City of Culver City

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Staff Report

File #: 23-256, **Version:** 1 **Item #:** PH-1.

PC - PUBLIC HEARING: Consideration of a Site Plan Review to allow the demolition of an existing one-story and two-story office building and surface parking lots and the construction of a new four story, 145,751 square foot office building with three subterranean parking levels at 3817-3855 Watseka Avenue (Project).

Meeting Date: October 19, 2022

Contact Person/Dept: William Kavadas, Assistant Planner
Erika Ramirez, Current Planning Manager

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

Fiscal Impact: Yes [] No [X] **General Fund:** Yes [] No [X]

Public Hearing: [X] **Action Item:** [] **Attachments:** [X]

Public Notification: (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - Planning Commission (10/06/22, 10/18/22); (Posted) City Website (09/20/22, 10/18/22); (Mailed) Property owners and occupants within a 500 ft radius (09/20/22); (Posted) on-site sign facing Watseka Avenue (09/20/22).

Department Approval: Jesse Mays, Assistant City Manager (10/04/2022)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission adopt a resolution adopting a Categorical Exemption and approving Site Plan Review, P2022-0190-SPR, subject to conditions of approval to allow demolition of existing office buildings and surface parking lots and construction of a new 145,751 square foot office building with three levels of subterranean parking in the Commercial Downtown (CD) Zone.

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, 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/DISCUSSION

Request

The request involves a Site Plan Review to build a new creative office building with subterranean parking at 3817-3855 Watseka Avenue ("Project Site" or "Site"). There are no other required Zoning entitlements. The Project Summary (Attachment No. 2) and Preliminary Development Plans (Attachment No. 4) provide a synopsis of the project details and plan lay out.

The Project was originally scheduled for hearing on October 12, 2022. Due to technical issues with the virtual public participation tools, the Planning Commission opened the hearing and continued the item to a date certain of October 19, 2022. Since that time, the Planning Division has updated Condition of Approval No. 78 to reflect that the applicant is responsible for street tree maintenance for one year before the Public Works Department takes responsibility and replaced the Attachment No. 5 with the final version that has removed the "preliminary" watermark.

Existing Conditions/Project Site

The Project Site is a 1.1-acre parcel that is generally flat and rectangularly shaped. It is located on the west side of Watseka Avenue, equidistant from Venice Boulevard to the north and Washington Boulevard to the south. The Project Site is developed with 7,370 square feet of medical office buildings and surface parking. There are 4 driveways along Watseka Avenue and one driveway accessed via an alley on the north side of the Project Site.

Surrounding Area/Zoning/General Plan

The Project Site is located within Downtown Culver City, an urbanized area with eating and drinking establishments, retail outlets, cultural institutions, and office uses. The project is also located adjacent to the Southern California Hospital medical campus and is bounded by medical uses to the north and west. A mix of office uses, a multi-family residential use, and a municipal parking garage border the site to the east across Watseka Avenue. The project is bordered by a multi-family residential use to the south. The Project Site is zoned Commercial Downtown (CD) and has a Downtown General Plan Land Use designation. The proposed office use is allowed in the Zone with an approved Site Plan Review to permit the construction of the new building area.

Project Description

The Project involves removal of existing vegetation, concrete surfacing, and demolition of a 7,370 square feet of existing medical office buildings. The Project consists of the construction of a 56 foot tall, 4 story, 145,751 square foot office building, with 13 feet 6 inch sawtooth roof elements and excavation to build three levels of subterranean parking for 551 parking spaces. Other improvements include a trash enclosure, onsite and offsite landscaping, onsite bicycle parking, onsite delivery bay, and sidewalk improvements. The structure complies with CD development standards regarding height, setbacks, and parking. Project details and plan layout are provided in the Project Summary (Attachment No. 2) and the Preliminary Development Plans (Attachment No. 4).

ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION

Architectural Design and Landscaping

The Project is designed to enhance the pedestrian experience along Watseka Avenue. The first floor Watseka Avenue frontage features a ground level setback including raised and at-grade planters interspersed with bench seating for passersby. The building's street-level exterior is also transparent to open the interior of the building to street view. The applicant will upgrade the public sidewalk by planting eight new Gingko biloba trees with decorative tree grates, brick pavers adjacent to the street, bike racks, and trash/recyclable receptacles. Various lighting designs at street level will enhance pedestrian safety while also accenting building design. Specific lighting information can be found later in this report. An at-grade transformer room has been designed to include a door and mechanical louver that are subtle and integrated with the façade, using creeping vines to shield blank building façade. In order to promote good design on all sides of the building, the west façade adjacent to Southern California Hospital at Culver City will incorporate the maximum 75% allowable openings for glazing and access to bicycle end-of-trip facilities at the ground level.

The design of the Project interior focuses on the use of extensive natural lighting and ventilation including mid-level landscaped patios with large operable doors to allow for natural ventilation of interior spaces. Placement of elevators and other building core components at the northeast and southwest corners of the building allows for expansive, open floor plans that promote flexible workspace configurations. The project includes sawtooth roof elements for the purposes of providing optimal angles for solar panels. The roof element exceeds the 56-foot height limit of the CD zone but complies with the 13-foot 6-inch Code allowance for mechanical equipment height above a roof line. Staff considers the proposed sawtooth roof as mechanical equipment as its primary purpose is to support solar equipment, although its design also accentuates the building.

The base of the building adjacent to surrounding properties will be landscaped with shrubbery and groundcover. Solid walls on the northwest and southwest corners, which are required to enclose the building cores for fire safety, feature at-grade plantings and vines that will grow upwards onto the building. Exterior patios on the north, south, and east elevations incorporate landscaping planters to provide green roof elements.

Vehicle Parking, EV Parking, and Access

Pedestrian and vehicular access is provided from Watseka Avenue. Adequate sidewalks and paved public streets provide both pedestrian and bicycle access to public transit services at Culver/Lafayette (Culver City Bus No 1 and Downtown Circulator) and at Venice/Hughes and Venice/Bagley (Metro No 33). All three bus lines provide access to the Metro E Line at Culver City Station.

The project is located in the Commercial Downtown (CD) Zone and requires one parking space per 294 square feet of floor area. However, the project qualifies for parking reduction with the implementation of a TDM Plan. A TDM plan (Attachment No. 15) was provided that qualifies the development to provide parking at a rate of one space per 370 square feet of floor area. Specific TDM measures are discussed later in this report.

Four existing driveways on Wateska Avenue would be removed and replaced with one dedicated entry drive aisle and two dedicated exit drive aisles. Automobile parking for the Project would be provided on-site in a 3-level subterranean parking structure. The Project would provide 551 parking spaces including 394 Code-required parking spaces and 120 additional spaces to replace on-site parking under existing parking agreements with 3840 Watseka across the street. 164 of the parking spaces are Code required Electric Vehicle (EV) parking spaces, including 41 EV charging stations, 41 EV ready spaces, and 82 EV capable spaces. In total, this amounts to 7 more EV parking spaces than otherwise required by Code. The subterranean parking is designed to accommodate vehicles through a combination of standard, tandem, stacker, and ADA-compliant parking spaces. Subterranean parking levels would be valet managed to facilitate the use of the various parking spaces.

The applicant proposes valet parking operations to occur between the hours of 7AM and 7PM Monday through Friday. Eight to ten valets will work during peak hour periods between 7:30AM and 9AM and between 4:30PM and 6PM to process an average of 30 cars per hour. Visitors will drop off their cars at ground level where valets will move those cars to either P2 or P3. Employees will proceed directly to valet drop off areas on P2 and P3 where those cars will be valet parked. If any cars remain after hours, keys will be kept in a lock box in the building lobby, under the supervision of security personnel.

In addition to automobile parking, 28 short-term and 28 long-term bicycle parking spaces are located within the ground level with end-of-trip facilities including showers and restrooms.

Traffic

Raju and Associates conducted a Transportation Assessment Study and Supplemental Memorandum (Attachment No. 6), which determined that the Project lies within the High-Quality Transit Service Corridor Area of the 'Move Culver City' pilot project and is therefore exempt from Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) analysis. The Public Works Department, Mobility and Traffic Engineering Division, has concurred with this analysis (Attachment No. 14) and has concluded that the project would not cause significant transportation impacts under CEQA. The study also determined the following:

- The Project provides adequate internal circulation to accommodate vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic without impeding through traffic movements on City streets.
- The design of the Project driveway does not introduce safety hazards for pedestrians, bicyclists, or motorists.
- The Project will incorporate a Transportation Demand Management program, detailed further below.
- A draft Construction Management Plan (Attachment No. 12) for the Project has been prepared and submitted to Public Works for review and approval. The CMP defines the scope and scheduling of construction activities as well as the Project's construction site management responsibilities in order to ensure that disturbance of nearby land uses or interruption of pedestrian, vehicle, bicycle, and public transit are minimized to the extent feasible. The CMP shows the location of any roadway or sidewalk closures, traffic detours, haul routes, hours of operation, protective devices, warning signs, and access to abutting properties. City staff will review and finalize the Plan prior to permit issuance.
- The Project is estimated to generate 116 net new automobile trips in the morning peak hour (100 inbound trips, 16 outbound trips) and 114 net new afternoon peak hour trips (18 inbound trips, 96 outbound trips). The Project is estimated to generate approximately 56 new transit trips in the morning and evening peak hours.
- The Project will not have a significant impact on vehicle capacity (Level of Service) at any studied intersections compared to existing or projected future conditions.

Mobility

The Project will implement a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan (Attachment No. 15) consistent with the reduced parking allowances for office uses in the CD Zone. The TDM Plan will consist of the following measures:

- A Transportation Coordinator to implement the TDM plan, including 1) administering, promoting, and marketing all subsidies and incentives for transit, carpooling, and ride-matching by building employees, including providing an on-site transportation information center, 2) encouraging Project tenants to implement flexible work schedules and telecommuting, 3) monitoring TDM Plan results for 5 years after 85% occupancy of the project, and 4) developing additional incentives as needed.
- Providing 28 short-term and 28 long-term on-site bicycle parking spaces and end-of- trip facilities as well as a contribution to a nearby public bicycle hub/share consistent with the City's bike share

program.
- Providing transit subsidies equivalent to a 2-way annual transit fare for up to 15% of employees in lieu of an on-site parking space. Subsidies shall be provided for a period of five years after the Project is occupied.
- Reserving 10% of all employee parking spaces for carpool and vanpool in preferential locations.

Development Fees

The Project is subject to development fees that are collected during the Building Permit plan check phase. The New Development Impact Fee and Mobility Fee are used to address traffic and mobility impacts in the vicinity of the Project Site. The Affordable Housing Commercial Development Impact fee funds affordable housing efforts in the City and the Art in Public Places Fee either contributes money for cultural and art programs or provides and actual art piece at the Project Site for the public to view. Below is a summary estimate of these fees for this Project:

- New Development Impact fee based on $1 per commercial square footage above the first 5,000 square feet: $140,962.
- Mobility Fee based on net new commercial office space: $1,933,996.50
- Affordable Housing Commercial Development Impact based $5 per Gross Leasable Floor area: $729,810.
- Art in Public Places fee is currently under review. Final Building Permit valuation is needed, and the Applicant may wish to install art instead of paying the fee-based permit valuation.

As noted, these are estimates and fees may change after final Building Permit plans are submitted that include final permit valuation figures, gross area, and gross leasable area.

Lighting/Security

The project was designed to provide an active frontage to increase safety. At the street level, the lighting program will consist of edge lighting below the second-floor overhang, linear downlighting below built into wooden canopies, linear up-lighting at the base of pilasters not to trespass beyond the ground level, landscape lighting in planter boxes, and up lights at the sidewalk tree pits, which will enhance the security of the pedestrian experience. The Project will include monitoring and access control at all entrances to bolster security beyond encouraging pedestrian activity.

Sustainability

The Project proposes use of 100% green electricity purchased through the Clean Power Alliance. The Project proposes utilizing a large rooftop photovoltaic array at the optimal tilt to maximize energy production. This solar array has been integrated into a “sawtooth” roof composed of six sloped roof monitors with large structural timber frames and northeast-facing windows, which will provide natural lighting to further reduce required energy consumption. The City’s on-site solar requirement is a 1 kilowatt (kw) solar photovoltaic system per 10,000 square feet of floor area, which would entail a solar PV system of approximately 30 kw, but the project will instead exceed this requirement with a system rated for 101.4 kW.

Additional energy saving and sustainable design elements have been incorporated by the applicant team

throughout the Project to promote conservation, energy efficiency, and carbon emission reduction, including the following measures:

- Recycling or salvaging at least 65 percent of non-hazardous construction and demolition debris.
- Using local manufactures and recycled products where possible.
- Use of Forest Sustainability Council-certified wood, including cross-laminated timber, or CLT, on the top floor in the building construction.
- LID stormwater filtration and capture system, which will irrigate drought-tolerant landscaping. Irrigation systems will incorporate timers and rain sensors.
- Installation of EV Capable and EV Ready charging stations in provided automobile parking.
- Water saving fixtures in all locations, including waterless urinals in restrooms.
- Dual and triple low emissivity glazing
- Highly reflective roof material.
- High-efficiency heating and air conditioning systems.
- High-efficiency lighting systems for all interior and exterior lighting, including motion sensor-controlled lighting in parking structures and all common areas.
- Natural ventilation on upper levels through operable patio doors and daylighting from upper-level windows and “sawtooth” roof monitors.
- On-site recycling collection facilities.

Trash Removal and Loading

The proposed trash enclosure at the south side of the building was reviewed and approved by the City’s Environmental Programs and Operation (EPO) Division. The trash enclosure is at-grade and faces the two exit lanes from the subterranean garage. The applicant has submitted their Waste Management Plan to EPO which was approved in March of 2022. Both small and large deliveries vehicles can park within a dedicated 30 -foot 8-inch by 23-foot 5-inch loading bay within the ground level directly adjacent to the trash enclosure.

Neighborhood Compatibility

The Project will enhance the surrounding area by replacing low rise medical office buildings and a large area of surface parking lots with a modern, multi-level structure that includes varied facades of glass, stucco, wood, and metal. It will improve the overall built environment along Watseka Avenue by constructing a use that interacts with the street and ground and upper levels in an area that is otherwise populated by auto-oriented uses and structures that are closed-off from the public right-of-way. Landscaping along the street frontage will also help to improve the pedestrian experience for both employees and those passing into Downtown Culver City. The Project will replace a previous office and parking lot uses with office space, expanding economic opportunities for Downtown Culver City and maximizing economic potential for the Project Site. The Project’s 56-foot height limit and large lot coverage will be consistent with neighboring downtown commercial and office developments.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Community Meetings and Public Outreach

Pursuant to the City’s Community Outreach Guidelines, the applicant held two community meetings as part of its outreach to neighbors and community members for the Project. Consistent with Culver City Municipal Code (CCMC) Chapter 17.630, a notice of community meeting was mailed to all property owners and occupants within 500-feet extended to City Block from the Project Site boundaries. The community meetings were held in person on March 5, 2020 and virtually on March 9, 2021. Attachment No. 13 contains community meeting

notes. At the meetings, the Applicant gave a brief overview of the proposed office building and provided opportunity for discussion with meeting attendants.

1st Community Meeting Minutes; held on Thursday, March 5, 2020 at 6 PM at Veterans Memorial Building:

Approximately 3 people attended the meeting where applicant representatives displayed boards illustrating floor plans, site plans, elevations, renderings, landscaping concepts, and other materials.

Key issues and questions raised at the meeting included:

- Number of parking spaces
- Timeline of project
- Potential tenant

The applicant responded to comments and questions:

- No expected tenants
- Construction will take approximately 27 months

2nd Community Meeting Minutes; held on Tuesday, March 9, 2021 at 6 PM (Virtual):

Approximately 19 people attended the meeting, and the applicant began with an overview of the Project including revisions that occurred after the 1st community meeting and provided information on key design elements. This was followed with a question-and-answer session.

Key issues and questions raised at the meeting included:

- Number of businesses expected to occupy the building
- Timeline of Construction
- Compliments on the design

The applicant responded to comments and questions:

- The building is designed for multiple tenants but can also hold just one
- Construction will take approximately 27 months

Comments Received During Public Comment Period

A public notice was mailed to all property owners and occupants within a 500-foot radius of the Project Site extended to City Block on September 20, 2022, advising the public of a hearing at the regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting of October 12, 2022. Prior to the October 12th Hearing, Staff received one letter of support from the Culver City Chamber of Commerce.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

Pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, initial review of the Project established there are no potentially significant adverse impacts upon the environment, and the Project has been determined to be Categorically Exempt pursuant to CEQA Section 15332, Class 32 - In-Fill Developments, because the proposed Project is consistent with the Downtown General Plan Land Use designation and the

CD Zoning standards. The Project Site is on a 1.1-acre site surrounded by urban uses that is substantially urban in character, developed with buildings and surface parking, and has no value as habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species. The Project will not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality because it is within the anticipated development threshold for this area. Project specific studies (Attachment Nos 5 through 11) did not identify significant impacts and required utilities and public services are provided as determined by the City.

CONCLUSION/SUMMARY

Based on the proposed preliminary development plans and recommended conditions of approval, the Project is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, adequately served by public facilities and, consistent with the General Plan, Zoning Code, and all CCMC requirements. The findings for Site Plan Review P2022-0190-SPR are made as outlined in proposed Planning Commission Resolution No. 2022-P018 (Attachment No. 1).

FISCAL ANALYSIS

There is no fiscal impact from this project to the City

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Proposed Planning Commission Resolution No. 2022-P018 with Exhibit A, Conditions of Approval and Exhibit B, Code Requirements
2. Project Summary
3. Vicinity Map
4. Preliminary Development Plans dated August 2022
5. CEQA Class 32 Exemption Report dated March 4, 2022
6. CEQA Attachment A, Class 32 Report Transportation Assessment by Raju Associates dated September 2021
7. CEQA Attachment B, Class 32 Report Noise & Vibration Study by ESA dated September 2021
8. CEQA Attachment C, Class 32 Report Air Quality Study by ESA dated September 2021
9. CEQA Attachment D, Class 32 Report Water Quality Memorandum by Kimley Horn dated May 2021
10. CEQA Attachment E, Class 32 Report Utility Will Serve Letters dated January 2021
11. CEQA Attachment F, Class 32 Historical Resource Technical Report dated April 2021
12. Preliminary Construction Management Plan
13. Community Meetings Notes, March 5, 2020, and March 9, 2021
14. Transportation Assessment and Response
15. Transportation Demand Management Plan
16. Parking Operations Plan

MOTION

That the Planning Commission:

Adopt a resolution adopting a Categorical Exemption and approving Site Plan Review P2022-0190-SPR, subject to conditions of approval.

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