



City of Culver City

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

Staff Report

File #: 22-794, **Version:** 1

Item #: PH-1.

PC - PUBLIC HEARING: Consideration of a Site Plan Review, Administrative Modification, and Administrative Use Permit (P2021-0171-SPR/AM/AUP) for the Construction of a 3-Story, 16,900 Square Feet of Office Structure and Subterranean Parking at 5861-5863 Washington Boulevard (Project).

Meeting Date: March 9, 2022

Contact Person/Dept: Deborah Hong, Planning Technician
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Phone Number: (310) 253-5714 / (310) 253-5755

Fiscal Impact: Yes No

General Fund: Yes No

Public Hearing:

Action Item:

Attachments:

City Council Action Required: Yes No

Date: N/A

Public Notification: (Mailed) Property owners and occupants within a 500-foot radius and extended (02/16/22); (Email) Master Notification List (02/16/22), Onsite Sign (02/18/22), Meetings and Agendas - Planning Commission (03/04/22)

Department Approval: Sol Blumenfeld, Community Development Director (03/01/2022)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission 1) Adopt a Class 32 Categorical Exemption, pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act Section 15332 In-Fill Development Projects, 2) Approve Site Plan Review, Administrative Modification, and Administrative Use Permit (P2021-0171-SPR/AUP/AM) subject to the Conditions of Approval as stated in Resolution No. 2022-P004 (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 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. Planning Commission discusses the matter and arrives at its decision.

BACKGROUND

Request

On July 2, 2021, an application was submitted by Clive Wilkinson Architects (the Applicant) and Maxam Properties (the Property Owner) for a Site Plan Review, Administrative Modification, and Administrative Use Permit. The application request is to allow the following:

- Demolition of a 3,414 sq. ft. non-residential structure, an auto repair garage, and other site improvements;
- Site Plan Review (SPR): To construct a three-story, 16,900 sq. ft. non-residential structure with a ground floor retail space, creative office spaces on upper levels, and one level of subterranean parking;
- Administrative Use Permit (AUP): To utilize tandem parking configuration to meet onsite parking requirement; and
- Administrative Modification (AM): To increase the maximum allowable building height, to reduce the minimum required dimensions for parking stalls (length) and driveway ramp, and to reduce the minimum number of required parking spaces.

Project Site/Existing Conditions

The Project site (Site) is located at 5861-5863 Washington Boulevard, at the northeast corner of the intersection with Comey Avenue, and on the north side of Washington Boulevard, east of La Cienega Boulevard and west of Fairfax Avenue (see Vicinity Map, Attachment No. 2). The Site is comprised of two parcels measuring 9,989 square feet. Both parcels are within the East Washington Overlay (EW) Zone with an underlying zone of Industrial General (IG) and has General Plan land use designation of General Corridor, which typically corresponds to the Commercial General (CG) zone.

The Site is currently improved with two single-story non-residential structures, surface parking, and site improvements including landscape and hardscape. Vehicular access to the existing parcels is provided by an existing driveway on Washington Boulevard, two existing driveways along Comey Avenue, and from the alley in rear. The Site abuts an alley to the rear, which connects to Comey Avenue and runs parallel to Washington Boulevard from La Cienega Boulevard until it meets David Avenue to the east. The existing adjacent public right-of-way consists of 10-foot wide sidewalk along Comey Avenue and a 14-foot wide sidewalk along Washington Boulevard. There are two mature palm trees on the sidewalk adjacent to the northwest corner of the Site.

The Site is surrounded by nonresidential uses to the east, west, and south, and abuts a residential zone across an alley to the north. Only a portion (approximately 22 feet in width) of the abutting residential zone is in Culver City; the rest of the block is in the City of Los Angeles' jurisdiction.

The surrounding zoning and land uses are as listed below.

- North: Residential Medium Density (RMD) Zone (one-story single-family home)
- South: Industrial General (IG) Zone (two-story warehouse use across Washington Boulevard)
- East: Industrial General (IG) Zone (one-story restaurant)
- West: Industrial General (IG) Zone (one- to two-story medical office, food retail, and auto repair service uses across Comey Avenue)

Project Description

As shown in the project plans (Attachment No. 4), the applicant proposes to demolish all existing on-site improvements and construct a three-story, 47'-3" high, commercial development with a mezzanine and one

level of subterranean parking, including 638 square feet of retail space and covered parking lot on the ground level. Upper floors are comprised of an open floor plan intended for office use and includes a mezzanine. The ground level parking area is proposed to provide 19 parking stalls including three standard stalls, ten standard tandem stalls, three compact stalls and three accessible spaces. The subterranean level provides 24 spaces total, including seven compact stalls, seven standard stalls, and ten standard tandem stalls. The subterranean parking level also includes an electrical room, elevator control room, and long-term bicycle lockers. The basement can access upper floors by either of the two staircases or the elevator, all of which connect all the way to the third floor. The mezzanine above third floor can be accessed by the elevator or a separate stairway from third floor.

Vehicular access to both ground level parking area and the subterranean garage are provided from the alley. A roll up gate will cover and secure each access point when the building is closed. A two-foot setback area in the rear will provide some planting between the alley and the Project. Pedestrians may enter the building on Washington Boulevard through a semi-enclosed, landscaped courtyard. Short term bicycle parking stalls are located in this entry courtyard. Ground floor retail space has its own street-facing pedestrian entrance on Washington Boulevard and an additional entry from the courtyard. An additional stairwell along Comey Avenue also provides pedestrian access. A trash room is located on the ground level adjacent to Comey Avenue may be accessed from the street by a roll up gate or from inside the parking area.

The applicant has requested an Administrative Modification for the following:

- (1) 10% reduction of the length of parking stalls from 18 feet to 16'-2",
- (2) 10% reduction of the width of drive aisles from 27 feet to 24'-4",
- (3) 10% reduction of number of required parking spaces from 48 stalls to 43 stalls, and
- (4) 10% increase of building height from 43 feet to 47'-3".

An Administrative Modification requires approval of the following factual findings noted in the Analysis/Discussion section below.

Additionally, the project proposes to provide 25% of the required parking spaces in tandem configuration. In nonresidential zones, providing tandem parking to meet the minimum parking requirement requires approval of an Administrative Use Permit.

ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION:

Administrative Modification

1. *Parking Dimensions, Spacing, and Number of Parking Spaces.* Per off-street parking design standards of the Zoning Code, standard parking stalls are required 18 feet in length, and a two-way traffic configuration requires a driveway width of 24 feet. However, due to the trapezoidal shape of the Site that becomes progressively narrower from rear to front, it is difficult to provide the required number of parking spaces with these minimum dimensions. Additionally, as much of the space on the ground floor and basement level are used for essential utility functions such as transformer yard, electrical room, and trash room, the space to provide the required parking becomes more limited. The Project requests a 10% reduction in length of standard stalls from 18 feet to 16'-3", a 10% reduction of the width of the ground-to-subterranean ramp from 24 feet to 22'-6", and a 10% reduction in number of parking spaces from 48 to 43. As the width of the parking stalls meet the Zoning Code minimum, parking stalls with reduced length could maintain usability. Retail use is only a small portion of the Project, at 638 square feet out of 16,900 square feet; the rest of the building footprint is dedicated to office use. For a typical office use, occupants would travel in one direction at peak traffic hours: ingress into the building in the morning and egress out of the building in the evening. As such, a reduction in the width of a two-way driveway would not be detrimental to

safety.

Per the Zoning Code Section 17.550.010.A, an Administrative Modification may be granted only once for a specific type of request per parcel. However, given the relatively small site and site restrictions, the Project's location and its configuration staff believes that it may be possible to approve the three Administrative Modification requests in the parking category. The Project meets the minimum requirement for number of accessible stalls and electric charging stations.

2. Height Increase. In the East Washington Overlay Zone (-EW) with an underlying Industrial General (IG) Zone, the maximum allowable height for the Site is 43 feet. The Project request a 10% increase to 47'-3" to accommodate higher ceilings that contemporary office tenants prefer and to accommodate a 1,782 square foot mezzanine, which will compensate for the square footage given away to incremental step-back setback required in the rear due to adjacency to a residential zone. Roof projections include parapet walls, mechanical equipment area and screening, and elevator shaft. All features meet maximum allowable projection. No furnished roof deck is proposed; roof is currently proposed to solely serve utility function to house mechanical and solar equipment.

Architectural Design/Neighborhood Compatibility

The Project is a three-story building over one level of basement parking garage with vehicular access in the rear through an alley. Straight lines, orthogonal angles, large windows, and flat roofs are typical of modern architecture and characterize the structure. The mass is broken into smaller blocks and punctuated by landscaped terraces along both Comey Avenue and Washington Boulevard frontages, and the larger block of mass comprising the open floor plan office spaces is pushed inward, visually diminishing the bulk. An open stairwell courtyard along Washington Boulevard, which is also the main pedestrian entry to the building, smooths the transition from the street and enhances connection between the Project and the public right-of-way at pedestrian level. Large windows that extend from floor to ceiling provide a sense of openness. A vertical landscaped wall from grade to third floor in the courtyard provides additional onsite landscaping and visually softens the solid building mass. More terraces and landscaping are provided in the rear, functioning as a buffer from the commercial streetscape for the adjacent residential zone. The color palette of the finish surface is comprised of two monochromatic colors, white and gray, and is juxtaposed with different textures between smooth metal panels, corrugated metal panels, perforated and corrugated metal panels, and smooth stucco to provide surface articulation.

The building will include allowable rooftop projections for the elevator, parapets, and mechanical equipment area/screening. Parapet extends additional 2'-3" to a height of 49'-6" from grade, elevator an additional 1'-9" to 49'-0", and metal mesh roof screen for mechanical equipment an additional 4'-3" to a height of 51'-6". All three features are within the allowable projection provisions per the Zoning Code: parapet walls may extend an additional 5 feet from the maximum height limit, and structures housing mechanical equipment and elevator shafts may project an additional 13'-6". The roof is accessed by an exterior ladder from the mezzanine terrace.

Both surface level parking lot and subterranean garage are accessed from the rear public alley, each through a separate entry driveway. This layout minimizes the visual impact of automobile presence and parking garages from the street frontages. It also maximizes sidewalk and strengthens the connection between the Project and the sidewalk and makes the Project more pedestrian oriented.

The project design is compatible with the contemporary architectural style that is found among recent developments in the East Washington Overlay Zone and Arts District. Once completed, it will be one of the few recent new developments in the East Washington Overlay Zone east of La Cienega Boulevard and is expected to encourage more retail, pedestrian-oriented developments in the vicinity.

The building design otherwise meets the development standards for the IG-EW zoning designation apart from

the exception of the Administrative Modification.

Landscaping

Due to the building footprint, site size, and necessary site access points for automobiles and pedestrians including driveways, exits as required by the building code, and trash enclosure access, there are limited opportunities for landscaping. The Project proposes to provide ground level landscaping wherever there is an opportunity. There will be 142 square feet of landscaping at grade, in the rear of the property. The Project also proposes a vertical landscaped wall that extends from ground level to the top floor in the open entryway courtyard, which will be open to sky and oriented towards Washington Boulevard. Six terraces throughout the project along both Comey Avenue and Washington Boulevard, as well as in rear abutting the alley and residential zone, will be landscaped, as well. Landscaped area throughout the Project will be 1,968 square feet in total. Preliminary landscape information is included in the preliminary development plans (Attachment No. 4) and in the CEQA Class 32 Categorical Exemption Report (Attachment No. 5).

Traffic, Parking, Mobility and Circulation

The Project proposes to close off all existing driveways along Washington Boulevard and Comey Avenue and provide parking lot access in rear through the alley. A new 19'-6" driveway will serve the ground level parking lot, and a 23'-6" wide ramp will provide access to the subterranean garage. Mobility and Traffic Engineering Division of the Public Works Department deems these driveway and driveway ramp widths to be adequate to serve the Project and its proposed parking layout. Ramp design will be further discussed under Administrative Modification subsection of this report. Both levels of the parking lot provide a height clearance that exceeds the minimum required height of 7'-0" for standard spaces and 8'-2" for vans.

The Zoning Code requires one space per 350 square feet of gross floor area for both retail space on ground level and office use on upper levels. For the proposed area of 16,900 square feet, the Project is required to provide 48 spaces. Approval Administrative Modification per the Zoning Code Section 17.500 may allow up to 10% reduction in this number, which results in 43 required spaces. The Project proposes to provide 43 spaces total: 19 on the ground level, and 24 in the subterranean level. The Project also requests an Administrative Use Permit to allow tandem configuration for ten standard spaces on ground level and ten additional standard spaces on the subterranean level. The Project also requests 10% reduction in the length of standard parking stalls, and six of the tandem spaces on each level is proposed at a reduced length of 16'-2 13/32". Per the provision in Zoning Code Section 17.320.035.C.1.c, 25% of the 43 spaces, or ten spaces, will be provided as compact stalls. Three of these compact stalls will be on the ground level and seven will be in the basement.

The Project will provide three accessible spaces on ground level, including two van accessible space. This exceeds Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, which requires two spaces for parking facilities that provides 50 or fewer spaces. One of the van accessible spaces will also be fully equipped with electrical vehicle (EV) charging equipment. The Project provides three additional fully equipped EV charging station on the subterranean level, four EV ready stalls, and nine EV capable stalls. Two of the EV capable stalls will be on the ground level, and rest of the EV-accommodating stalls will be on the subterranean level. Three of the EV ready stalls will also serve as clean air vehicle (CAV) stalls. The number of stalls complies with the Zoning Code, which requires 10% charging stations, 10% EV ready, and 20% EV capable. Additionally, two short term bicycle parking spaces will be provided in the pedestrian entry courtyard, and two long term bicycle parking spaces will be provided in the subterranean elevator lobby. Long term bicycle parking spaces will be accessible by the elevator and the two stairwells.

Vehicular access to the subterranean parking garage is provided by the driveway ramp at the easterly edge of the Project, accessed through the alley. The ramp provides a width of 22'-6" with a 10% reduction through Administrative Modification, as mentioned above. The Zoning Code Section 17.320.035.E.1 states that the slope of 20 feet of a driveway or a ramp closest to the exit shall not exceed 3%, or as approved by the

Director. The driveway ramp diagrams that the applicant prepared in consultation with a traffic engineer (Attachment No. 6) includes a slope of 9.89% for the 8 feet closest to the exit into the alley, a 19.78% slope for the next 39'-2", and again a 9.89% slope for the last 8 feet of the ramp. Per the diagrams, , which are also a part of the preliminary development plans (Attachment No. 4), the steepest transition point would provide an undercarriage clearance of 0.11 feet or 1 inch when simulated with a diagram of an automobile with a low undercarriage height of 0.36 feet or 4 inches. The ramp is predicted to provide a minimum visibility height of 3 feet at the steepest transition. As the estimates used in the diagram are conservative, real-life undercarriage distance and range of visibility may be greater.

As indicated Class 32 Categorical Exemption Report (Attachment No. 5), the Project will not create any significant traffic impacts, and mitigation measures are not required.

Existing sidewalks and alleys adjacent to the Site will be repaired to meet Public Works Department's standards and the ADA requirements. No street dedication is required per the Public Works Department standards. The proposed removal of existing driveways along the street frontages and vehicular ingress and egress in the rear through the alley will improve pedestrian safety on both Comey Avenue and Washington Boulevard.

Noise

Proposed uses for the project are retail on the ground level and office on second floor, third floor, and mezzanine. In all reasonable scenarios, the level of noise that the Project generates would be typical of a nonresidential development. Open spaces are mostly oriented towards Comey Avenue and Washington Boulevard, away from the residential zone in rear. Onsite landscaping in rear on second floor, third floor, and mezzanine will help reduce noise that the Project generates. Roof equipment will be screened by metal mesh screening, which will not only visually screen the equipment but help muffle equipment noise. Hours of operation of the building will be typical of retail and office uses, and the building will be vacant and closed overnight at most times. Considering the character of the vicinity, an alternate use for the ground floor would likely be food retail. While land use for upper floors may change over time as well depending on the demand and tenant availability, given the allowable uses for the IG-EW Zone, the number of parking spaces onsite, and the floor plan of the upper floors, alternate uses would be those that have similar hours of operation and generate similar levels of noise, such as business and consumer support services, medical office, medical lab, or retail.

Construction Management

To minimize the potential for disruptions resulting from the construction related activities for the project, the applicant will be required to submit a final Construction Management Plan, Pedestrian Protection Plan, and Construction Traffic Management Plan. Per the Conditions of Approval, said plans will incorporate measures for noise reduction and dust control, and will specify detailed construction phases and timelines, construction and crew vehicle parking, on-site staging areas, pedestrian path of travel and coordination of construction deliveries.

The applicant's anticipated construction start date is October 2022 and completion in the third quarter of 2023, to a total of approximately eleven months of construction. Construction will include removal of approximately 4,700 cubic yards of dirt. The applicant will provide a construction management plan consistent with the City's requirements prior to issuance of a building permit.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

As part of the review process, one community meeting was held for the project. The meeting was held on

Tuesday, February 4, 2020, during the Preliminary Project Review phase of the process. The applicant sent invitations two weeks before the meeting to property owners and occupants within a 500-foot radius and extended area from the site, inviting interested persons to learn about the development project, provide comments and feedback, as well as to share any concerns regarding the proposed Project. Besides the project team, six members of the public attended the meeting held at the Clive Wilkinson Architects' office at 6116 Washington Boulevard.

Topics of discussion:

- Overview of project including architectural design and use
- Concerns about traffic safety in the alley and on Comey Avenue during rush hour
- Concerns about additional traffic the Project would generate
- Desire for more landscaping
- Proximity to a transit station (Metro La Cienega station)
- Concerns about safety in the alley
- Concerns about construction activities causing a nuisance

During the community meeting, the attendees comprised of the residents and homeowners in the vicinity. There were concerns about additional traffic and construction activities, but the attendees' response to the Project was overall favorable. The attendees made several suggestions to address their concerns, such as placing parking access on Washington Boulevard, installing rolling gates at parking entrances, and providing ample lighting in rear along the alley. Most of the attendees' concerns and suggestions are reflected in the Project design, except the driveway location. After discussions with the Mobility and Traffic Engineering Division, it was concluded that vehicular access from the alley would be safer than on Washington Boulevard.

Comments Received During Public Comment Period

As of the writing of this report, staff has not received any inquiries for this Project.

CONCLUSION/SUMMARY

The proposed Project will redevelop a corner parcel that was previously an auto repair use. The Site is located on Washington Boulevard east of La Cienega Boulevard, an area that currently has minimal pedestrian activity. Staff believes that the Applicant's proposal will help activate the East Washington Boulevard commercial corridor and that based on the development plans, building design and recommended conditions of approval, findings can be made to approve the Project Site Plan Review, Administrative Use Permit, and Administrative Modification (P-2021-0171-SPR, AUP, and AM) as outlined in Resolution No. 2022-P004 (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 32 Categorical Exemption as an "In-Fill Development Project" (Section 15332), as further detailed in the CEQA Class 32 Exemption Analysis (Attachment No. 5).

As outlined herein, the project involves the construction of one (1) three-story structure containing 16,900 square feet of commercial floor area and forty-three (43) parking spaces, as well as additional site improvements and amenities (e.g. landscape, bicycle parking, carshare, public parking, etc.). Further, the proposed project is consistent with the General Plan Land Use Designation of General Corridor and with the

IG-EW Zone development standards, except where Administrative Modification is requested; located within Culver City surrounded by urban uses, and has no value as a habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species as it is currently developed with two one-story commercial structures (vacant office and auto repair garage), paved vehicle circulation and walkways, and vegetation consistent with adjacent non-residential development. Based on the scale of the project and the proposed land use, the project will not have significant traffic impacts or peak hour vehicle trips exceeding fifty (50); as an office-use development surrounded by a mix of non-residential and residential development, noise and air quality impacts generated by the project will be within established thresholds; implementation of public works storm water run-off standards will result in less than significant impacts to water quality; and the project can be adequately served by utilities and public services.

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 Planning Commission Resolution No. 2022-P004 with Exhibit A and B: Conditions of Approval
2. Vicinity Map
3. Project Summary
4. Preliminary Development Plans dated October 27, 2021
5. CEQA Class 32 Exemption Report
6. Driveway Ramp Diagrams

MOTION

That the Planning Commission:

Adopt a Class 32 CEQA Categorical Exemption, Approve a Site Plan Review, Administrative Use Permit, and Administrative Modification for a 3-story, 16,900 sq. ft. Office Development, subject to the Conditions of Approval per the proposed Resolution.