



# Architectural Review Board

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## Staff Report

**Agenda Date:** November 21, 2013

**To:** Architectural Review Board

**From:** Elena Lee, Senior Planner **Department: Planning and Community Environment**

**Subject:** 777 Welch Road [13PLN-00417]: Request by Stoecker and Northway for Preliminary Architectural Review of a proposal to demolish a 3,046 sq. ft. building of a 14,142 sq. ft. three building complex and construct a new 3-story 11,724 sq. ft. building for a total of 22,820 sq. ft. Zone District: MOR.

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff requests the Architectural Review Board (ARB) conduct a preliminary review of the proposed project and provide comments on the design to staff and the applicant. No formal action may be taken at a preliminary review; comments made at a preliminary review are not binding on the City or the applicant.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Site Information**

The subject site is located on a 70,381 square foot (sq. ft.) site on the south side of Welch Road adjacent to the Stanford Hospital and Clinics and other medical buildings. The property is developed with three single story medical office buildings with a total of 14,142 square feet of floor area. The buildings are connected by covered corridors. The three buildings are occupied by primarily dental businesses, as permitted in the Medical Office and Medical Research (MOR) zoning district. Vehicular access to the site is current provided by a driveway from Welch Road on the northwest side of the property. Parking is located at grade along the perimeter of the site, with one row of parking adjacent to the east side of the building. Landscaping is provided at the front of the site and along the perimeter of the buildings. The site is located south of the recently constructed 800 Welch Road medical office building and the recently approved companion medical office building to be located at 780 Welch Road.

#### **Project Description**

The applicant is proposing a two phase project. However, the intention is to move forward with Phase I initially. The applicant's preliminary plans include the demolition of the front 3,046 sq. ft. one story building of the complex. The first phase would be to construct a new 3 story, 11,724 sq. ft. building at the front of the property. Each floor would be dedicated to one individual tenant. Roof access would be provided only for mechanical equipment, located towards the west side of the building. The parking area along the Welch Road frontage would be reconfigured to accommodate accessible parking.

However, the remainder of the parking lot is proposed to be maintained as existing. The northeast corner along Welch Road would remain available for emergency fire truck access.

Phase two would include replacement of the two remaining buildings located at the interior of the site with one new three-story, 23,400 sq. ft. building. The first floor of the building would be dedicated to parking, including the use of parking lifts. The remainder of the surface parking area would then be reconfigured to accommodate the additional parking requirements and landscaping. Additional landscaping is also proposed around the Phase I building, along with new paving. The parking along Welch Road would be better screened by additional landscaping. Phase II would propose to enhance the landscaping both around the new buildings as well as the parking lot.

The Phase I and II buildings are proposed to be similar, with a strong emphasis on the horizontal and dark earth tones. The lobby and primary entry to the buildings would consist of a structural steel glazing system with spandrel glass bands. This entry feature would be located near the northwest portion of the site for the Phase I building. The buildings would also feature stained IPE wood siding, painted cement plaster and an aluminum glazing system. The two buildings would be connected on the upper levels by a glass corridor above the primary lobby area.

The conceptual plans provide context in site plan, floor plans, three dimensional renderings, elevations and building sections to assist the ARB review. The applicant had received planning entitlements for two previous proposals, but the owner chose not to pursue either project. The formal application for the project will be subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Architectural Review Board review. Comments from City department staff have been forwarded to the applicant for consideration. The ARB's feedback will be used to inform the applicant and staff on what is expected for reviews of the formal applications and other miscellaneous permits, in accordance with the requirement of the Municipal Code.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Zoning Compliance**

The placement of the buildings would meet the required minimum setbacks. The MOR district requires setbacks of 50 feet for the street frontages and ten for the interior side yard. Parking is also placed a minimum of 10 feet away from the front property line as required. The buildings appear to meet the 50 foot height limit. The Zoning Code does allow utility or mechanical features to exceed the height limit by not more than fifteen feet, which this project does include. The current maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for the site is 0.50:1. The buildings for both phases would comply with the Municipal Code. Phase I would result in an FAR of 0.32:1 or 22,820 sq. ft. Implementation of Phase II would bring the site closer to the maximum with an FAR 0.50:1 or 35,124 sq. ft.

### **Parking**

Per the Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC), 22,820 sq. ft. of medical office use would require a minimum of one space per 250 sq. ft. or 92 total spaces in the MOR zoning district. The applicant is proposing to provide 96 stalls. However, at least two existing stalls do not conform to Municipal Code size requirements. Two accessible stalls are being relocated from the east side of the building to the Welch Road frontage.

### Design and Compatibility on Welch Road

The City has within the past few years approved a redesign of Welch Road as part of the Stanford Medical Center project as well as new buildings within this area, including 780 and 800 Welch Road. 780 and 800 Welch Road buildings were designed to complement one another in terms of materials and color, setting a pattern for the area. The constructed and approved building materials for those buildings included concrete, curtain wall windows, terra cotta panels, limestone, wood decking and metal panels, in a lighter color palette. An important component of both developments was the treatment of the parking facilities. The applicant, Stanford University, requested the use of landscape reserve to defer meeting the full parking requirement per PAMC Chapter 18.52.050 (b). The parking facility was also designed to be located primarily to the rear of the site or located within a below grade garage. These approaches allowed significant amount of landscaping to be planted along the front of the site, within the 50 foot front setbacks which would have otherwise been developed with parking.

The currently proposed project is distinctively different in its treatment of parking at the front of the site and design approach to the building. Minimal changes are proposed to the parking in both phases as parking still is proposed along the perimeter. The design treatment includes a darker palette with a greater emphasis on horizontal elements. Although, it should be noted that the proposed colors and building materials would serve to tie the new building with the existing buildings that would remain in Phase I. This is a concern shared by Stanford University. The applicant has provided street views of the proposed building and the adjacent medical center buildings for context. Staff requests ARB feedback if these same standards and design approaches should be applied to this project for both Phase I and II.

### City Department Comments

The plans were routed to other City departments for review and the written comments provided are included in Attachment C. Based on the preliminary plans provided to staff, the most significant concern was provided by the Urban Forestry Division, Public Works and Utilities. The primary concerns are the storm water treatment of the site, including the installation of bio-swales, during both phases and landscaping.

### ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

No environmental review is required for a Preliminary Review as it is not considered a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

### ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Project Description\*  
Attachment B: Zoning Compliance Table  
Attachment C: Development Plans (Board Members Only)\*

\* Prepared by Applicant; all other attachments prepared by Staff

### COURTESY COPIES

Cynthia Munoz: [Cynthia@stoeckerandnorthway.com](mailto:Cynthia@stoeckerandnorthway.com)

**Prepared By:** Elena Lee, Senior Planner

**Manager Review:** Amy French, Chief Planning Official



## Design Narrative

The proposed building is a contemporary design with an emphasis on horizontal lines and massing that makes use of thick monolithic wall forms to define the different parts of the building. The building provides a strong presence along Welch Road with the intent of a future Phase 2 building tying into this structure on the south side. A conceptual Phase 2 design is reflected in this package for reference.

The main portion of the three-story building houses office space for medical and dental office suites. This mass is anchored on the east and west ends by thick plaster wall forms with bands of glazing alternating with horizontal sections of sustainable ipe wood siding. Eyebrows over the windows and bands along the base of the building further emphasize the clean horizontal lines desired on this main building mass.

The lobby core, which was designed and sized with a future Phase 2 in mind, is defined by a thick L-shaped wall/roofline that steps down and back from the main portion of the building. Full height glass facades on both the north and south sides are intended to provide a bright and elegant feeling to this public core.

The east and west ends are anchored by more solid forms that further step down and back from the main building and house the toilet room core and secondary exit stairs. These forms are punctuated by a playful arrangement of smaller windows that let natural light into these functional spaces.

The color palette consisting of natural buff and gray-green colored cement plasters, smooth metallic finished dark bronze horizontal bands and window frames are intended to complement the clean and elegant natural colors of the new hospital buildings that will be surrounding this project.

The landscaping incorporates plants that are drought tolerant, low maintenance and low on allergens. There is a layering of plantings that tell the story of the seasons with some plant selections providing rich fall color and others providing bright spring blooms. The future Phase 2 work will allow for an increase of the perimeter landscape buffer and provide opportunities for sitting areas that building inhabitants can use.

An open walkway is developed between the new building and existing one-story buildings to the south, which will be retained upon the development of the future Phase 2. Phase 2 is conceived to be a two-story building over parking on-grade. The connection between the two buildings would be through a glassy bridge that connects into the lobby of Phase 1. The same types of materials and use of thick wall forms with horizontal bands will allow the two buildings to blend together harmoniously with each other and with the surroundings.

Stanford University has provided their comments and concerns regarding the proposed project and we have included a copy of those comments for your review. We would appreciate the ARB's feedback regarding their concerns.

# Stanford University

September 13, 2013

Dr. Jim Cox  
The Dental Plaza LLC  
777 Welch Road  
Palo Alto, CA 94304

Re: 777 Welch Road-Dental Plaza Design Submittal

Dear Dr. Cox:

As you are aware we have been working through the review of a new building design for The Dental Plaza with your architects Cynthia Munoz and John Northway of Stoecker and Northway Architects. The project as we understand it will be to demolish one of the single story buildings and construct a three story building on the Welch Road side of the property (Phase 1). The remaining single story buildings would be removed and replaced with a larger building provided financing is available (Phase 2). At this time we are unable to approve the design as submitted. However, in the spirit of cooperation we have signed the City of Palo Alto's Development Review Application to allow the project to be submitted for preliminary ARB review. Attached are our architectural comments for the project which have not been resolved to our satisfaction. Also attached are environmental questions and requirements.

In addition to these comments we are seriously concerned about the conditional commitment to complete the 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase of this project.

We look forward to the opportunity to review a modified design after your preliminary ARB hearing.

Thank you.

Very truly yours,



Leonie F. Batkin

Director, Asset Management

Cc: Cynthia Munoz and John Northway, Stoecker and Northway  
Amy French, Chief Planning Official, City of Palo Alto

# Stanford University

## EXHIBIT A

### ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

**Subject: 777 Welch Road, Palo Alto Dental Plaza Renovation Re-submittal**

#### Comments and recommendations

We very much appreciate the response to our previous comments; however, we still find the current proposal to be an inappropriate design solution for this site. We provided design drawings for several of Stanford University Medical Center's recent and under-construction projects including: The SU School of Medicine's 780 and 800 Welch Road Medical Office Buildings, Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Expansion, and the New Stanford Hospital. We asked that the architects study the 777 Welch Road design in the context of these new projects, which will establish an important new tone for the Medical Center district. The hope was that the 777 Welch Road design team would look for possible synergies and formal relationships with these other projects. Unfortunately the updated package of drawings has remained, in many essential ways, unchanged from the prior submittal.

We still feel that this proposal is unsatisfactory and appears to look too much toward the past rather than the future. The building design is a bit dated looking, but more importantly, the approach to site planning is unchanged from its current condition: an island of buildings surrounded by asphalt. All of the recent Medical Center projects have employed a new paradigm: minimizing paving, maximizing outdoor amenity space, and utilizing attractive landscape areas as the gesture of the entry sequence. We believe strongly that the natural landscape is a character-defining element for Palo Alto and Stanford, and that it plays an especially significant role in the healing process for the Medical Center's patients, staff and visitors. We've provided specific comments below which, it is hoped, can be thoughtfully addressed.

# Stanford University

1. Massing:
  - a. The current proposal creates an overly imposing impression along Welch Road, with a minimal setback from the street edge (featuring parking lot) and the building constructed to its maximum allowable height in this area.
    - i. Consider stepping the building down as it approaches the street edge; constructing Phase One as 2-stories above grade, and Phase Two as 3 Stories above grade (with parking below grade).
      1. This would be more consistent with the new Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Expansion and the new Stanford Hospital (both currently under construction).
    - ii. Consider simplifying the massing of Phase 1. Currently, there are 4 different floor plan areas which are each expressed in a different massing, fenestration and materials: office, lobby/restrooms, north stair tower, and south stair tower. All of this stark differentiation actually makes the building seem larger than it is.
      1. See the design of the new Stanford Hospital parking garage (further south on Welch Road), which is a much a larger building with a much simpler massing and fenestration approach.
    - iii. Consider eliminating expression of vertical fin elements (in green stucco), and simply expressing the building in pure volumetric forms.
      1. This would be more consistent with the all of the new buildings on Welch Road.
2. Base Condition and Entry
  - a. The building crashes into the ground, with no differentiation of the ground level from the upper stories.
    - i. Consider modifying the treatment of the ground level to express a "base" that is comfortable and enjoyable for pedestrian circulation.
      1. This would be more consistent with the expressed base condition featured at the new 780 and 800 Welch Buildings – which utilizes a change in plane as well as a change in material and fenestration.
    - ii. Consider a safe pedestrian path at the perimeter of the building (especially after Phase Two), which provides safe access to the building entry from all surface parking locations.
    - iii. Consider alternatives for embellishing the building entry for improved patient/visitor wayfinding and a more welcoming entry experience (e.g. Introduce a canopy or awning)
3. Fenestration
  - a. The window pattern at the stair towers is distracting and foreign to the rest of the composition.
    - i. Consider simplifying the window pattern in order to be more consistent with the rest of the proposed window types.

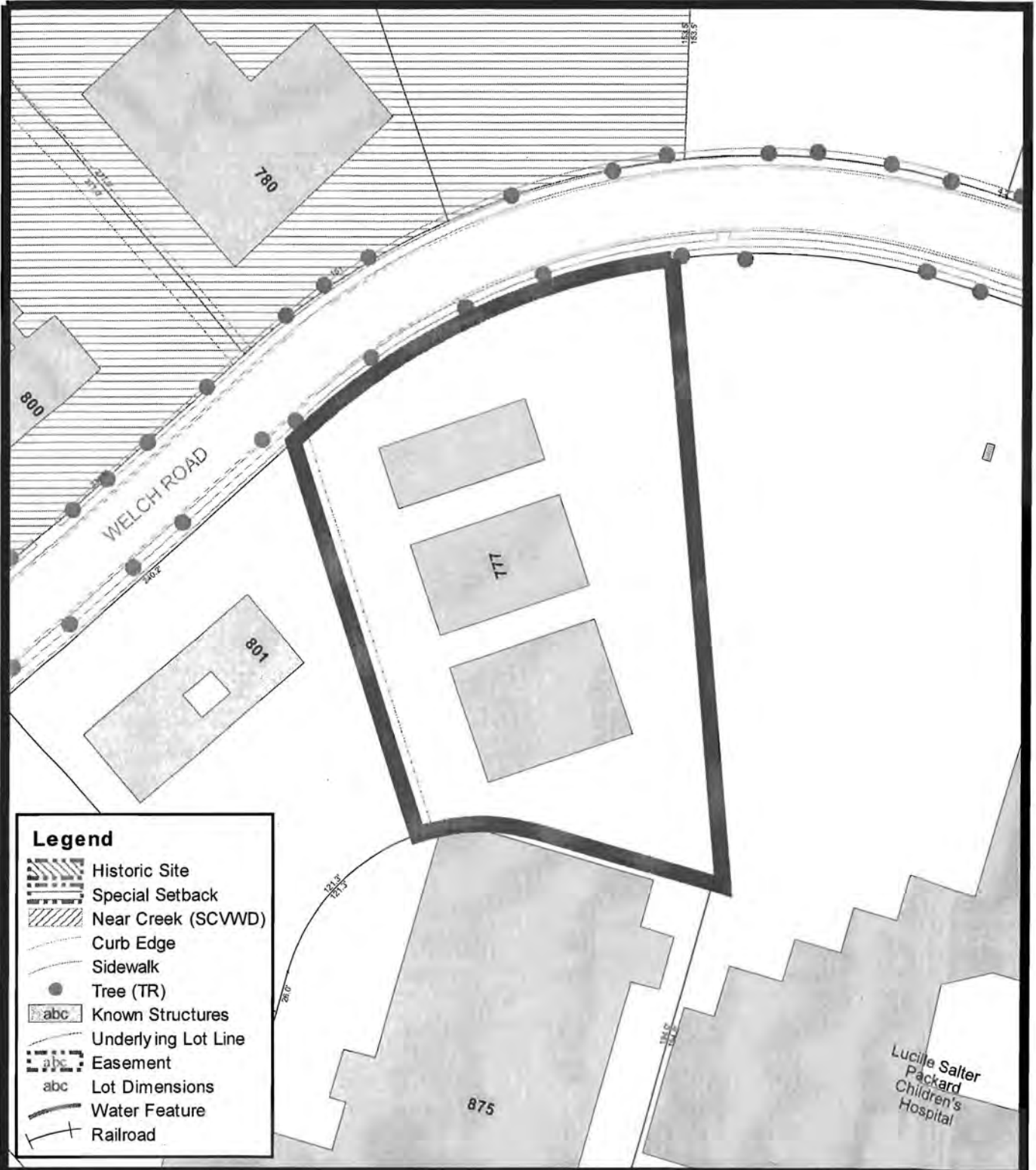
# Stanford University

4. Material and Color
  - a. The proposed material palette seems quite dark and more consistent with older buildings on Welch Road.
    - i. Consider replacing the window systems with a lighter color aluminum finish (e.g. Champagne, Clear-Anodized, etc.)
    - ii. Consider replacing the "Sandalwood Tan" plaster color with a warmer value (e.g. Tan, Cream, etc.)
    - iii. Consider reducing the amount of the dark IPE Wood (e.g. as a highlight material near entries and public portions of the building, rather than a primary siding on the office block).
5. Parking
  - a. Consider eliminating the at-grade parking between the street and the building, and replacing with an outdoor amenity space featuring landscape/hardscape improvements to support the building program. The current proposal has the parking area so tight to the building, that the corner of the building must be wrapped in bollards for protection at the building entry.
    1. This would be more consistent with the "green belt" concept featured at the new 780 and 800 Welch Buildings.
  - b. The current proposal features an at-grade parking lot in Phase Two, with 2 levels of office above. This creates an unattractive façade and a confusing disconnected entry experience.
    - i. Consider locating the parking below grade, and reducing the overall height of the building.
6. Landscape
  - a. The Tree Species being proposed are quite small, even when full-grown.
    - i. Consider species that have a larger canopy, in order to weave better into the scale of the building.
  - b. Provide location and details of:
    - i. Bike Parking (ideally located near main entrance)
    - ii. Site Lighting
    - iii. Surface material (e.g. lawn, mulch, shrubs, etc.)
7. Phasing
  - a. The current proposal constructs Phase One at the front of the site (adjacent to Welch Road), and Phase Two a mere 10' away, creating an extremely narrow but tall exterior corridor between the two buildings. This is not only a strange exterior condition but also an unfortunate leasing condition, as there will be 3 levels of tenants whose suites look directly into each other.
    - i. Consider increasing the distance between the two buildings, thereby creating a more comfortable exterior and interior condition.
    - ii. Consider constructing Phase One at the rear of the site, and stepping the massing of the building down toward Welch Road.
















**Attachment B**  
**Zoning Code Compliance Table (Phase I)**

<b>DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR CN ZONE DISTRICT</b>	<b>STANDARD</b>	<b>PROPOSED PROJECT</b>	<b>CONFORMS</b>
Site coverage (building footprint)	30%	20%	Project Complies
Floor area (gross floor area)	0.50:1	0.32:1 (22,820 sq. ft.)	Project Complies
<b>Building setbacks</b>			
Front	50 ft.	50 ft.	Project Complies
Rear	10 ft.	160 ft.	Project Complies
Interior Side	10 ft.	60 ft.	Project Complies
Building Height	50 ft.	45 ft.	Project Complies
<b>Parking Spaces</b>	<b>Required per PAMC 18.52</b>	<b>Proposed Project</b>	<b>Conformance</b>
Vehicle spaces	1 space per 250 sq. ft. (92)	96 spaces	Project Complies



**Legend**

-  Historic Site
-  Special Setback
-  Near Creek (SCVWD)
-  Curb Edge
-  Sidewalk
-  Tree (TR)
-  Known Structures
-  Underlying Lot Line
-  Easement
-  Lot Dimensions
-  Water Feature
-  Railroad



The City of  
Palo Alto



## 777 Welch Road Location Map

This map is a product of the  
City of Palo Alto GIS

