



STAFF REPORT

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

January 24, 2023

TO: Honorable Chair and Commissioners

FROM: David Loya, Director of Community Development

PREPARER: Delores Freitas, Senior Planner

DATE: January 17, 2023

TITLE: Consider Approval of the Cal Poly Bookstore Design Review Permit

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission approve the Cal Poly Bookstore Design Review Permit by adopting: 1) a California Environmental Quality Act Exemption per §15301, Class 1 -Existing Facilities; and then 2) the Action with Findings and Conditions of Approval and proposed plan set.

INTRODUCTION:

697 8th Street sits on the southeast corner of the Plaza within the boundary of the Arcata Plaza Area Historic District per Historical Preservation Element policy H-3, which is the most intensely regulated design review zone in the City. The subject site has historical ties going back to 1850. In the mid-1950s the current structure was constructed as the Bank of America – Arcata Branch. In its current state it serves as The Campus Store for Cal Poly Humboldt. The Campus Store serves the Cal Poly Humboldt students and Humboldt County community as a mercantile space. The applicant proposes to modify the existing storefront including the fenestration of the existing street-facing windows and installation of new permanent signage. Each item is discussed separately below and findings of approval to support the discussion are included in Exhibit 1 of Attachment A.

DISCUSSION:

The applicant's proposal is limited to storefront alterations to windows and signage and will not affect existing site layout, building arrangement, setbacks, accessory structures, or outdoor lighting. Proposed modifications will increase architectural compatibility by ensuring the resulting façade will more closely match surrounding ground-floor retail storefronts with a larger percentage of transparency, adding to the overall feel of the Plaza as a central shopping area, and by bringing the site closer into compliance with City landscaping standards.

Exterior Structural Alterations

Per Design Element policy D2-g, contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing structures shall not be prohibited when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical or architectural character of the property, if the size and proportions of alterations are compatible with the original building. Given this policy guidance and design sensitivity of the Plaza, staff requested the applicant prepare a historic and architectural report for the property to support

required findings. The report was prepared by project architect Howard Maxwell and is included as Attachment B to this report.

The submitted architect's report finds that the existing 1950s building does not have significant historical attributes and should not be considered a relevant example of the International Style and that proposed modifications will not deter from the architectural style from which it was designed. The increase in transparency on the north and west elevations will connect the building to the public as well as the Plaza by connecting the building to the architectural language of other commercial buildings in the Plaza district.

In summary, the increased window area and entryway replacement are compatible with the original building and the alterations do not destroy distinguishing original qualities or character of the building. This finding is supported by both the project architect and the determination of the Historic Landmarks Committee who reviewed the item at their November 17th meeting. Prepared findings support the applicant's proposal by finding proposed alterations will not negatively affect the existing site or the basic historical pattern or design of the Plaza.

Signage

The applicant proposed 282.2 total square feet of signage spread across all four sides of the building. Generally speaking, proposed permanent signage will closely match existing temporary banner signs onsite in terms of color, type font, and scale. The extent of the calculated sign area triggers a Master Sign permit. In order to achieve variety and to encourage good design, the Review Authority may grant exceptions to design requirements, subject to a Master Sign Plan.

The proposed signage is found to be in compliance with the standards of Land Use Code sections 9.38.070 through 9.38.090 (General Requirements for all Signs; Sign Standards by Zone; Standards for Specific Sign Types) as discussed in project findings (Attachment A). The applicant proposes flush-mounted signs with copy in a specifically designated horizontal band which is identified in Design Element policy D-2i as the preferred citywide sign type. Internally-lit signs are encouraged to be used sparingly and designed to be unobtrusive. The applicant has limited internally-lit signage to one of the multiple proposed signs and the proposed conditions of approval will limit illumination to Land Use Code standards. The color of the signage will tie in Cal Poly Humboldt's colors of green and gold into other green and gold elements integrated into the plaza and neighboring plaza storefronts.

Staff has prepared findings to support approval of the project as submitted and recommends the Planning Commission approve the Cal Poly Bookstore Design Review Permit by adopting the draft Action that includes the Findings of Approval, Conditions of Approval, and an environmental determination (Attachment A, Exhibits 1 and 2). The recommendation is based on the department's determination the proposed project with conditions of approval incorporated is in compliance with the Arcata General Plan and Land Use Code.

COMMITTEE/COMMISSION REVIEW:

The project findings included in the historic and architectural report as submitted by the project architect were supported by the Historic Landmarks Committee who reviewed the item at their November 17th meeting.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CEQA):

The project qualifies for a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) §15301, Class 1 – *Existing Facilities* Exemption as further described in the environmental review findings (Attachment A). This CEQA recommendation is based on the proposed application materials and draft findings and conditions of approval submitted to the Planning Commission for the project.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A_Draft Action (PDF)

Attachment B_Historical and Architectural Report (PDF)