



REPORT to the LA MESA DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

DATE: September 9, 2024

SUBJECT: 2023-2716 (CROSBY PROPERTIES LLC)

DESCRIPTION: CONSIDERATION OF DESIGN REVIEW FOR AN 18-UNIT APARTMENT DEVELOPMENT AT 7285 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, APN 474-181-17-00, 474-181-18-00, AND 474-181-19-00 IN THE C-F-D-MU (GENERAL COMMERCIAL/FLOODWAY OVERLAY/URBAN DESIGN OVERLAY/MIXED USE OVERLAY) ZONE

ISSUING DEPARTMENT: Community Development

SUMMARY:

Issue:

Does the proposed design meet the intent of the Urban Design Program policies and the Design Guidelines for Properties in the Mixed Use Overlay Zone?

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Design Review Board approve the project, with conditions, subject to City Council ratification.

BACKGROUND:

The 15,000-square-foot project site is comprised of three parcels situated on the south side of University Avenue between Massachusetts Avenue and Yale Avenue. It is square in shape and nearly level. Existing improvements dating to the 1950s-60s include two single-story commercial buildings and one two-story commercial building. Also present are a billboard sign, paved parking, and an open-channel storm drain within an easement across the rear. The west half of the site is currently fenced with the neighboring property to the west.

Surrounding development includes older commercial retail and service uses to the east and west, lower-density residential housing transitioning to commercial along the north side of University Avenue, and a single-family residential neighborhood uphill to the south. An Assessor Parcel Map sheet is provided as **Attachment A**, and photos of the project site are provided in **Attachment B**. A vicinity map is provided below.

University Avenue along the project frontage is classified as an Arterial street in the General Plan Circulation Element and functions as a major circulation corridor. Existing right-of-way improvements include sidewalk, curb and gutter, Class 2 bike lanes, and below-ground utilities. Two driveway curb openings are also present. Covered bus stops are located near the intersection of Yale Avenue approximately 150 feet to the east.

The project site is located in the Mixed Use (MU) and Urban Design (D) Overlay zones. In the MU Overlay, pedestrian-friendly residential and mixed-use development is prescribed, such as row housing, loft-type dwellings, and flats arranged either around courtyards or linearly, all situated close to the street. New development is required to include pedestrian realm improvements along project frontages on collector streets to activate the streetscape.

Design Review by the Design Review Board (DRB) is required for all development projects within the MU and D Overlay zones to ensure that projects are consistent with the City's Urban Design Program and with the Design Guidelines for Properties within the Mixed Use Overlay Zone (**Attachment C**). DRB decisions are ratified by the City Council. The entitlement process for this project also includes site development plan review approved by the Director of Community Development and Planning Commission approval of a tentative tract map.

DISCUSSION:

The property owner proposes to demolish existing on-site improvements to construct a three-story condominium building comprised of 18 residential units over covered parking as shown on the project plans provided as **Attachment D**.



Of the 18 proposed units, five will be deed-restricted affordable to low income residents. As a qualifying affordable housing project under Government Code Section 65915 and the City's Affordable Homes Bonus Program, the development is eligible for incentives and waivers of development standards and reduced parking ratios. The applicant will be requesting one waiver for reduced open space and is utilizing affordable housing parking ratios.

Pedestrian Orientation Along Street Frontage / Setbacks

The project will provide non-contiguous sidewalk along the entirety of the frontage, partially in the right-of-way and partially within a public easement to be granted on the subdivision map. The parkway strip between the curb and sidewalk is proposed to be planted with four 36-inch box Canary Island Pine trees, which are on the City's list of approved street trees. A Eucalyptus Citriodora tree is proposed in a five-foot-wide planter area along the front wall of the building. As this type of eucalyptus can grow very tall, and may not be suitable in this location, staff recommends that a different type of tree be considered.

The design guidelines, as well as the development standards in the zoning ordinance, require at least 50 percent of the ground floor building frontage facing the public realm to have windows with clear, un-tinted glass. The project provides a floor-to-ceiling aluminum storefront system across the entirety of the lobby area to meet this standard and to provide architectural character at street level as described below.

Ground Floor Use and Design

Consistent with the design guidelines, no ground floor residential is proposed, with the entirety of the ground floor area to consist of an entry lobby and stairwell, leasing office, and parking. Siting the lobby at the sidewalk will add to the pedestrian feel of the street.

Building Height

At three stories, the proposed building is a full story under the height limit. While there is a single-family residential neighborhood abutting the project site to the rear, the rear yards of neighboring residences sit approximately 35 feet above the project site and approximately 100 feet away. The rear of the proposed building is approximately 37 feet high, inclusive of a six-foot parapet. Staff discussed with the applicant the need for a 6 foot parapet feature along the south elevation as this elevation faces the single-family uses to the south. The applicant stated that the proposed parapet feature is intended to screen the four foot rooftop mechanical equipment however, if the DRB would like, the applicant is willing to further discuss the treatment of the parapet elevation .

Adjacent Single-Family Residential Zone

As a privacy measure, all windows facing surrounding single-family residences, are proposed to sit at a lower elevation and would be at least 100 feet away from existing single-family residences.

Access and Parking

The subject site is located mid-block with no alley access. Proposed vehicular access and circulation are oriented towards University Avenue and therefore should not impact the single-family residential neighborhood located to the south. Three individual lots will be consolidated, resulting in a single driveway entrance from University Avenue, which will further benefit pedestrian and bicycle circulation along this corridor. The applicant has sited the adjacent street trees in consideration of vehicular sight distance. For design sensitivity, the ground level parking area is proposed within the building footprint and screened from view of the street through the use of walls and a security gate.

Open Space

Open space will be provided through private balconies and within two common patio areas on the second story. The common areas are centrally located with landscaping, including shade trees. Recreational furnishings will be provided.

Utilities and Mechanical Equipment

The applicant has verified that below grade utilities are located beneath the street and therefore will not pose any conflicts along the sidewalk. Mechanical equipment will be roof-mounted and screened behind parapet walls.

Architectural Character and Massing

Visual interest is proposed through street level full-height, transparent, aluminum storefront windows topped by a metal awning and tall, narrow, evenly-spaced openings in the front wall of the parking area. The proposed finish materials, which include khaki brown fiber cement shiplap siding, white and dark grey stucco, and black cable railing, are proposed to unify the building appearance and fit into the pedestrian realm context. The materials board includes a dark gray paint sample that would be applied to a significant portion of the building wall. Given the color's deep saturation, staff recommends use of a slightly lighter, medium gray tone that will contrast with the dark address numbers proposed on the front elevation.

Compatibility with Surrounding Development and Between Uses on the Site

Privacy between residential units and neighboring properties is proposed by limiting windows to the front and rear building elevations. The lobby entrance is recessed slightly from the sidewalk to provide area for a landscape planter to enhance the pedestrian realm. Upper-story private balconies facing the street are proposed to provide architectural relief to further complement the pedestrian realm.

Building Entries and Service Areas

The residential lobby will be accessed directly from the public sidewalk to promote pedestrian activity along the street. Service areas, including trash enclosure and meters,

will be located at the rear of the parking area.

Consolidation

The lot consolidation of three adjacent parcels will provide more space along the pedestrian realm for street trees, pedestrian amenities, and on-street parking. The proposed building respects the surrounding community fabric through the use of building indentations, varied materials, and architectural relief.

Overall, the proposed project appears to achieve the design priorities and architectural vision expressed by the Design Guidelines for Projects in the Mixed Use Overlay Zone and the Urban Design Program.

CONCLUSION:

Approve Project 2023-2716, with conditions, based on a finding that the project is consistent with the Urban Design Program, subject to City Council ratification.

Respectfully submitted by:



Allyson Kinnard
Associate Planner

Reviewed by:

Lynnette Santos

Lynnette Santos
Director of Community Development

Attachments:

- A. Assessor Parcel Map Sheet
- B. Site Photographs
- C. Design Guidelines for Properties in the Mixed Use Overlay Zone
- D. Project plans