



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

PLANNING & COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

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Item #2

MEMORANDUM

To: Chair Kohler and Members of the Historic Resources Board (HRB)
From: Matthew Weintraub, Planner
Date: May 28, 2015
Re: 203 Forest Avenue - 14PLN-00472

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the HRB review the attached Historic Resources Evaluation (HRE, Attachment A), Architectural Review Board (ARB) report (Attachment B), and project plans (Attachment C), which were presented to the ARB on May 21, 2015, and receive the applicant's presentation. Staff seeks the HRB's comments to the ARB on the HRE's recommended finding of non-resource, and on the proposed project's architectural compatibility with its environment. The HRB's comments will be relayed to the ARB prior to the ARB considering the project again.

Executive Summary

The applicant requests approval of a project that would add a residential unit and supporting facilities to an existing commercial building constructed in 1958 and containing 4,626 square feet of commercial floor area on the ground floor and mezzanine.

The building is not a designated historic structure. The HRE (Attachment A) submitted by the applicant indicates that the existing property is not eligible for listing in the federal or State register. It is not currently considered for designation in the City's Historic Inventory.

The project site is not located within an identified historic district. It is located on the Emerson Street block between Hamilton Avenue and Forest Avenue, which contains several buildings listed in the City's Historic Inventory as shown on the map provided to the ARB (see Attachment B). The area is identified by the Downtown Urban Design Guide as having "its own distinct architectural characteristics" and "strong historic character".

The ARB's task, in recommending approval of the project, is to make all of the relevant Approval Findings contained in Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC) Section 18.76.020; Finding #4 states that the ARB must find that: "In areas considered by the board (ARB) as having a unified design character or historical character, the design is compatible with such character". The ARB does not need to determine that the area has historical character, because the Downtown Urban Design Guide contains an assertion of this state.

The project description is found in the attached ARB staff report. Staff has considered the project as eligible for an exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act as a Class 1 project (floor area addition less than 10,000 square feet (sf) to an existing building).

Discussion

Downtown Urban Design Guide

According to the Downtown Urban Design Guide approved by City Council for use by staff and the ARB, the project site is located in the Emerson Street Secondary District of the South of Forest Commercial District, which is described as follows:

“This area is singled out as a secondary district because it has its own distinct architectural characteristics. The vibrant pedestrian quality of this street is contained in its excellent human scale and strong historic character of large, open storefronts, often with high ceilings and transom windows protected by front awnings. Buildings are also individualistic, while conforming to some or most of these historic patterns. Recent development has supported this historic architectural expression and has proven both commercially and architecturally successful.”

Major Project

The project represents a significant alteration to the character or appearance of the existing building. The applicant characterized the project as “minor” since the original application did not exceed 5,000 sf of additional floor area; however, the revised plans indicate the additional floor area exceeds 5,000 sf. For these reasons, the project is considered a major project, and the ARB is allowed up to three hearings to render its recommendation.

The project is the construction of new additions to the building as follows:

- New floor area in the amount of 4,999 sf to create a residential unit on two floors
- A new residential garage providing two parking spaces for residential use
- A new trash enclosure underneath the current drive through canopy.

The project also includes façade renovations described in the ARB report.

Referral to the HRB and HRB Purview

At the May 21 ARB meeting, the ARB voted unanimously to continue the application to a date uncertain. ARB members indicated that they agreed with staff’s recommendation to seek HRB comments on the application before the ARB makes a decision. Staff requests that the HRB provide comments to the ARB on the following:

1. Review and comment on the HRE’s recommended finding that the existing structure is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historical Resources.

2. Review and comment on the compatibility of the proposed new design with the distinct architectural characteristics and strong historic character of the Emerson Street secondary district as described in the Downtown Urban Design Guide.

Attachments:

- A. HRE
- B. ARB Staff Report, May 21, 2015
- C. Project Plans