



REPORT to the LA MESA DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

DATE: April 13, 2026

SUBJECT: 2026-0124 (YARWICK TERRY J LIVING TRUST)

DESCRIPTION: DESIGN REVIEW CONSIDERATION FOR A MAJOR REMODEL AND FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS OF AN EXISTING COMMERCIAL BUILDING LOCATED AT 7995 LA MESA BOULEVARD, IN THE CD-D (DOWNTOWN COMMERCIAL/URBAN DESIGN OVERLAY) ZONE AND DOWNTOWN VILLAGE SPECIFIC PLAN AREA (APN 470-561-17-00).

ISSUING DEPARTMENT: Community Development

SUMMARY:

Issue(s):

Does the proposed design meet the policies and intent of the Urban Design Program and the Downtown Village Specific Plan?

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Design Review Board determine that the project meets the goals and guidelines of the Downtown Village Specific Plan and Urban Design Program, and approve the project, subject to City Council ratification. (**Attachment A**).

Environmental Review:

The project is exempt from environmental review in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15301, Existing Facilities. Section 15301 exempts minor alteration of existing structures involving negligible or no expansion of the existing use. The project meets all the conditions necessary to qualify for the exemption and none of the exceptions listed in Section 15300.2 apply.

BACKGROUND:

The project is located at 7995 La Mesa Boulevard, at the southwest corner of Normal Avenue and La Mesa Boulevard, as seen on the Vicinity Map. The approximately 0.22-acre project site contains an existing 3,828 square foot commercial building and an adjacent 1,937 square foot, two-unit residential building, for a combined building area of 5,765 square feet. The residential units are not part of the proposed project and will remain unchanged.

The property is located within the CD-D (Downtown Commercial/Urban Design Overlay) zone and is within the Downtown Village Specific Plan (DVSP) area, as seen in the Zoning Map.



The project applicant (Property Owner, Terry Yarwick) is requesting to remodel the existing commercial structure to accommodate a Handel's Ice Cream shop. The project includes a reduction in the building footprint, construction of a new outdoor dining patio with seating for up to 35 patrons, reconfiguration of the parking area to accommodate both customers and employees, and construction of a trash enclosure along the northwest property line. The outdoor dining patio requires approval of a Special Permit by the Planning Commission.

The project site is within one-half mile of the La Mesa Boulevard Trolley Station and, pursuant to AB 2097, parking is not required. However, the applicant has elected to retain and improve on-site parking. Existing site access is provided via driveways from both

Normal Avenue and La Mesa Boulevard, with La Mesa Boulevard access located at the northeast corner of the property. Existing right-of-way improvements include sidewalks, curb and gutter, a traffic signal at the intersection, and a fire hydrant. Site photographs are included as **Attachment B**.

Downtown Commercial zoning is intended to promote customer-oriented business activities which are appropriate to the central business district. Surrounding land uses include an assisted living facility to the northwest, an optometry office to the southeast, residential uses to the south, and the La Mesa Springs Shopping Center to the northeast.

The proposed project is a recipient of the La Mesa Façade and Property Improvement Grant Program, which provides financial assistance to local businesses for exterior and site enhancements. The program is intended to enhance the appearance of commercial properties, and improve overall economic vitality and visual character of the City.

Pursuant to Chapter 24.11 of the La Mesa Municipal Code (LMMC), the project requires review and approval by the Design Review Board (DRB), with ratification by the City Council, for major renovations and remodeling of a property within the Urban Design Overlay (D) Zone and for properties located within the Downtown Village Specific Plan (DVSP) area. The DRB evaluates projects for consistency with the City's DVSP Design Guidelines and Urban Design Program.

DISCUSSION:

The proposed project is to remodel an existing commercial structure and parking area to accommodate a 2,616 square foot, walk-up ice cream shop. The project includes demolition of approximately 1,212 square feet of existing building frontage and reconfiguration of the parking area to construct a 523 square foot outdoor dining patio and trash enclosure, while maintaining the ability to provide 12 off-street parking spaces. Proposed interior improvements include new food preparation areas to support the ice cream shop operations and a 644 square foot interior patio area for walk-up ordering during inclement weather.

Façade improvements include construction of a new north-facing building façade featuring walk-up service window and roll-up doors for the interior patio area. Additional architectural enhancements are proposed to unify the site's appearance and include new stucco finishes, decorative brick veneer, and awning in the accent colors for Handel's Ice Cream. Proposed exterior tenant signage will be subject to separate City permit review and approval. Signage is shown on the building elevations for illustrative and contextual purposes. The final design will comply with the Urban Design Guidelines and Downtown Village Specific Plan guidelines regarding signage.

Project plans, including the site plan, floor plans, and elevations are provided as **Attachment C** and project renderings are included as **Attachment D**, with a color and materials board included as **Attachment E**.

URBAN DESIGN PROGRAM APPLICABILITY

The intent of the Urban Design Program is to provide direction and support to the Design Review Board and applicants, to ensure design quality for site design and architectural design. The Urban Design Program establishes design direction related to building form, pedestrian orientation, architectural character, and site organization, particularly in visually sensitive and commercially active areas.

The project site is identified within the Urban Design Program as part of the Downtown Area Special Design District, which is recognized as a sensitive area requiring additional guidelines to address its unique character. Within this district, the Urban Design Program emphasizes elements such as rooftop treatment, front facades, refuse and storage screening, pedestrian elements, exterior appurtenances, lighting, and overall architectural quality. The proposed project addresses these objectives through articulated facades, pedestrian-oriented design elements, screened refuse area, integrated lighting, and rooftop equipment screening, consistent with the intent of the Special Design District.

DOWNTOWN VILLAGE SPECIFIC PLAN DESIGN GUIDELINES APPLICABILITY

While the Urban Design Program provides overarching guidance, the Downtown Village Specific Plan (DVSP) establishes more detailed and specific design standards for properties within the Downtown Area Special Design District to implement the vision for Downtown La Mesa. The DVSP builds upon the Urban Design Program by expanding design guidance related to pedestrian scale, materials and colors, street-edge conditions, parking design, and sub-area character. The following sections discuss how the project meets the DVSP guidelines, as well as the Urban Design Program guidelines.

DVSP GOALS

The DVSP establishes goals across five key areas: land use, circulation, parking, public facilities, and design. The goal is for the five key areas to work together to create downtown spaces that benefit and improve pedestrian experience through a variety of architectural details and styles, provide safe separation of circulation, and support services and businesses that benefit the entire community. The proposed project meets the DVSP goals by introducing a welcoming business to an underutilized corner, improving and modernizing an existing site, diversifying the architectural character of the surrounding area, and providing clear separation of pedestrian and vehicular circulation both on and off site.

Architecture

The DVSP encourages architectural designs that are human-scaled, incorporate detailing at the pedestrian level, and contribute positively to the diverse visual character of the Downtown Village. The proposed remodel of the existing commercial building provides a new north-facing street frontage along La Mesa Boulevard that emphasizes pedestrian interaction. A proposed walk-up service windows and an outdoor dining patio encourage activity at the street edge and shift the site away from an auto-oriented design toward a more pedestrian-focused environment.

Benefit to the Community

The project supports business diversity within the Downtown Village by improving an existing commercial building while introducing a neighborhood-serving business that will encourage community gathering and interaction. Improvements to the building façade and overall site appearance enhance the visual quality of the corridor and contribute to a more vibrant and inviting Downtown environment for residents and visitors.

Safe Circulation

The DVSP emphasizes safe and functional circulation that prioritizes pedestrian comfort and minimizes conflicts with vehicles. Existing sidewalks and driveway access points will remain and be maintained, while minor on-site demolition and reconfiguration of the parking area are proposed to improve site functionality and safety. Vehicular access to the site will be limited to a single entry point from Normal Avenue with an exit only onto La Mesa Boulevard, supporting clear and predictable circulation patterns. A new pedestrian ramp and walkway is proposed from the northeast corner of the property near the intersection of La Mesa Boulevard and Normal Avenue, providing a clear and safe path of travel across the parking lot to the walk-up service windows and outdoor dining patio. Additional pedestrian safety measures to provide added separation between vehicles and pedestrians, include bollards and railings along the low frontage wall on La Mesa Boulevard, adjacent to the pedestrian walkway between the building and parking spaces, and at the edge of the outdoor dining patio adjacent to the driveway entrance and parking. Together, these improvements will enhance circulation and safety in a manner consistent with the goals and design guidelines of the DVSP.

SUB-AREA GUIDELINES

The Sub-area design guidelines within the DVSP utilize design principles, building form and scale, street-edge conditions, historic buildings and cultural resources, pedestrian emphasis, materials and colors, off-street parking facilities, landscaping, and signage to promote a well-designed and pedestrian-oriented Downtown Village. The proposed design utilizes the existing building and site configuration while introducing targeted improvements to better achieve the intent of the DVSP. Although constrained by existing

site conditions, the project proposes to enhance architectural character, strengthen the pedestrian relationship along the street frontage, and improve overall site functionality in a manner consistent with the applicable Sub-Area design guidelines.

Design Principles

The proposed design is consistent with the DVSP Design Principles through a cohesive architectural approach that improves character, articulation, and compatibility with surrounding development. Architectural interest is achieved through variation in proposed parapet wall heights, new walk-up service windows, and the roll-up door serving the indoor patio, providing appropriate scale, rhythm, and visual variety along the façade. The central parapet along La Mesa Boulevard is approximately 4.5 feet taller than the existing parapet walls to emphasize the front façade and accommodate the primary business signage consisting of individually illuminated letters. Adjacent proposed parapets will remain similar in height to the existing structure, enhancing articulation without significantly increasing the perceived building mass. All parapet walls are integral to the building design and fully screen rooftop equipment, ensuring no exposed roof elements.

The DVSP encourages low-intensity, down-directed light fixtures to maintain pedestrian-oriented spaces. The proposed lighting will consist of down-directed fixtures mounted at mid-building height adjacent to the parking area and trash enclosure, down-directed lighting beneath the proposed awnings at the walk-up service windows and entrances, and goose-neck fixtures over the secondary signage on the front and northwest facades. The varied placement and type of fixtures focus illumination on pedestrian areas to enhance safety and comfort, while minimizing glare and light spill for passing vehicles.

In accordance with the DVSP, the proposed trash enclosure will be located away from building entrances and public streets to minimize visibility and impacts to pedestrian areas. It will be located within a permanent structure at the northwestern edge of the property, which provides separation from the service windows and outdoor dining while remaining accessible to employees. The enclosure matches the primary building with white stucco-finished CMU walls and a blue roof that complements the proposed awnings, which ensures a cohesive design that is compatible with the proposed project character and surrounding development.

Building Form and Scale

The improvements are proposed to enhance building form and scale through proportional elements, reduction of apparent height and bulk, and vertical composition. Varied architectural elements divide the building into smaller, human-scale components while maintaining compatibility with its surroundings. Three sides of the building are viewable from the street. The proposed improvements will reduce the overall width of the building by approximately 12.6 feet, decreasing the length of exposed, blank wall on along Normal

Avenue and the northwest property line. This will reduce the perceived mass and bulk of the structure. The façade is designed into three distinct vertical sections to further break up horizontal massing:

1. The southeast portion, closest to Normal Avenue, features the tempered glass roll-up door opening to the proposed outdoor dining area and indoor patio. Above the door, a flat metal awning will be installed to create a clearly defined pedestrian-scale area. The DVSP encourages limiting metal elements to no more than 10% of any facade. This requirement will be addressed in more detail in the Materials and Colors section below.
2. The central section includes the taller parapet with the primary business signage and an angled metal awning over the walk-up service windows, flanked by brick column details that add vertical emphasis.
3. The northwest portion provides an employee entrance and restroom access with a metal awning to maintain visual balance and continuity across the façade.

Street-edge

The building is positioned along the southeastern property line on Normal Avenue and the northwestern property line adjacent to a vacant lot, with the front façade oriented toward off-street parking along La Mesa Boulevard. As part of the façade and site improvements, the existing retaining wall along Normal Avenue will be modified to step down in height between the new building face and the existing driveway, with a maximum exposed height of 3.5 feet. This stepped design maintains visual connectivity between the sidewalk and the patio area below. The wall will be topped with a railing not to exceed 2 feet height, consistent with the outdoor patio design, to address safety concerns related to the elevation difference between the public right-of-way and the patio. The proposed materials and colors for the wall and railing will be consistent with the primary building design. Additionally, the stepped wall and railing will introduce visual variety and articulation along a previously underwhelming street-edge.

Parking along the La Mesa Boulevard frontage remains directly adjacent to the sidewalk, consistent with existing conditions. While the DVSP encourages landscaped buffers where parking occurs along the street edge, site constraints limit the ability to introduce new landscaping onto the developed site. In lieu of landscaping, the project proposes to update the short retaining wall to be consistent with the building improvements and to add bollards along the frontage, to provide visual separation, and a more defined and safer pedestrian environment.

Pedestrian Emphasis

Pedestrian-oriented design is a key objective of the DVSP. The proposed renovations enhance the pedestrian experience through active building frontages, transparency, and inviting gathering spaces. As described above, the project proposes an active frontage

and indoor-outdoor design elements that work together to create an engaging, pedestrian-community focused environment. Awnings and patio umbrellas provide weather protection and encourage year-round use. Additionally, the outdoor patio is designed to be a visible and active space that contributes to a lively streetscape, consistent with the DVSP guidelines.

Materials and Colors

The DVSP encourages natural materials such as brick, stucco, textured masonry, and formed concrete, with light or medium-toned primary building colors and accent colors and metal elements limited to no more than 10 percent of any exterior elevation, to maintain the cohesive and attractive Village environment. The proposed project is consistent with these standards through the use of white stucco as the primary building and walls material, with reddish brick accents along the lower portion of the building and accent columns. Metal awnings are incorporated as accent elements and account approximately 141 square feet of the 1,745 square foot front facade, representing approximately 8 percent of the front elevation which is in alignment with the DVSP guidelines. Accent colors are limited to the awnings, wrought-iron railings, and bollards. The awnings will feature red, blue, and white striping, while the bollards, railings, awning tops, and trash enclosure will be blue, consistent with Handel's Ice Cream national branding. These accent colors are applied sparingly and do not exceed 10 percent of any exterior elevation. Overall, the proposed materials and color palette maintain a light color with limited accents that are compatible with surrounding development within the Downtown Village.

Off-Street Parking Facilities

The DVSP includes design guidance for surface parking areas, encouraging landscaping and tree planting to minimize visual impacts and support a pedestrian-oriented environment. The project is less than half a mile from the La Mesa Boulevard Trolley Station, so no parking minimums are required in accordance with AB 2097. Although parking is not required, the applicant has elected to retain and improve on-site parking consistent with the existing condition. The project proposes a minor reconfiguration of the existing on-site parking to improve site functionality while maintaining as much parking as feasible given site constraints. As discussed in previous sections, the street-edge improvements are proposed to enhance visual and pedestrian experience where parking occurs adjacent to the public right-of-way.

UNIVERSITY AVENUE AND LA MESA BOULEVARD SUB-AREA GUIDELINES

The project site is located within the University Avenue and La Mesa Boulevard (Between Acacia Avenue and Nebo Drive) Sub-Area, which encourages re-organizing parking and adding landscaping to create a pedestrian-oriented environment and improve the

transition into the Village through guidelines related to parking design, street edges, landscaping, and building height.

While the site is constrained by existing development, the project is designed to achieve these objectives where feasible. Improvements include enhanced building facades, a street-visible patio space, a clearly defined pedestrian path from the public right-of-way, and weather protection elements. Street-edge conditions are enhanced through retaining wall improvements, railings, and bollards that visually buffer parking areas and reinforce a pedestrian space.

The building remains one story in height, with varied parapet heights used to reduce apparent massing. Collectively, all of the proposed improvements support the Sub-Area's goals of creating a pedestrian atmosphere and transitioning to the Village.

CONCLUSION:

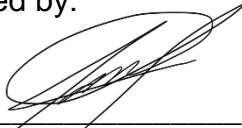
The project as proposed meets the Design Guidelines of the Urban Design Program and the Downtown Village Specific Plan Guidelines. Therefore, staff recommends that the Design Review Board approve the Certificate of Action for Project 2026-0124, subject to City Council ratification.

Respectfully submitted by:



Julia Hill
Project Planner

Reviewed by:



Jared Chavez
Assistant Director of Community Development



Lynnette Santos
Director of Community Development
Attachments:

- A. Draft Certificate of Action
- B. Site Photographs
- C. Project Plans
- D. Project Renderings
- E. Color and Materials Board