

HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION
DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE (DRC) MEETING

July 21, 2021

Action Minutes

ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioners Boehm and Royer

Meeting called to order at 1:02 p.m.

AGENDA

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

Proposed Projects for Review:

1. **HP21-005 and H21-026:** Historic Preservation Permit and Site Development Permit applications to allow the demolition of the side and rear walls and interior (two facades to remain) of a City Landmark at 142-150 East Santa Clara Street, the demolition of two buildings at 130-134 East Santa Clara Street and 17 South 4th Street), and the construction of an approximately 72,500-square foot four and six story commercial building on a 0.34-gross acre site (three combined parcels) partially located in the Downtown Commercial Historic District.

PROJECT MANAGER, RINA SHAH

Attachments:

1. [Architectural Plan Set](#)
2. [148-150 E. Santa Clara Street DPR Forms \(1991\)](#)
3. [130-134 E. Santa Clara Street DPR Forms \(1991\)](#)

Commissioner Boehm started the meeting and read the project description.

Ted McMahon, Bayview Development Group, provided a project overview in a PowerPoint presentation. He described significant changes happening with development in Downtown with regard to scale and size. Mr. McMahon discussed the site challenges, including the subject U-shaped property configuration. He related the scale of the proposed project to the Hotel Clariana. Mr. McMahon shared a massing study of the project context area and comparison of scale and size of the project relevant to its surroundings. He added that economic revitalization and street level activation at the pedestrian scale is important to the project. Mr. McMahon cited 178 Townsend in San Francisco as a relevant example and stated that the project team strived for the project to meet all ten of the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation.

Russ Nichols, RMW Architecture, emphasized the design challenges the u-shaped property presented. He stated South 4th Street and East Santa Clara Street is an important corner. The design team wanted to take advantage of northern light and utilize quality materials. Mr. Nichols stated that the project was designed with an understanding that the scale was important at the street corner and food and beverage sales would be a viable business. He discussed the project challenges which included egress and fire safety which resulted in limiting the height of the proposed building to 85 feet. Mr. Nichols stated the building consists of mass timber and glazing which relates to the verticality of the brick façade. He asserted that the rooftop trellis serves as the building's cornice and its geometry relates to the historic building below. Mr. Nichols stated the trellis introduces a stronger skyline presence and adds a vertical scale.

Peter Birkholz, Page and Turnbull, stated that during the design process the firm provided objective feedback from a historic preservation perspective on the design and its effect on the City landmark. He summarized the character-defining features of the City Landmark, which was designated in 1982. Mr. Birkholz stated that five of the ten standards of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation were met due in relation to façade preservation, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse.

Commissioner Boehm then opened up the meeting to public comments.

*Ben Leech, Preservation Action Council San Jose (PAC*SJ), stated that PAC*SJ questioned overbuilding in Downtown and whether there is a norm developing that two-story buildings are no longer viable in Downtown. Mr. Leech stated if that is the case, then PAC*SJ would have to come in grips with that fact. If that is not the case, the City should develop language to consider when it is acceptable and when it is not acceptable. He noted that the policy discussion was beyond the scope of the meeting and project review, but he wanted to set the stage. Mr. Leech stated that the proposed design was one of the better designs recently proposed in terms of mass and scale. He thought the design was modest in scale, not a 20-story tower dwarfing a City Landmark base. Mr. Leech noted that breaking up the massing has improved the design along South 4th Street façade but questioned the ground floor level and the treatment of the brick on this façade. He looked forward to that being addressed by the design team. Mr. Leech urged the applicant to research the building and reinstate the fenestration at the South 4th Street façade.*

*Commissioner Royer appreciated the modifications as good improvements to the design. She agreed with the comments from PAC*PJ that the setback from the City Landmark helps to break down the massing of the new building along South 4th Street, the roof trellis provides a nice cornice-type element and setting back the building's edge is a good improvement to the design. Commissioner Royer agreed that the site is a challenge due to the U-shaped configuration. She commended the design team on taking up the challenge to develop something there. Commissioner Royer supported the setback from East Santa Clara Street and noted the benefit of the setback.*

She questioned whether the South 4th Street setback of the new building was adequate and wondered whether there might be an opportunity to provide a little more relief there with a deeper setback? Commissioner Royer acknowledged that a greater setback could be a challenge, given the structural bay and spacing.

From a preservation standpoint, Commissioner Royer stated that the two-story historic building should be preserved and maintained as it is; however, she was open to considering the proposed design as a good alternative to maintaining the two-story building. She noted the proposed project created more square footage and density and incorporated the important historic elements of the historic structure at the corner of South 4th Street & East Santa Clara Street. Commissioner Royer added that she too was curious about the treatment of the ground level of the South 4th Street façade and how that would be resolved. She agreed that there was still work that needed to be done on the design, but overall, Commissioner Royer thought it was a great project. She added that the mass timber construction was exciting. Commissioner Royer inquired whether the glazing would be a curtain wall system with butt joints between columns as shown in the renderings? She commented that it looked like one sheet of glass, so she was just curious to see how the glass wall would appear in reality.

Russ Nichols, RMW Architecture, responded to the glazing comments and stated that the assumption on the glass wall design was correct. He noted that the proposed glazing and butt joints were tight at the perimeter. Mr. Nichols stated the idea is to keep the treatment simple. The glass is a response to the northern light and good quality glass with quality transparency would be used. He added that the mullions would be visible through the glass to help give the building form and to break down its scale. Mr. Nichols stated that there would not be a strong shadow line as in the perimeter and the design team loved the idea of a clean design.

Mr. Nichols responded to the setback comments and stated that the setback from the City Landmark façade is two feet along South 4th Street façade. He noted the design team tried to set the new building back further, but the challenge is that South 4th Street is a longer façade and the setback would take away much of the valuable square footage through the entire length of the building. It was easier to do that on the shorter end of the building since the loss of square footage was much less. Mr. Nichols stated the design team even looked into translating that loss of square footage to increasing the height of the building but decided to keep setback at two feet and keep the scale of the building down and maintain the height under 85 feet.

Commissioner Boehm inquired about the significance of the Louis Henning meat market building outlined in the 1991 (Glory Ann Laffey) documentation of historical significance. He asserted that Page and Turnbull had discounted that significance in their report and requested an explanation.

Page and Turnbull staff stated that Louis Henning was not the first proprietor of a meat market, nor was the meat market the only market in San José. In addition, the building lost a great deal of integrity and it no longer conveys the appearance it had at the time when it was used as Henning's meat market.

Commissioner Boehm reiterated Commissioner Royer's comments regarding massing and scale as strong points of the proposed design. He appreciated that the scale was done moderately so that the building could fit in with other historic structures on that side of East Santa Clara Street. Commissioner Boehm agreed that it was challenging to design a U-shaped building. He noted there was something to be said for the trellis being perceived as a cornice that served as a decorative feature on top of the building. Commissioner Boehm also noted that the rooftop trellis added a contemporary flavor to the building, which does not fully conform with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Commissioner Boehm stated his primary concern was that it was a City Landmark structure and with that designation comes certain protections. He noted that the proposed project does not adhere to five of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, and the project is still lacking in its protection of the Landmark. Commissioner Boehm asserted the project is "facadism", and it is not something that is condoned in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. He stated that the project does not comply with Standards 1 and 2. Even with use of timber, predominantly in the interior, it does not relate to the Landmark, as the exterior is glass. Commissioner Boehm stated that the cornice of the building does not relate to the design of the two-story City Landmark. He suggested that the design needs a mix of materials. Even though there is timber on the interior, the exterior glass seems less compatible to the brick façade which is the appeal of the City Landmark. In summary, Commission Boehm did see some improvements and acknowledged that there were real project challenges; however, he was reluctant to support any kind of demolition of the City Landmark.

2. **HP21-004 and SP21-012:** Historic Preservation Permit and Special Use Permit applications to allow the relocation of a Structure of Merit located at 91 South Autumn Street to 317 West St. John Street and to utilize the building as a restaurant (Poor House Bistro) on a 0.21-gross acre site in the River Street City Landmark District.

PROJECT MANAGER, RINA SHAH

Attachments:

1. [Architectural Plan Set](#)
2. [91 S. Autumn Street DPR Forms](#)
3. [323 W. St. John Street DPR Forms](#)
4. [317 W. St John Street Documentation](#)
5. [Aerial Map](#)

Commissioner Boehm read the project description and Sal Caruso, project representative, provided a brief presentation. Mr. Caruso stated that the 91 South Autumn Street house (Poor House Bistro) is proposed to be moved to 323 West St. John Street by the same family that owned it in its prior location, which was sold to Google. He noted that the house was moved to the 91 South Autumn site in the mid-twentieth century and was not in its original setting and did not qualify for designation as a City Landmark. Mr. Caruso said that the structure at 91 South Autumn Street is proposed to be moved to the Little Italy museum site, since it was occupied for many decades by an Italian-American family and adaptively used for an Italian-American business. He stated that the proposal is to locate the house between the museum and Henry's Hi-Life commercial business.

Mr. Caruso stated that the project proposed to add a detached refrigeration room and bathroom building to the site and the building would be preserved in its entirety at the new location for the next 100 years. He presented a map showing the route that would be followed to relocate the building from South Autumn Street to the new location at West St. John Street. He added that the move had been reviewed and confirmed by house movers.

Dana Peak, Acting Historic Preservation Officer, steered the discussion to why the house was being relocated to the rear of the site.

Sal Caruso Design staff provided an overview of an analysis prepared by Archaeological Resources Management Group. It was noted, and the analysis stated that both the museum and the Poor House Bistro would be contributing structures to the River Street City Landmark District and it would be better to have the Poor House Bistro building set back from the street because it would preserve the historic context as it would not interrupt the street view of other buildings on the street.

Mr. Caruso added that putting the Poor House Bistro in a secondary position on the site, at the rear and not closer to the street, would help maintain the integrity of the other two historic buildings and would not compete with them. The Poor House Bistro would still be clearly visible from the street.

Commissioner Royer commented on the placement of 91 South Autumn Street with other historic buildings in the River Street City Landmark District. She noted that it did not appear the building would fit at the front of the lot and suggested that might be the bigger reason for its relocation to the rear of the site, which would still preserve the building. The project team stated that the Poor House Bistro building was too wide and would not fit if sited adjacent to the Museum building on site.

Commissioner Boehm opened public comment.

*Ben Leech, PAC*SJ, agreed that the placement on the site is a little odd. He noted, in a perfect world, the building should maintain a more traditional relationship with the street, but he understood the constraints of the project. Mr. Leech asserted that there were more benefits to the proposed relocation plan than detriments. He inquired whether the applicant proposes to demolish and reconstruct the roof of 91 South Autumn Street and if so, why is demolition being proposed.*

Mr. Caruso responded that the roof of the structure would be removed in order to relocate the structure because it is too tall to move under objects and power lines under which it will pass. The gables would be removed, transported to the new site and reconstructed. He noted that it is a meticulous process, but it is the best way to accomplish the move. Mr. Caruso cited an example of one such move of a two-story Victorian style house at 1st Street and Alma.

Commissioner Boehm stated that locating the house at the rear of the property is disappointing. He understood that there were likely limited sites where the building could be relocated. However, Commissioner Boehm noted the site is near Henry's Hi-Life, and the Poor House Bistro would be similar and compatible. He asserted the proposal was a good project that could be supported. Commissioner Boehm suggested that before the project is heard by the Historic Landmarks Commission, the applicant should try to identify alternate sites where the building could be placed closer to the street. Commissioner Boehm closed the meeting after summarizing the comments on the two projects and thanking City staff.

Meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.