



City of Culver City

Mike Balkman Council
Chambers
9770 Culver Blvd.
Culver City, CA 90232

Staff Report

File #: 22-232, **Version:** 1

Item #: A-1.

PC - Sony Pictures Scenic Arts Conformance Review (P2021-0193-CPCR) Consisting of an Adaptive Reuse and 9,514 Square Foot Addition to a 2-story, 16,396 Square Foot Support Building; Demolition of a 1-story, 18,280 Square Foot Support Building to be Replaced with the Construction of a 4-story, 47,845 Square Foot Office Building in the Sony Studio Lot at 10202 Washington Boulevard.

Meeting Date: August 25, 2021

Contact Person/Dept: Susan Herbertson, Senior Planner
Sol Blumenfeld, Community Development Director

Phone Number: (310) 253-5755

Fiscal Impact: Yes ☐ No ☒

General Fund: Yes ☐ No ☒

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

Public Notification: Meetings and Agendas - Planning Commission (08/20/2021).

Department Approval: Sol Blumenfeld, Community Development Director (08/19/2021)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends Planning Commission approve the Scenic Arts project, finding conformance to the Sony Pictures Comprehensive Plan as outlined in Resolution No. 2021-P010 (Attachment No. 1).

PROCEDURES

1. Chair calls on staff for a brief staff report and Planning Commission poses questions to staff as desired.
2. Chair provides the applicant the first opportunity to speak, followed by the general public.
3. Planning Commission discusses the matter and arrives at its decision.

BACKGROUND:

On July 30, 2021, Sony Pictures Entertainment (SPE) applied for a project conformance review to address building modifications and new construction related to the Scenic Arts Building on the studio lot (Scenic Arts Conformance Review, 2021-0193-CPCR).

The Scenic Arts Building project consists of the addition of 57,359 square feet of office and studio support area, and the removal of 18,280 square feet of existing support area, resulting in a net increase of 39,079

square feet of development. A conformance review by the Planning Commission is required as the proposed project net new square feet is greater than the 25,000 square footage thresholds established by the Comprehensive Plan and related Development Agreement. The Development Agreement (Agreement) between the City of Culver City and Sony Pictures allows a phased expansion and renovation of the Sony Studios lot in accordance with their adopted Comprehensive Plan. The Agreement was entered into in September 1993 and expires September 2031. The Agreement was extended in March 2006 and November 2020.¹

Comprehensive Plan Conditions of Approval

The adopted Sony Comprehensive Plan allows net new development, or a cumulative amount of building square footage constructed that exceeds the development baseline of 1,537,743 square feet but not to exceed 2,542,819 total gross square feet.

The Sony Studio lot is divided into six (6) Comprehensive Plan Design Areas (CPDA)'s all serving to implement the adopted Comprehensive Plan. The CPDA's have maximum allowable building square footage, applicable design parameters, and limits to types and construction of uses within each area. The boundaries of the six (6) CPDA are shown on page 40 of the subject Conformance Review plans (Attachment No. 4).

Applicable Comprehensive Plan Conditions of Approval (the "Conditions") are reviewed when a project is proposed (Attachment No.2). The Conditions are utilized as a type of extensive checklist to determine whether a project triggers a particular requirement or conforms to the Comprehensive Plan. The Conditions contain 97 pages detailing requirements and procedures to implement the phased development of the Sony Studios lot. Development standards regarding building height, setback, design, parking, and use types are defined. All related construction, infrastructure, transportation, and traffic requirements are also identified in the Conditions. The Conditions can be on-going or a one-time action or a monitoring and annual reporting type of requirement. Conditions are generally triggered by thresholds or when maximums are reached.

In accordance with the Conditions, the Planning Commission conducts a Comprehensive Plan Conformance Review for additions, expansions or new construction projects of 25,000 square feet or greater and must approve the proposed addition, expansion or new construction provided all applicable requirements of the Comprehensive Plan in general, and the applicable Comprehensive Plan Design Area requirements for the particular project are met. The City's Special and Standard Conditions of Approval are supplemental to the Comprehensive Plan Conditions of a project (Attachment No. 1, Exhibit A).

SCENIC ARTS CONFORMANCE REVIEW:

The project site is located on the western portion of the Sony Studio lot, adjacent to the parking structure and main gate off Overland Avenue in CPDA 5. The Scenic Arts project is proposed by Sony Pictures as a sustainable and conscientious adaptive reuse of the Scenic Paint building that involves expansion in support space and advanced, up to date technological upgrades.

The Scenic Arts project involves two buildings totaling 73,755 gross square feet (33,466 square feet of office space and 40,289 square feet of support space) and the relocation of an existing production parking pad to the southerly area of the project site to better facilitate construction of a new office building.

Scenic Paint Building Adaptive Reuse: The existing 16,396 square feet Scenic Paint building is 2-stories and 97'-6" high with the upper level at 58'-6" high and the lower level at 39'-0" high. The total building height and footprint will not be altered. An addition of 9,514 square feet is proposed for the Scenic Paint building by dividing the ground level (8,507 square feet) into a total of three levels resulting in a four-level building without altering the existing height or footprint of the building. The volume and total area of 7,899 square feet of

second level will not change.

The original Scenic Paint building operated as the central location on the Sony Studio lot to house and paint large canvases used as backdrops for filming. The canvases were stored on the lower level of the building and painted by select crafts people on the upper level. Canvases were loaded and essentially pulleyed from the ground level to the top level which allowed painting or viewing of canvases hung against expansive wood frame walls. The exposure of natural light from the sawtooth clerestory skylights and the distinct south and north facing building windows at the top level is recreated as part of the adaptive reuse effort. The windows and skylights will be updated with glass that is insulated, inclement weather tolerating, and energy preserving.

The 2nd-level of Scenic Paint building will be re-purposed as a flexible multipurpose area to host Sony Pictures related events and meetings, retaining aspects of the original use of interior space and maintaining the architectural qualities of the building. The multipurpose space is accented with the revival of the rigging system to showcase painted canvases during events. The multipurpose level includes a catering kitchen and back of house area. An egress balcony is added to the back side of the building connecting at the same level of the new 4-story office building. The ground floor level of the Scenic Paint building consists of a backlot trade area, utility and janitorial rooms, a trash enclosure and entrance to a freight elevator. A mezzanine level is proposed as the new 2nd level providing a trades administration space and a break room for Sony staff.

Scene Dock 5 Building Demolition: Scene Dock 5 is a one-story 18,280 square feet wood framed support structure that abuts the Scenic Paint building. Currently, the Scene Dock 5 building generally is used by Sony Studio lot backlot trades such as mechanical, electric, and plumbing shops as well as storage for janitorial, buildings and grounds purposes. It is also used for Sony Studio lot expendables which mostly provides supplies for set building and other construction material for sound stages. The Scene Dock 5 building is proposed for demolition and replaced with a new 4-story office building.

4-Story Office Building: The new 4-story, 55'-6" high office building is 47,845 gross square feet comprising 32,616 square feet of office space and 15,299 square feet of support space. The new building will occupy the footprint of both the existing Scene Dock 5 building which will be demolished and an open area production parking pad to be relocated on the back side near the fire lane.

The ground floor of the 4-story office building includes a lobby with a floor to ceiling glass view of the shaded garden area, studio merchandise area, audience holding, expendables, and utility rooms. The 2nd level will contain a wardrobe area and the 3rd level includes an outdoor balcony located at the frontside of the building. A flexible and open office plan is provided on floor levels two (2) through four (4).

Outdoor Balcony: An outdoor balcony on the 3rd level, encompassing approximately 750 square feet is located on the north terrace of the Scenic Arts building to provide outdoor area for employees and production crew members. The balcony planters will reflect landscape and hardscape areas of the project.

ANALYSIS

Architectural Design and Building Standards including square footage limitations, building setbacks, height, architectural design, and landscape and open space requirements applying to the proposed project are found in Section V.G. (Pages 18-36) of the Comprehensive Plan Conditions of Approval (Attachment No.2).

Square Footage Maximums: The Conditions of Approval in Section V.G.1.d-g (pages 18 through 25) sets forth maximum allowable building square footage of the overall Sony Studio lot and within each CPDA. Net new square footage is calculated with new building square feet minus building square feet demolished. The Scenic Arts project complies with building square footage maximums of the Conditions.

Square Footage Transfers: Comprehensive Design Areas such as CPDA No.5 may be increased in allowable square footage by no more than 15% (24,022 square feet) of the amount allowed in the affected CPDA

(160,150 square feet) by a transfer of floor area from any other Comprehensive Plan Design Area including the maximum allowable transfer. The maximum allowable building square footage including transfers is 184,497 square feet for CPDA 5. The Scenic Arts project will transfer 9.7% or 15,499 square feet from CPDA 6 which is below the 15% maximum allowed in CPDA 5. The proposed project is within the overall square footage maximums of the Comprehensive Plan as summarized below.

	<u>Sony Studio Lot</u>	<u>CPDA 5</u>
Maximum Area:	2,542,819	160,150
Actual Existing Area:	<u>1,829,963</u>	<u>136,570</u>
Remaining Area:	673,777	23,580
Project Demolition:	18,280	18,280
Project New Construction:	<u>57,359</u>	<u>57,359</u>
Project Net New:	39,079	39,079
Transfer Area:	<u>15,499</u>	<u>15,499</u>
Maximum Area w/ Project:	1,869,042	175,649
Remaining Area w/ Project:	175,649	0

Architectural Design: The Scenic Arts project is in conformance with the architectural design and materials and finish requirements based on the criterion of the Comprehensive Plan. The Conditions permits new office building interiors to the site to vary in form, massing, color, and materials to allow for a diversity of complementary styles. The design of support buildings is determined by the practical and functional nature of such building, with no restrictions to specific architectural styles. The Conditions do not restrict type of materials and finishes for structures not abutting public streets.

The design of the Scenic Arts building is meant to reflect the character of the original Scenic Paint building and complement architecturally, the existing building and the addition. The difference of the color and materiality allow the existing building to stand out from the addition, and the new building is juxtaposed to the existing in both massing and exterior finish color.

Design materials include architectural panels made of smooth finish glass fiber reinforced concrete with a grid pattern that supports the sustainability goals and integrates with the glazing openings. The Scenic Paint building will be clad in an exterior insulation finishing system, improving the building envelope performance, and maintaining a similar aesthetic.

The exterior of the Scene Paint building is representative of the industrial appearance of buildings on the Sony Studios lot. The interior contains a unique space based on its past function. Due to the size of the backings required for the movies, the space required to paint them was significant. The Scene Paint building was essentially one large space with the second floor 28' up, and supported like a bridge with continuous openings on each of the long sides of the building that allowed for the backings to be mechanically raised and lowered on frames so that the painters could reach all parts of the backing.

Large expanses of glass exist at the south and north facades, and illuminating clerestories facing north make up a continuous ceiling and roof. The spatial and daylighting features of interior space is a key aspect of the adaptive reuse scope sending the message the use of the space will be preserved yet transformed with current health and safety related code requirements and to accommodate a wide variety of uses with new technology. The exterior building will be surfaced with an Exterior Insulation Façade System (EFIS) finished like the original building's finish. The painting slots, frames, and mechanical conveying systems will be retained. Sony anticipates displaying scenic backings on the frames in the multipurpose room. The structure

will be replaced with a code compliant structure that will allow the original slot spaces to continue to exist, while maintaining code required separations for new backlot and storage uses.

Height: A maximum height limit of 56', plus 13'-6" for mechanical equipment is required in the Comprehensive Plan and within CPDA 5. The 4-story 56' high office building is in conformance with the height requirements of the Comprehensive Plan with the proposed building measuring 55'-6" in height, with a 3'-6" high parapet and a 13'-6" high screen for mechanical equipment on the roof. Sony is voluntarily including solar photovoltaic panels covering an extensive portion of the roof, well over the City's minimum requirement. The existing 97'-3" high Scenic Arts building is also in conformance with the height requirements of the Comprehensive Plan as the building is existing and not proposed to change in height or footprint.

Setbacks: The Comprehensive Plan Conditions of Approval (Section V.G.2.d, page 29-31) does not require building setbacks for buildings that are proposed in the interior of the Sony Studio lot. The project will meet the minimum separation between buildings required by the Building, Fire and Zoning Code.

Vehicle Parking: The project's required parking will be supplied on-site. Currently, there are a total of 4,751 parking spaces in parking structures or surface parking lots throughout the Sony Studios lot. The amount of total parking required for existing development is 3,232 spaces resulting in a surplus of 1,559 parking spaces. The Scenic Arts project requires 61 parking stalls based the parking ratios established by the adopted Comprehensive Plan. The existing parking surplus on the Sony Studios lot will cover the proposed project's 61 required spaces, leaving a total of 1,498 remaining parking spaces. Sony Pictures has voluntarily installed 64 electric vehicle parking stations in the recent past even though they are not required by the Comprehensive Plan. The Overland parking structure is located near the Scenic Arts building and most employees working at the building or site will park at the structure.

Bicycle Parking: The Comprehensive Plan does not have a numerical requirement for bicycle parking. There are general requirements for bicycle parking facilities to be provided at every significant workplace within the Sony Studio lot. There are approximately 231 existing parking spaces spread across the Sony Studios lot. Sony Pictures is not required to provide additional bicycle parking or facilities. Nevertheless, they are providing two new shower facilities as part of the proposed project to encourage staff to bicycle to and from work.

Project Access: Vehicular and pedestrian access will be through the main gate off Overland Avenue including Sony Pictures staff and guests. Programs and operations occupying both the new and existing buildings will be relocated within the Studio lot and no new employees or staff are anticipated with this project. The Scenic Arts project does not trigger any traffic improvements of the Comprehensive Plan Conditions or generate a significant number of vehicular trips to impact movement or queuing at the Overland Gate (Attachment No. 3, Queuing Assessment by Gibson Transportation consulting, Inc.). In regard to ADA compliance in the public right of way, Sony has agreed to fund the City with \$100,000 that will be used to perform ADA improvements identified in the City's ADA Transition Plan in the general area of the Sony Pictures Studio lot.

Historic Preservation Program: Neither the Scenic Paint or Scene Dock 5 building are designated Culver City Cultural Resources and are not identified or mentioned in the Cultural Resources section of the Comprehensive Plan Conditions of Approval. Therefore, no requirements as outlined in the City's Historic Preservation Program apply to the proposed project.

Art in Public Places Program: Per the Comprehensive Standard Conditions of Approval, the Scenic Arts project is subject to the City's Art in Public Places Program (APPP) as outlined in CCMC subchapter 15.06. Sony Pictures currently has an agreement with the City in conjunction with the commission of Tony Tasset's artwork, *RAINBOW* that allows them to apply a cost credit from their investment into the artwork toward future APPP allocations. Sony Pictures intends to apply the remaining balance of their cost credit for *RAINBOW* toward the

1% APPP allocation for this project.

CONCLUSION:

Staff has conducted a thorough review and analysis of the proposed Scenic Arts project in coordination with Sony Pictures Entertainment to ensure conformance of the project with the Comprehensive Plan and all applicable conditions of approval. Based on the analysis contained herein staff recommends the Planning Commission approve and find the proposed project conforms to the Sony Comprehensive Plan as outlined in proposed Resolution No. 2021-P010 (Attachment No. 1).

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:

Pursuant to Section 15061, 15062, 15357, 15369 and 15374 of the State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, the Conformance Review for the proposed project is exempt from environmental analysis because it is a ministerial action.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

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

1. Approve the application with the recommended conditions of approval if the application is deemed to meet all applicable requirements of the Comprehensive Plan in general and the applicable Comprehensive Plan Design Area.
2. Disapprove the application if it does not meet all applicable requirements of the Comprehensive Plan in general and the applicable Comprehensive Plan Design Area.

NOTES:

1. State law, Article 2.5 of the California Government Code specifically authorizes the use of a Development Agreement to provide an applicant with some assurance that, upon approval of a project, the property can be developed in accordance with the policies, rules and regulations that are in existence at the time of the execution of the agreement. The City's Zoning Code, Section 17.590, also discusses the required content and process of a Development Agreement consistent with the provisions of State law.

Pursuant to the SPE Development Agreement, the City's review is limited to the rules, regulations, and official policies of the City in existence at the time of execution of the Agreement, which govern applicable density, building design, improvement and construction standards and specifications, and other conditions of approval (collectively, the "Applicable Rules"). Notwithstanding the Applicable Rules, the 2006 Amendment requires Sony Pictures conformance with the 2005 Zoning Code.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Proposed Resolution No. 2021-P010 and Exhibit "A", City Standard and Special Conditions of Approval.
2. Sony Pictures Entertainment Comprehensive Plan Conditions of Approval dated August 9, 1993 (Exhibit "A" to Resolution No. 93-R071).
3. Queuing Assessment for the Scenic Arts Project prepared by Gibson Transportation Consulting, dated August 17, 2021.
4. Comprehensive Plan Conformance Review Plans for Scenic Arts Project dated August 25, 2021.