



City of Culver City

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Staff Report

File #: 21-633, **Version:** 1

Item #: PH-2.

PC: Development of a Four (4) Unit Residential Condominium at 4095 Sawtelle Boulevard in the Medium Density Multiple-Family Residential (RMD) zone (P2020-0188-TPM, P2020-0188-ASPR)

Meeting Date: February 10, 2021

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

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

Fiscal Impact: Yes ☐ No ☒

General Fund: Yes ☐ No ☒

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

City Council Action Required: Yes ☐ No ☒ **Date:** N/A

Public Notification:(E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - Planning Commission (02/05/2021); (Posted) City Website (01/20/2021); (Mailed) Property owners and occupants within a 500-foot radius of the site (01/20/2021); (Sign Posted) on Project Site (01/20/2021)

Department Approval: Sol Blumenfeld, Community Development Director (01/27/2021)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission 1) Adopt a Categorical Exemption pursuant to CEQA Section 15303 and 15315, Class 3 and 15, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures and Minor Land Divisions, finding that there are no potentially significant adverse impacts on the environment and 2) Approve Tentative Parcel Map No. 2018-82779, P2020-0188-TPM and Administrative Site Plan Review P2020-0188-ASPR, subject to the Conditions of Approval as stated in Resolution No. 2020-P001.

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 August 7, 2020, 4095 Sawtelle LLC (the “Applicant”) applied for an Administrative Site Plan Review and Tentative Parcel Map to allow the development of four (4) attached condominium units located at 4095 Sawtelle Boulevard (the “Project Site”) in the Medium Density Multiple Family (RMD) Zone.

Existing Conditions

The project site is located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Sawtelle Boulevard and Herbert Street, as shown on the Vicinity Map (Attachment No. 2). The site is generally flat in topography and rectangular in shape with dimensions of 60 feet in width by 110 feet in depth. The project site topography and shape is consistent with parcels in the immediate vicinity. The subject site is currently developed with a single-family residential structure.

Surrounding Area/General Plan/Zoning

The surrounding neighborhood includes single family homes to the west and a mix of predominantly one-story single-family and duplex units along Sawtelle Boulevard. 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 land uses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Surrounding Zoning and Land Use

Location	Zoning	Land Use
North	RMD	Single Family Dwelling
South	CN	5-Unit Apartment Building
East	RMD	Single Family Dwelling
West	R1	Single Family Dwelling

Project Description

The proposed four (4) attached condominium units are of contemporary design. The dwelling units are two-stories over a subterranean garage. The units are 27 feet 3 inches in height to top of structure with an additional 5 feet 8 inches of height for staircase enclosures. Each unit is allocated two parking spaces within a subterranean garage with an additional guest and accessible guest parking space. A staircase and 10-foot-wide driveway ramp on Herbert Street provides pedestrian and automobile access to the subterranean garage. Unit entries face both Herbert Street and Sawtelle Boulevard. The structure incorporates a mix of white stucco with vertical wood siding, with balconies and patios facing the Herbert Street frontage. The project development program is summarized in Table 2.

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4
Size (sq. ft.)	1,640	1,891	1,887	1,710
Bedrooms	3	3	3	3
Bath	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Open Space (sq. ft.)	197	247	247	197

ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION:

The RMD Zone allows up to one dwelling unit per 1,500 square feet of lot area, up to a maximum of nine (9) dwelling units. A maximum of four (4) dwelling units are permitted on the 6,484 square foot lot; the applicant proposes four (4) units. Construction of new residential projects of less than ten (10) units is subject to an Administrative Site Plan Review pursuant to Zoning Code Section 17.540.010. The Planning Commission must act on both the proposed Administrative Site Plan Review and a Tentative Parcel Map as the project proposes subdivision for condominium purposes. The proposed development conforms to all regulations of the RMD zone as illustrated in the Project Summary (Attachment No. 3).

ADMINISTRATIVE SITE PLAN REVIEW

Architectural Design and Neighborhood Compatibility

The contemporary structure includes white stucco exterior accentuated by vertical wood siding that breaks up massing along all building facades. Balconies face Herbert Avenue creating an offset in building façade and to decrease noise and privacy concerns to adjacent neighbors. Window placement reduces instances of blank façade along the street frontages and reduces instances of adjacent window alignment with neighboring properties. Patios along both street frontages provides a soft transition between the public and private space. The Hebert Street frontage includes trash enclosures for individual carts and the façade is softened with a trellis to facilitate vine growth.

The existing neighborhood includes single-family homes of standard post-war suburban design. The Multi-Family Neighborhood Design Guidelines were incorporated to increase compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. Primary entrances and porches that face the street relate to the pedestrian scale of the neighborhood. Privacy is enhanced by offsetting adjacent windows and distancing outdoor open space areas from interior property lines. Pedestrian-scaled elements such as windows, porches, and street-facing front doors create an active street front similar to other structures in the vicinity.

Landscaping and Open Space

The applicant must landscape all front, side, and rear yards not devoted to paved driveways, walkways, or patios as required by CCMC. In addition, front yard hardscape coverage cannot exceed 45 percent. The project provides approximately 1,001 square feet of landscaping on-site. Sweet Bay trees will provide a continuous hedge along the part of the northern property line. Street frontages include a mix of Brisbane Box and Desert Museum Palo Verde trees. Plantings accent and soften the building façade and increase privacy along key building frontages. Each unit provides a rooftop deck measuring between 197 and 247 square feet in area. Rooftop decks are setback from the building edge to provide additional privacy for neighboring properties.

Stairwell enclosures separate each rooftop deck. Preliminary staff comment suggested reducing unnecessary massing created by the voided space within the stairwell enclosure by eliminating the portion of the enclosed stairwell above and beyond what is required to satisfy the California Building Code. The applicant chose to maintain the stairwell design to create privacy for each deck. However, a slanted stairwell would still provide separation between the rooftop decks due to their placement on the roof, as seen in Attachment No. 4. The applicant could incorporate landscape planters with hedges along the edges of the rooftop decks to achieve additional privacy or incorporate a decorative screen. Condition of Approval Number 51 has been included in the Draft Conditions of Approval for Planning Commission consideration.

Waste Management

Planning and Public Works Environmental Programs and Operations (EPO) staff worked with the applicant to establish trash and recycling services. The proposed driveway ramp layout is a result of the proximity of the property to an intersection and the inability to place a ramp on Sawtelle Boulevard. This led to the inability to increase the garage clearance to allow passage by Public Works EPO vehicles for trash bin pickup. Therefore, individual enclosures have been proposed along Herbert Street for manual waste carts. Proposed trellises surround each trash door to facilitate vine growth and soften the look of the building facade.

Traffic, Parking, And Circulation

The project provides CCMC required ten (10) parking spaces. Each unit is provided two (2) parking spaces in a private garage and the project will have one (1) standard guest parking space and one (1) ADA guest parking space, all designed to provide the minimum required width, depth, and height clearances. The proposed ten (10) foot wide common driveway along the southerly edge of the site provides vehicular access to the subterranean garage. A back-up clearance of 24 feet provides the CCMC required turning radius and maneuvering area. In order to provide a driveway that can successfully traverse the grade change between Herbert Street and the basement level, the applicant has modified the slope of the ramp to exceed the CCMC maximum of three percent (3%). The attached driveway slope diagrams demonstrate how the proposed six percent (6%) slope allows automobiles to traverse the changes in grade and provide visibility of pedestrians along the public right-of-way.

Front doors facing Herbert Street provide the primary pedestrian entrance to each dwelling unit. The front unit has an additional door facing Sawtelle Boulevard to stay consistent with Design Guidelines for building orientation towards street frontages. A staircase on Herbert Street will also provide pedestrian access to the garage.

Sawtelle Boulevard currently measures eighty (80) feet in width and is of adequate width to serve the proposed subdivision and four-unit development. Existing gutter, curb, sidewalk, and driveway approach along the project's frontage will be upgraded as deemed necessary by the Public Works Engineering Division. Existing mature street trees along Sawtelle Boulevard will be preserved. 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. The density of the development will not create significant traffic impacts and is below the threshold required for traffic study.

TENTATIVE PARCEL MAP

CCMC Section 17.210.020 - Table 2-4, Residential Districts 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 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 6,484 square foot lot area. The overall lot width of 60 feet will not change and the overall lot length of 110 feet will not change. Other parcels in the neighborhood have a similar lot area. Thus, the overall project lot configuration - area, width, and length - will comply with the RMD development standards. Through the subdivision process, four (4) airspace condominium parcels 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 Engineering Division has reviewed the Tentative Parcel Map (Attachment No. 5) for the proposed subdivision and found it to follow all applicable State and local regulations as more specifically outlined in the recommended conditions of approval. The proposed condominium development includes a common driveway with vehicular access easements secured through the condominium association Covenants, Restrictions, and Conditions (CC&Rs).

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 airspace parcels have required access to the public right-of-way.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Two community meetings were held as part of the project review process; the first on July 2, 2019 at Veterans Memorial Building and the second on September 10, 2020 via video conference consistent with the Culver City “Safer-at-Home” Public Orders. The applicant invited interested persons to learn about the development project, provide comments and feedback, and share any concerns regarding the proposed project.

At the July 2, 2019 Community Meeting, six (6) members of the public attended and provided the following comments

- Concerns regarding the overall design of the structure and how it did not blend well with the neighborhood.
- General concerns regarding construction impacts.
- Concerns regarding parking availability along Sawtelle Boulevard and Citizens inquired about permit parking along the street. The public was given staff contact to discuss the proposal further under different review criteria.

At the September 10, 2020 Community Meeting, five (5) members of the public attended and provided the following comment.

- General concerns regarding construction impacts including maintenance of existing property line fences. The applicant responded that fences would remain if in good conditions but would otherwise be replaced during construction.
- General questions regarding construction schedule and price points.
- Concern was readdressed regarding creation of a permit parking district for the neighborhood. The public was given staff contact to discuss the proposal further under different review processes.

Staff worked with the applicant team to address neighborhood concerns and early project designs were reworked to create more façade variation and reduce instances of blank stucco. Eight (8) resident parking space in addition to one (1) guest and one (1) ADA guest space provide Code required parking. Construction best management practices, enforced by the Community Development Department staff, will mitigate construction-related impacts.

Comments Received During Public Comment Period

At the time of this writing, one email was received in support of the project. All public comment received prior to agenda finalization is included in Attachment No. 7.

CONCLUSION/SUMMARY

Staff and the applicant team collaborated during the design review process to produce a code-compliant

project that also provides an aesthetic that will blend with the existing neighborhood. Varied façade treatments and window placement will create an active street frontage. Porches and balconies along Herbert Street and Sawtelle Boulevard foster a pedestrian atmosphere. Non-alignment of adjacent windows and rooftop deck setbacks from the building edge will increase neighboring privacy.

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 P2020-0188-TPM and Administrative Site Plan Review P2020-0188-ASPR can be made as outlined in Resolution No. P2021-001 (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 environmental and the proposed project has been determined to be a Class 3 and Class 15 Categorical Exemption as an “New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures” (Section 15303) project and as a “Minor Land Division” (Section 15315) project.

- The project includes the construction of no more than four residential units in an urbanized area.
- The project consists of the subdivision of the site into four condominium parcels.
- The project is deemed consistent with the applicable General Plan and RMD zoning designation and regulations without any variances or exceptions to said General Plan or Zoning Code,
- The project does not involve a parcel from a larger subdivision within the previous two (2) years,
- The project will not result in a parcel with an average slope of greater than 20 percent.
- The project will be adequately served by all required utilities and public services; and will have all services and access to local standards.

MOTION

That the Planning Commission:

Adopt a Categorical Exemption pursuant to CEQA Section 15303 and 15315, Class 3 and 15, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures and Minor Land Divisions, finding that there are no potentially significant adverse impacts on the environment and 2) Approve Tentative Parcel Map No. 2018-82779, P2020-0188-TPM and Administrative Site Plan Review P2020-0188-ASPR, subject to the Conditions of Approval as stated in Resolution No. 2020-P001.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft Resolution No. 2021-P001 and Exhibit A Conditions of Approval
2. Vicinity Map
3. Project Summary
4. Preliminary Development Plans Dated January 25, 2021
5. Tentative Parcel Map No. 2018-82779
6. Applicant Summary of Community Meetings

7. Public Comments Received Prior to Agenda Publication