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Architectural Review Board

Staff Report

Agenda Date: December 19, 2013

To: Architectural Review Board

From: Russ Reich, Senior Planner

**Department: Planning and
Community Environment**

Subject: **3877 El Camino Real [13PLN-00439]:** A Request by EID Architects on behalf of Zijin, Inc. for Preliminary Architectural Review of a new three story mixed use building with 4,365 sq. ft. of commercial office/retail area and 21,663 sq. ft. of area for 17 housing units over one level of semi depressed podium parking replacing the existing 6,000 sq. ft. single-story restaurant building and surface parking lot. Zone district: Service Commercial (CS) and RM-30.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Architectural Review Board (ARB) conduct a Preliminary Review of the conceptual plans for the project and provide comments on the design to staff and the applicant. No formal action may be taken at a Preliminary Review and comments made are not binding on the City or the applicant. Staff has summarized key issues to provide a framework for comments.

BACKGROUND

Site Information

The site is located mid-block on the north east side of El Camino Real between Curtner and Ventura Avenues. The site is a unique "L" shaped parcel that also has street frontage on Curtner Avenue. The 0.75 acre site includes a one-story, approximately 6,000-square-foot, restaurant building on the El Camino Real frontage, and a surface parking lot that covers the rest of the site with vehicular access only from Curtner Avenue. The Compadres restaurant closed and the building has been vacant for about five years. Landscaping and trees exist around the perimeter of the parking lot. Adjacent uses primarily consist of one and two story multifamily structures, with the exception of commercial uses on either side of the parcel at the El Camino Real frontage. The commercial use to north (left side) is an automotive service facility that does oil changes and to the south (right side) is a Starbucks Coffee retail business with drive through window service. Across El Camino Real to the west are two liquor stores, a small market, a florist and nursery business, and fast food retailers.

The site has two separate Land Use Designations. The Comprehensive Plan land use map indicates that the portion of the lot that faces El Camino Real has a Service Commercial

designation and the rear portion that goes back and continues to the Curtner Avenue frontage has a Multifamily Residential designation.

Project Description

The proposed project is the demolition of the existing restaurant building and construction of a new mixed-use building. The project description provided by the applicant is included as Attachment A. The concept plans indicate two floors of office/retail space at the El Camino Real frontage consisting of approximately 4,365 square feet. Behind the commercial portion would be 17, two-story, attached residential townhome units over a semi-depressed parking podium, providing 55 parking spaces. The residential units would total approximately 21,663 square feet in floor area. The proposed building height is approximately 32 feet with smaller elements that reach a height of 35 feet. The vehicular ingress and egress for the project would occur on Curtner Avenue, at the same location as the existing parking lot for the former restaurant. The building's primary pedestrian entrance for the commercial portion of the project would be located at the sidewalk on El Camino Real with an additional entrance behind the commercial space from the semi depressed parking garage. The pedestrian access for the residential units would be provided off of Curtner Avenue. The proposed landscaping would include various ground covers, shrubs and trees. The new trees would be strategically placed along the perimeter property boundary to enhance privacy and provide a landscape buffer between the project and the adjacent multifamily residential uses.

DISCUSSION

Comprehensive Plan Conformance

The proposed commercial and residential uses are consistent with the site's Service Commercial and Multifamily Residential land use designations. The proposed project is the replacement of an existing single-story restaurant building with a new approximately three-story mixed use building containing 17 residential units. The proposal is consistent with the following Comprehensive plan policies, as indicated:

Policy L-4-The project would maintain and reinforce the residential neighborhood, replacing a restaurant parking lot with new multifamily housing in a multifamily zone district while also maintaining the commercial vitality by replacing a use that has been vacant for five years with new office/retail/residential uses.

Policy L-6- The project would be consistent with the scale of the neighborhood with a two story commercial component on El Camino Real and three level multifamily residential uses located between other one, two, and three story multifamily residential buildings.

Policy L-9- The project enhances mixed use areas by adding residential units and new commercial uses to an area zoned for mixed use development.

Policy L-12- The project enhances the existing multifamily residential neighborhood by replacing a commercial parking lot with multifamily residential units.

Policy L-13- The project increases the housing density, adding residential units to a location that previously had none.

Policy L-31- The project site lies between California Avenue and Ventura Avenue and provides mixed use in a location where mixed use and increased housing density is encouraged.

Policy L-35- The project proposal limits the building heights to two and three stories, as encouraged by this policy.

Policy L-36- The proposal includes office/retail spaces as encouraged by the policy while maintaining a separation between the new commercial uses and the existing residential uses as stated in the Policy.

Policy L-48- The project incorporates a well-designed building that is compatible with surrounding development.

Policy L-49- The new buildings would include human scale details and massing.

Policy L-67- The proposal does not include vehicular access from El Camino Real to enhance vehicle and pedestrian safety at the El Camino Real frontage, preventing faster moving cars from needing to slow down quickly to enter at an El Camino Real driveway. All vehicular access would be from Curtner Avenue, where the traffic speeds are slower and the project access point is close to a signalized intersection.

Policy L-75- The proposal places the parking behind and beneath the building, hiding it from view.

Policy L-77- The project's semi depressed parking beneath the new building provides an alternative to surface parking lots as encouraged by the Policy.

Parking and Traffic

The project would include one level of semi depressed parking. Due to the narrow width of the property along El Camino Real, the Curtner Avenue frontage would provide the vehicular access to the parking garage. Avoiding a vehicular access point on El Camino Real improves pedestrian safety along the street. El Camino Real traffic is fast moving and a quick turn into a narrow driveway would not be ideal. Curtner Avenue is a side street with a slower traffic speed making it more ideal as a vehicle entry point. Having the access on Curtner Avenue also provides the added benefit of a signalized intersection, allowing both right and left turns onto El Camino Real from Curtner Avenue. The garage would provide 55 vehicle parking spaces and 10 bicycle spaces. The project concept would meet the parking requirement set forth in the Palo Alto Municipal Code.

A traffic analysis will be conducted for the formal project submittal, which would study the projects potential impact on traffic and parking in the area.

Trees and Landscaping

There are currently numerous trees along the perimeter of the property that buffer the site from the adjacent multifamily properties. The formal application submittal will need to clarify which of these trees are to be removed and precisely where new trees will be planted in order to maintain an adequate landscape/privacy buffer between the properties. While the landscape concept is not fully developed, staff would encourage the applicant to consider a reverse approach to the "plaza" areas shown on the plans. As currently proposed, there are open spaces surrounding elevated planted areas. A reverse strategy, having elevated planting areas that surround the open spaces would be more desirable from a user's standpoint. Having the open spaces encapsulated and surrounded by the landscape areas affords the opportunity for the open spaces to be more useful and feel more comfortable, rather than just being a pathway around a large planter box.

Context-Based Design Considerations and Findings

In addition to Zoning Compliance and Architectural Review approval findings, Context-Based Design Considerations and Findings found in PAMC Chapter 18.18 would be applicable to the project. Many of the South El Camino Real Design Guidelines were adopted in the Context Based Design Guidelines and Findings. The following findings that appear relevant to this project are listed for discussion purposes:

1. **Pedestrian and Bicycle Environment:** The design of new projects shall promote pedestrian walkability, a bicycle friendly environment, and connectivity through design elements.

The proposal appears to be bike friendly in that it would provide bike parking within the parking area of the garage. Bike racks at the buildings entries would also be required. The design includes pedestrian friendly design elements such as awnings, large expanses of storefront glass, and balconies.

2. **Street Building Facades:** Street facades shall be designed to provide a strong relationship with the sidewalk and the street(s), to create an environment that supports and encourages pedestrian activity through design elements.

The proposal includes a two-story retail/office building that holds the El Camino Real street frontage. It is set back four feet to provide a 12 foot wide sidewalk. The initial proposal had a vehicle access point on El Camino Real but the plan has been revised to only have a pedestrian entry point, relocating the vehicle entry point to Curtner Avenue to enhance the pedestrian experience at El Camino Real.

3. **Massing and Setbacks:** Buildings shall be designed to minimize massing and conform to proper setbacks.

The building will meet the required setback to provide the 12 foot sidewalk at El Camino Real. The two and three story heights are appropriate for the context of the project.

4. **Low Density Residential Transitions:** Where new projects are built abutting existing lower-scale residential development, care shall be taken to respect the scale and privacy of neighboring properties.

The proposed building would be set back from the property line relative to the adjacent residential neighbors and would be further away where neighboring residential buildings come closer to the property line.

5. **Project Open Space:** Private and public open space shall be provided so that it is usable for the residents, visitors, and/or employees of a site.

The proposal appears to include adequate open spaces but further design development is needed to ensure that the spaces are more functional.

6. **Parking Design:** Parking needs shall be accommodated but shall not be allowed to overwhelm the character of the project or detract from the pedestrian environment.

Consistent with the Guidelines, the parking for the project has been located below grade. The entry to the garage has been located on Curtner Avenue to avoid a new curb cut on El Camino Real.

- 8. Sustainability and Green Building Design: Project design and materials to achieve sustainability and green building design should be incorporated into the project. Green building design considers the environment during design and construction.

The project will incorporate a multitude of Green building design elements such as solar electric power, high efficiency HVAC equipment, energy efficient lighting systems, structurally insulated roofs, low-e windows, solar window shading, low VOC finishes, tankless or electric heat pump water heaters, structured plumbing with recirculating pumps, foam wrapped building envelope, tight ducting, energy star appliances, water saving fixtures, whole house vacuums, and indoor air exchangers.

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). An initial study would be prepared in accordance with CEQA for a formal project on this site, and as noted, a traffic analysis would be required in addition to other studies.

ATTACHMENTS


- Attachment A: Project Description*
- Attachment B: Site Location Map
- Attachment C: Development Plans (Board Members Only)*

* Prepared by Applicant; all other attachments prepared by Staff

COURTESY COPIES

Applicant: EID Architects
Owner: Zijin, Inc.

Prepared By: Russ Reich, Senior Planner 

Manager Review: Amy French, Chief Planning Official 



**3877 El Camino & 393 Curtner Avenue
Palo Alto, California 94306
A Vibrant & Sustainable Mixed Use Community**

Proposed Project Design

The proposed design will create a vibrant and sustainable mixed-use community at the southeast corner of El Camino Real and Curtner Avenue – a portion of the El Camino Real that will be revitalized and make the Palo Alto community proud. The project will include a mix of commercial and townhome style condominiums, and ample podium parking below.

Our team is collaborating with the City of Palo Alto Community Development staff to thoughtfully synthesize a highly sustainable community for the proposed site plan and architectural design. The project will complement and support the existing urban fabric, and will be harmonious with the new developments underway in close proximity to our site.

COMMERCIAL SPACE – APPROX. 4,600SF

The commercial spaces will contribute significantly to the revitalization of El Camino Real, and will be located on two floors along this business corridor. Designed for pedestrians, the commercial spaces are open, inviting, and convenient for local residents.

CONDOMINIUM RESIDENCES – 16 UNITS

Flexibly designed two bedroom with office or three bedroom condominiums are planned to maximize energy efficiency and provide healthy living environments for residents. The inclusion of 15% affordable housing will provide for a diverse range of income levels.

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

A unifying theme throughout the project will be the use of sustainable materials and energy efficiency technologies. Green building has become more and more main stream in recent years, thus homeowners and businesses increasingly seek the high level of quality, natural beauty, economic and health benefits that sustainable design and construction entail. Our green design approach is particularly suitable for a community that includes a 15% affordable housing component. While all residents of this sustainable community will enjoy lower utility bills (utility bills are reduced by as much as 95% in “zero energy” homes), this significant monthly savings will be particularly meaningful to low and moderate income residents. The health benefits of sustainable design, such as better indoor air quality resulting from use of no- or low-VOC paints and adhesives, are another advantage for sensitive populations. Green design will support a thriving commercial community, as employers will benefit from reduced utility bills and customers will be happy to visit pleasant, daylight-filled spaces.

The commercial component of the project will include cutting-edge commercial applications of energy efficient and recycled building materials. Some of the features envisioned for this component include solar electric power systems, high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, energy-efficient lighting systems, structurally insulated roofs, low-e windows, passive solar design, solar window shading, thermally advanced building envelopes, low-VOC finishes.

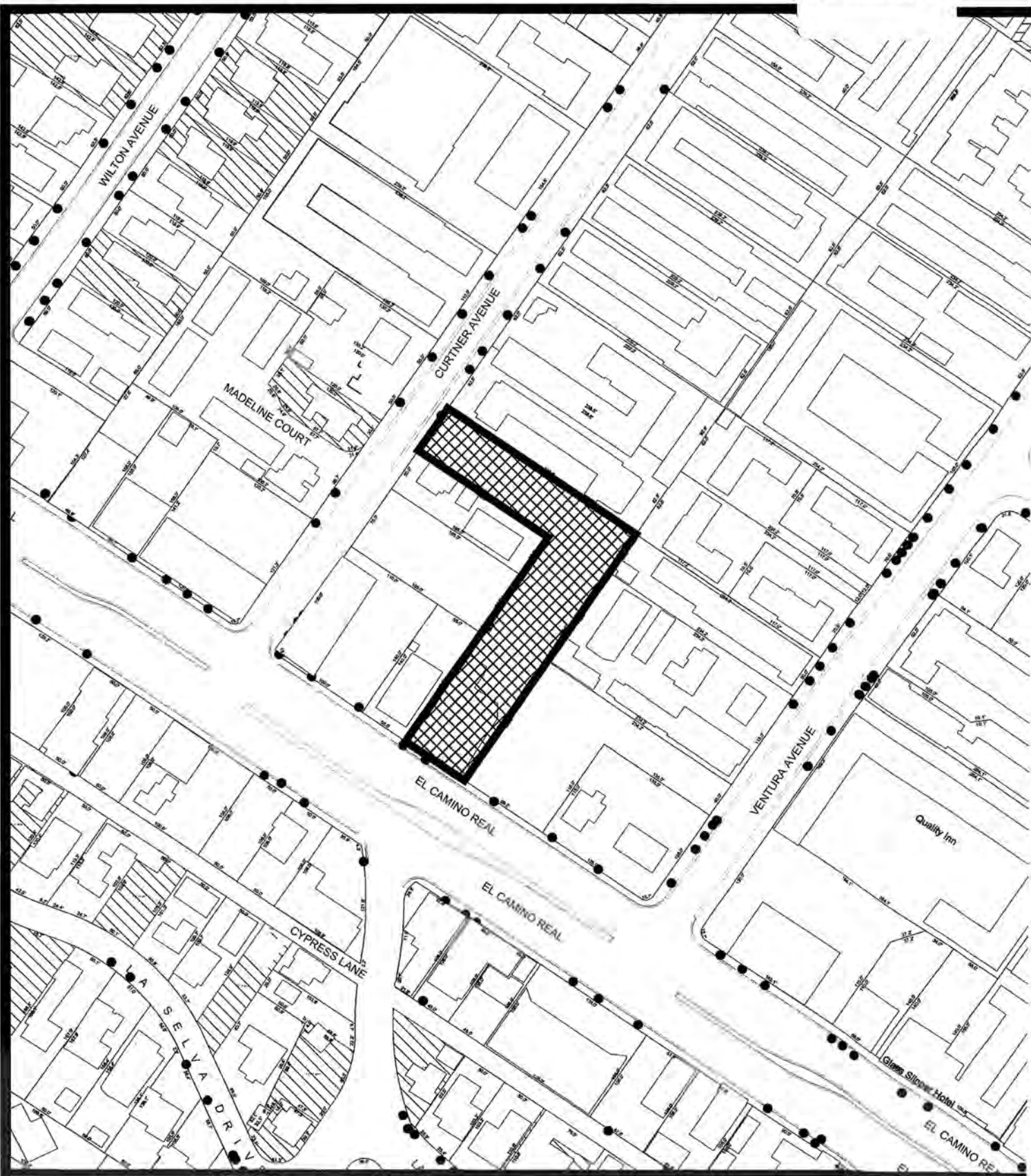
The residences will include all of our standard Enviro-Home features including solar electric power, tankless or electric heat pump water heaters, structured plumbing with recirculating pumps, high-efficiency furnaces with energy star thermostats, low-e windows, increased insulation, foam wrapped building envelope, advanced HVAC



design, tight ducting, Energy Star appliances, water saving fixtures, high efficiency lighting and ceiling fan outlets. Additional features are planned to include eco-cabinets constructed with wheatboard frames, recycled flooring options, bamboo and cork flooring, whole house vacuums, indoor air exchangers, front-loading laundry equipment and low-VOC paints.

Landscape elements throughout the entire project will include a variety of drought-tolerant native California plants, satellite-controlled irrigation systems (where feasible), porous paving and local materials.

We will recycle eighty-five percent (85%) of onsite construction waste via local de-construction teams, who specialize in onsite/offsite methods to convert scrap lumber, drywall and brick/block into mulch, erosion control material, soil amendment and aggregate base.



The City of
Palo Alto



3877 El Camino Real

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

