is categorically exempt pursuant to the above noted CEQA sections.

MOTION

That the Planning Commission:

Adopt Resolution No. 2019-P001 recommending to the City Council approval of Tentative Parcel Map P2018-0243-TPM related to a new two-unit townhome development on small lots through an exception to the Subdivision Map Act.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft Resolution No. 2019-P001 and Exhibit A Conditions of Approval
2. Vicinity Map
3. Project Summary
4. Preliminary Development Plans Dated October 17, 2018
5. Tentative Parcel Map No. 82444
6. Applicant Summary of Community Meetings
7. Public Comments (if received prior to final drafting of staff report)