



Legislation Text

File #: 16-358, **Version:** 1

Staff Report and Recommendation for the Appeal of the Disapproval by the San Leandro Planning Commission of PLN15-0031, the Proposed Modification to Planned Development, PD-83-3, for façade renovations to six buildings at the Greenhouse Marketplace that would include the replacement of glass atrium features with new roofing or sign towers, installation of stone veneer accents and a new paint color palette at 699 Lewelling Boulevard; Commercial Community (CC) District; Alameda County Assessor's Parcel Numbers 412-0001-009, -011, -014, -016, -017, -018, -019 and -020 ; B.Kriz on behalf of Weingarten Realty Investors, appellant and property owner (Appeal of the Planning Commission's Denial of PLN15-0031 **APL16-0002**;))

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The Applicant proposes façade modifications to six buildings at the Greenhouse Marketplace Shopping Center, located at 699 Lewelling Boulevard. According to the City of San Leandro Zoning Code, the proposal is a significant change to the shopping center's design, which requires a formal modification of the existing Planned Development approval, PD-83-3, which must be reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission. The case was reviewed by the Planning Commission on March 17, 2016 at which time the Commission asked the applicant to return with revised designs that would comport with the Zoning Code's requirements; the Commission continued the item to the May 19 Planning Commission meeting. The applicant declined to provide updated design concepts; the Planning Commission denied the request to modify PD-83-3.

The originally approved Planned Development PD-83-3 established an architectural design theme to reflect the past use of the site as a greenhouse and nursery business. The proposed façade modifications would replace the glass atrium elements with sign towers, add stone veneers to existing columns, and introduce new paint color. Staff determined, and the Planning Commission agreed, that the removal of the glass atriums directly conflicts with the original design intent.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the City Council review the proposed major facade modifications to the Planned Development approval PD-83-3 and deny the applicant's appeal of the proposed project due to its inconsistency with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance, which will uphold the Planning Commission's May 19 disapproval, all of which would be memorialized in the attached draft resolution and findings for denial.

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING STATEMENT

See attached.

BACKGROUND AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE SURROUNDING AREA

Greenhouse Marketplace is located on the north side of Lewelling Boulevard. The I-880 and I-238 freeway interchange makes up the northeast boundary. Land uses south of the project site include commercial retail uses, public uses, and multi-family residential, with single and multi-family residential and commercial to the west.

The Planned Development, PD-83-3, received City Council approvals for the general and precise plans in 1984 for the establishment of a 282,800 gross square-foot shopping center development located on a 25-acre site. The subsequent commercial development, known as the Greenhouse Marketplace, consists of a main building, four major stores/tenants, smaller stores, and freestanding pads. Greenhouse Marketplace is accessed by Washington Avenue and Lewelling Boulevard.

During the original General Development Plan review process, the Planning Commission staff report and minutes from February 2, 1984 and December 8, 1983, respectively (see attachment Excerpts of PD-83-3 Approvals), indicate that the overall design theme of the buildings were intended to reflect the past use of the site as a greenhouse and nursery business. The site was previously zoned as Nursery (N). In 2003, the City approved minor modifications to allow façade updates for a new tenant, 99 Cent Only Stores. In 2005, the City approved a minor modification to Safeway for exterior changes. The architecture of the renovated Safeway building incorporates design elements consistent with the original shopping center. In addition, the building color palate is indicative of a traditional greenhouse building. In 2012, the City approved another minor modification to McDonalds, located off of Washington Avenue; the approval allowed for the addition of a new drive-through lane and other modifications to the site plan, building envelope, architectural details, and landscaping. The McDonald's building is set off on a separate stand-alone pad and its distinctive architecture was approved due to its distance from the main shopping arcade.

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

The proposed project would include exterior remodels to the facades of six buildings distributed throughout the Greenhouse Marketplace Shopping Center. The buildings in the proposal contain Jo-Ann's Fabrics, Hometown Buffet, Petco and various other tenants. Buildings excluded from the proposal include those that contain McDonald's, Jack in the Box, Safeway, CVS, Food Maxx, Factory 2-U and the 99 Cent Only Store. These buildings are under separate ownership and would remain unchanged.

The proposed exterior remodel would include removal of each glass atrium element. The glass atrium element adjacent to Nothing Bundt Cakes would be filled in with standing seam metal roofing to match the existing features. According to the applicant, the primary reasons for the proposed modifications are to resolve ongoing building maintenance problems caused by the leaking atriums, and to ostensibly update the buildings' appearances.

The other glass atrium elements would be replaced with sign towers and columns that project out slightly from the building. These sign towers would consist of cement plaster with a two-inch reveal, cornice trim along the top and bottom of the tower element and stone veneer along the length of the new columns. In addition, stone veneer accents would be added to the base of existing columns on the six buildings included in the project scope.

The proposal also includes a change in the color palette. The new color palette would consist of earth tones ranging in color from various shades of beige and brown to dark gray.

STAFF ANALYSIS

A Planned Development is a special zoning entitlement that is granted after individual review of the specific application, which includes site planning, use of the property, architecture, and landscaping. Staff contends that the proposed modification of the existing Planned Development approval conflicts with General Plan Goals 42 and 43, and does not meet the objectives of the Planned Development process or the provisions of the original approval (PD-83-3). Per Zoning Code Section 3-1018, a Planned Development project is approved only when it “will provide superior urban design in comparison with the development under the base district zoning regulations.”

Applicable General Plan Policies

The Historic Preservation and Community Design Element of the San Leandro General Plan contains Goals and Policies that, among other things, promote a stronger “sense of place” in San Leandro and seek to ensure that new renovation contributes to the quality and overall image of the community. The proposed project is inconsistent with Goals 42 and 43, as well as Policies 42.07, 43.06, and 43.07 as described below.

Goal 42: PROMOTE A STRONGER “SENSE OF PLACE” IN SAN LEANDRO

The standard corporate architectural design, materials and color of the proposed project communicates a commercial development that is typical of other such projects throughout the region and even the state. The design fails to orient to, or reflect the character of the surrounding community, and instead creates an independent commercial development, detached from the surrounding neighborhoods and even other tenants and buildings in the shopping center as a whole.

Policy 42.07 VISUAL LANDMARKS *Promote the development of “signature” buildings and monuments that provide visual landmarks and create a more distinctive and positive impression of San Leandro within the greater Bay Area. Local design guidelines should ensure that such buildings and monuments respect the character, scale, and context of the surrounding area.*

The identity communicated by the standard corporate architectural design approach of the appellant’s proposal does not create a distinctive impression of or for San Leandro and fails to create architectural elements or interest that create a San Leandro-unique sense of place. The proposed removal of the “Greenhouse” atriums would eliminate the existing elements that distinguish this center from others in the City and the surrounding region, and the historical context of the previous land uses, namely greenhouses and botanical nurseries.

Goal 43: QUALITY CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN: ENSURE THAT NEW CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION CONTRIBUTES TO THE QUALITY AND OVERALL IMAGE OF THE COMMUNITY.

The proposed project eliminates existing elements (glass atriums) that are reminiscent of San Leandro’s past and reflect a positive community image connected to that past. The project proposes to replace these elements with sign towers that do not reflect the unique or distinct character of the community.

Policy 43.06 ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST *Encourage new structures to incorporate architectural elements that create visual interest such as trellises, awnings, overhangs, patios, and window bays. Avoid solid or blank street-facing walls.*

By removing the glass atriums (architectural elements that create visual interest), the project would directly conflict with this policy. By replacing these architectural elements with sign towers, the project would fail to create visual interest, reflect a sense of place, or contribute to the image of San Leandro.

Policy 43.07 COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL STANDARDS *Improve the visual appearance of the City's commercial and industrial areas by applying high standards of architectural design and landscaping for new commercial and industrial development and the re-use or remodeling of existing commercial and industrial buildings.*

The project makes no effort to draw from local building forms or references to guide project design. The proposed sign towers detract from the "low-slung," predominantly horizontal building forms without enhancing the project site.

Staff notes that although General Plan Update 2035 is yet to be adopted, a policy audit prepared for the Historic Preservation and Community Design Element indicates that the above goals and policies remain valid and will be carried forward in the updated General Plan.

Consistency with Planned Development (PD-83-3)

Staff cannot recommend approval of the proposed changes to the Planned Development because the project abandons the original design concept, does not comprehensively evaluate all storefronts within the shopping center, fails to propose an adequate substitute for replacing architectural features that reference San Leandro's past, and does not provide superior urban design.

Because only six buildings interspersed within the Greenhouse Marketplace are included in this exterior renovation proposal, staff is also concerned that the shopping center will look disjointed and fragmented. This is because the core of the Greenhouse Shopping Center will consist of two very distinct architectural styles and varying material and color palettes.

In response to staff's concerns regarding the loss of an architectural connection to the site's historic context, the applicant proposes to install seven evenly spaced six-foot tall by ten-foot wide picture boxes consisting of images of historic significance to San Leandro along the southern wall of Jo-Ann's Fabrics (see Exhibit L Historical Display.) Although incorporating a public art component into the proposal will contribute to the site aesthetic and user enjoyment, it is not an appropriate substitute for the General Plan Goals and Policies that require integration of architectural building elements to maintain a cohesive building design and historic character.

Staff presents the following recommendations for a future submittal of a proposal that will create a comprehensive and cohesive design update for the Greenhouse Marketplace:

Design Concept: The proposed project is not mindful of the site's history, typified by the "ranch style" architecture predominantly found in northern California. The design should reflect the "low-slung," horizontal nature of the buildings with consistency in the pattern of design. The horizontal nature of the buildings should be retained, with vertical elements that do not override the low-slung nature of the existing buildings and that are subordinate to the existing architectural form.

Comprehensive Approach: The Greenhouse Marketplace shopping center is a local shopping and dining destination in San Leandro and contributes to the City as a unique place for community interaction. To be effective as a Planned Development amendment, the project should consider the design elements of all the storefronts that are part of Greenhouse Marketplace, regardless of ownership. Proposed alterations to existing storefronts should therefore meet the key principles of design, particularly in terms of 1) quality: utilizing existing site assets and being mindful of the site's history; 2) sense of place: where property improvements attract commercial attention, create pedestrian activity, and foster a sense of place; and 3) integration: with other major stores like Safeway, CVS and the 99 Cent Only Store, as well as the properties that are owned by others but were approved in the original PD-83-3.

Architectural Elements: Although according to the property owner the existing glass atriums cause on-going building maintenance problems, they represent features of specific architectural interest at the site relating to its previous use and history. The proposed removal of these distinctive elements represents a lost opportunity to create a new high quality design that preserves and enhances the special architectural interest of the Greenhouse Marketplace shopping center.

Historical Features: Features of the site's original use and history should also be incorporated where possible. The most recent package submittal dated February 15, 2016, includes a historical display wall on Jo-Ann's Fabrics eastern wall,

facing the parking lot. While the proposal acknowledges the importance of San Leandro's past, staff contends that it is an inadequate substitute for architectural forms that reflect the history of the site or the community context within which the project occurs. Staff recommends that the applicant pursue a more context sensitive design response to site opportunities rather than memorializing what exists.

In addition to context sensitivity, the project should consider a comprehensive urban design approach to establish a hierarchy of storefronts (major, intermediate, and small), with appropriate designs for each type of storefront to reflect the varying size and importance of places. The recent version of the proposed plans has been modified to include a hierarchy of storefronts, indicated by the various tower sizes (Tower A - major sign tower; tower B - minor sign tower; tower C - sign). While a sign hierarchy is important, this approach makes building form secondary to advertising and does nothing to create visual interest, reflect a sense of place, or contribute to the image of San Leandro

Environmental Review

The proposed project is exempt from environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act per (CEQA) Guideline Article 19 Section 15301 Existing Facilities.

Board/Commission Review and Actions

PLN15-0031 was heard at the March 17, 2016 Planning Commission meeting. Following staff and applicant presentations and questions, the Planning Commission discussed the merits of the proposed façade project and voted four in favor and two opposed, with one abstention, to continue the item to the May 19 meeting.

The Commission asked the applicant to revise its plans to meet the General Plan objectives stated in the staff report (see the attached minutes of the March 17 Planning Commission meeting.) The applicant, Weingarten Realty Investors, decided against drawing up new plans; in the attached email dated May 9, 2016 Weingarten stated that it would "not be submitting an alternative design." At the May 19 meeting, the Planning Commission disapproved the proposal to modify PD-83-3.

Summary of Public Outreach Efforts

For the City Council meeting of July 18, the following public outreach was performed: a legal advertisement for the public hearing was placed in the Daily Review newspaper on Friday, July 8, 2016; notification letters were mailed to the property owners and business owners within 500 feet of the subject property and public notification placards were posted on the utility poles and building elements adjacent to and near the subject property. This is similar to the notification for the March 17, 2016 Planning Commission meeting. A continuance of that meeting to a date certain, May 19, 2016, did not require any further notification.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the City Council affirm the Planning Commission's disapproval of the project due to its inconsistency with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance, because the project:

- Conflicts with General Plan Goals 42 (Sense of Place) and 43 (Quality Construction and Design). The proposed modifications would remove architectural elements that reflect project context and the unique characteristics of the site, and would replace them with sign towers using standard corporate architecture that fails to acknowledge attributes of the architecture unique and historically significant to San Leandro;
- Does not satisfy the provisions of the Planned Development process because it abandons the original design concept for the property, does not comprehensively address storefront design within the center, and fails to propose superior urban design as required for Planned Development Projects, per Zoning Code Section 3-1018;
- The proposed project's architecture would be described as corporate eclectic in that it would be employing multiple roof forms, building materials, and colors. Façade changes proposed for multiple, but not all, buildings creates an inconsistent treatment. The result would be building forms that fail to create a cohesive identity for the site with recognition of its part within the larger shopping development, or provide

- architectural forms that reference San Leandro or harken to its past; and
- The standardized design, materials and colors communicates a commercial development that is typical of other such projects throughout the state. The design fails to orient to, or reflect the surrounding community or San Leandro and creates a sense of independent commercial development, detached from the Greenhouse Marketplace Shopping Center and surrounding neighborhood.

Staff recommends that the City Council review the proposed modifications to the Planned Development for the major façade modifications, deny the appeal and uphold the Planning Commission's May 19 disapproval of the application by adopting the attached resolution and findings for denial.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment to the Staff Report:

Appeal Application

Memorandum from Weingarten Realty to tenants dated May 3, 2016 and tenant emails

Vicinity Map

Vicinity and Aerial Images

Applicant Statement

Exhibit A - Site Plan (Sheet DR-1)

Exhibit B - Façade Remodel For Units A0A to A0E (Sheet DR-2)

Exhibit C - Façade Remodel For Units B0G to B0R (Sheet DR-3.1)

Exhibit D - Façade Remodel For Units B0A to B0F (Sheet DR-3.2)

Exhibit E - Façade Remodel For Units C0H to C0R (Sheet DR-4.1)

Exhibit F - Façade Remodel For Units C0A to Jo-Ann (Sheet DR-4.2)

Exhibit G - Façade Remodel For Units E0H to E0N (Sheet DR-5.1)

Exhibit H - Façade Remodel For Units E0A to E0F (Sheet DR-5.2)

Exhibit I - Façade Remodel For Units D0A to D0E (Sheet DR-6)

Exhibit J - Façade Remodel For Units F0A to F0E (Sheet DR-7.1)

Exhibit K - Façade Remodel For Units F0E to F0G (Sheet DR-7.2)

Exhibit L - Applicant's Historical Display (Sheet X-43)

Excerpts from the Planned Development (PD-83-3) Approvals

Staff Photographs of Greenhouse Marketplace

Minutes of the March 17, 2016 Planning Commission meeting

Minutes of the May 19, 2016 Planning Commission meeting

Email from Brian Kriz, Weingarten Realty Investors, dated May 9, 2016

Attachments to the Resolution:

Exhibit A: Findings of Fact for Denial of PLN15-00031

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