

HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION
DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE (DRC) MEETING

December 16, 2020

Action Minutes

ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioners Saum, Polcyn, and Raynsford

AGENDA

Meeting Goal: Discuss preliminary project design and provide comments to staff and applicants.

Proposed Projects for Review:

1. **H20-037:** Site Development Permit to allow the construction of a 21-story high rise building consisting of 194 residential units and 314,000 sf office with four levels of underground parking on a 1.25-acre site located at 35 South Second Street in downtown San Jose.
 - a. Provide initial input and feedback on the design of the proposed new infill building located in the Downtown Commercial National Register Historic District with regard to Section 4.2.4 (Historic Adjacency) of the San Jose Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards (2019) and the Downtown San Jose Historic District Design Guidelines (2003).

PROJECT MANAGER, ANGELA WANG

Attachments:

1. [Plan Set](#)
2. [Map of Downtown Commercial National Register Historic District](#)
3. [Section 4.2.4 \(Historic Adjacency\) of the San Jose Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards \(2019\)](#)
4. [Downtown San Jose Historic District Design Guidelines \(2003\)](#)

5. DPR 523 series forms for Adjacent Properties in the Historic District
 - a. [83-85 South Second Street](#)
 - b. [87 South Second Street](#)
 - c. [42-48 East Santa Clara Street](#)

Chair Saum called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. and read the first item on the agenda.

Chair Saum then turned the meeting over to staff. Vicrim Chima, Historic Preservation Officer, introduced the project manager, Angela Wang, who briefly described the site, existing conditions and stated the project applicant was West Bank, before turning it over to the architect.

The architect made a presentation divided into four sections. The introduction was focused on historic building footprints and the character of the existing historic district. The second section, context & public realm, looked at the applicable design and historic guidelines. Learning from context, the architect focused on components of historic storefronts and the hierarchy from bulkhead to storefront glass to transom to a horizontal transition above, along with recessed entries with brick aprons. The architect also discussed types of extant historic material in the district and contemporary materials that would be employed in the building including the exterior veil's terracotta, storefront systems and free-standing pillars in blackened steel or other dark metal, clerestory windows above the transom, and a variety storefront programs. A number of storefront variations were considered with different combinations of storefront types, planters, flush/fixed storefronts, recessed entry, brick wall, roll up door, etc. The architect described the first level streetscape and water features that would be included to activate all the space around the building. Then he discussed hardscape materials: dark toned clay brick, granite, and decomposed granite. He then shifted into discussing elements of the "urban room" illustrating the area with vegetation, kiosks, market stalls, and other public uses. Building and site design would maintain sight lines between the "urban room" and the cupola of the Bank of Italy.

The architect then began discussing where the massing and form of the building came from. He described a long narrow site with the traditional mixed-use models (retail facing the street, then office spaces with larger floor plates, and residential on top including outdoor space and amenities). But for this site, the architect chose to flip residential and office, to engage smaller floor plates close to the ground floor to communicate a more neighborhood scale and then large office correlating with the skyline. He also explained trying to open up the alley ways. The architect discussed an element of design that is a "nod" to the Bank of Italy, an area of the buildings where the louvers would recede allowing the glazing to reflect an image of the Bank of Italy. Façade materiality was the next topic, and the architect went through the explanation of the terracotta louvers that would shade the single wall glass exterior system. He spoke about the way natural materials through the mixing, extrusion, and finishing process would provide a variegated feel. Finally, the architect covered green rooms, with vegetation in the balconies and a large collection or "crown" of trees on the roof. The louvers depress and recede in regular shapes along the façade to allow for planting and for articulation. The architect included some slides that described the penthouse and the planting on the roof. Lastly, the architect shared the massing and volumetric design iterations for the site and a detailed study of the nature and form of the urban room.

Commissioner Raynsford made several comments. He stated that he appreciated all the work that went into the project, particularly the ground level details at the storefronts and the rhythm they create. He also liked that it was a porous building that would connect parts of the district. But the Commissioner felt that more attention needed to be paid to the second, third, and fourth floors of the building which correspond to the cornice heights of adjacent historic buildings. He felt the long horizontals were less effective in creating compatibility and that the architect should consider design elements that align with the cornice height of the adjacent buildings.

Commissioner Raynsford continued by stating that although the massing is interesting, the curvilinear shape is quite alien for the city and district. He appreciated all the planting and integrating architecture with planting, although he felt the landscaping palette could be expressed more formally. He suggested that suddenly introducing a wild grouping of plants isn't characteristic to the district and to explore a more formal, organized way to introduce green space. He also stated that the top of the building could benefit from a cornice element.

Commissioner Polcyn thanked the applicant and architect for the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of the presentation. He expressed that he liked the projects circulation around the building, transoms, lintels, and storefronts. He expressed that the buildings most prominent feature is its verticality. He suggested that other projects in historic areas, after a certain floor, institute a setback at the top portion of the building. Without a setback, a building can become very bulky. When the Commissioner looked at the size of the building and how it related to existing structures, it seemed bulky, however, he understood developers needed larger buildings to maximize space.

The Commissioner was concerned that there wasn't enough area dedicated on the back side of the building for freight, garbage and other practical exchanges although he did like concept that building was to be perceived as having no "back" or inactivated, unutilized space. He stated that he didn't mind the horizontal elements and appreciated the softer shape of the building, but there may be compatibility issues with adjacent buildings. Finally, the Commissioner questioned how much of the landscaping was feasible considering root ball and growth canopy. He expressed that the crown of the building was fine, and it should be useable space as opposed to mechanical equipment. Again, the Commissioner stated that the only real concern was the height and massing.

Chair Saum began his comments by stating the site was a challenging one and the character of the district was really about how it was perceived at the ground level. He stated that First and Second streets are pedestrian experiences. He then expressed that the architect had succeeded in embracing the pedestrian nature of Fountain Alley. The Chair mentioned that he wished Mike (Sondergran) from PAC SJ was present to see the 3-D modeling and the massive amount of geographic and visual context presented by the architect. He also applauded the architect's efforts to integrate new development into the study and the context mapping. He expressed that he preferred the raised planters rather than vegetation coming straight out of the ground and the mid-century urban spaces it evoked.

Further the chair commended the architect for acknowledging and embracing more historic materials. He echoed Commissioner Raynsford's comments concerning formality in the planting. The Chair also stated the project was doing well referencing some datum lines with the adjacent buildings, but some form of variation in the horizontal elements may be appropriate. The building didn't necessarily need to be rectilinear, but some kind of corner or cornice element could be incorporated, perhaps a little bit more of the base, shaft, cap typology. He expressed his pleasure at the applicant's willingness to embrace the guidelines and that the pedestrian level analysis was ideal.

Commissioner Raynsford suggested that a setback should be incorporated at the third or fourth floor.

Commissioner Polcyn also commented that he liked the landscaping and the way the landscape design extended beyond the building footprint. The new building would be an obvious addition and landscaping that extends into the district helps embrace that transition.

The architect responded to the setback recommendation and referenced the Bank of Italy which stands on the corner with its full massing that comes all the way up and down. He stated that the tower podium with the setback is not common in this area and expressed concern that if they were to setback, they would need a podium to setback from, and the impacts that such a change would have on the public realm.

Commissioner Polcyn suggested that the change may only need to be a subtle change, perhaps exaggerating some of the horizontal elements, or a shift in material above a certain floor.

The architect responded by addressing the role of the balconies in the project, there are smaller and more frequent push-ins which are meant to break up the longer horizontal lines, and then having the trees to complement the canopy from the street trees.

Commissioner Polcyn thought it worth communicating or clarifying the role of the balconies. He went on to express that there have been many designs for the site. Referencing the east elevation slide, he asked the designers to be a little more honest about the height of the building compared to the historic buildings.

The architect than described the vehicular ramp and adjacent alley for fire access and trash collection.

Meeting adjourned at 2:17 p.m.