



STAFF REPORT

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

March 12, 2024

TO: Honorable Chair and Commissioners

FROM: David Loya, Director of Community Development

PREPARER: Joe Mateer, Senior Planner

DATE: March 06, 2024

TITLE: **Approve a Design Review Permit and Minor Use Permit for a proposed multifamily development on vacant land at the southeast corner of 12th and I Streets; File No. 234-003-DR-MUP**

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission open the public hearing, receive a staff report and public comments, and consider approving the Design Review by adopting: a California Environmental Quality Act §15332, Class 32 In-Fill Development Project environmental review exemption, and then 2) the Action with Findings of Approval, Conditions of Approval, and the approved plans.

INTRODUCTION:

The applicant is requesting Design Review approval for a new eight-unit multifamily development on vacant lands in the Arcata Heights Conservation Area. Site modifications for building height and laundry facilities are requested. The proposed development spans over two separate legal parcels which will be required to be merged prior to construction. Land Use Code §9.30.040.B, §9.72.040.C Table 7-2 and §9.72.080.C.2. gives the Planning Commission the authority to review and approve the proposed development as shown in Exhibit 3 of the Action (Attachment A).

The applicants seek approval for the development of a 5,282 square foot apartment structure 37 feet in height that consists of six primary dwelling units and two State accessory dwelling units. The project includes seven on-site parking spaces, eight enclosed bicycle parking spaces, solid waste and recycling, driveway, landscaping and other site improvements (Attachment A, Exhibit 3).

In 2006 the subject lands were subdivided to create two separate parcels as depicted with Assessor's Parcel Numbers 021-091-009 and 021-091-010. To meet development standards, a recommended condition of approval ensures the parcels are merged prior to building permit submittal. The parcel merger will be reviewed by the Zoning Administrator and not require additional review by the Commission. The applicant chose to defer the parcel merger until after design review approval. A Settlement-era home was demolished in 2021 after the Historic Landmarks Committee determined the older home lost its integrity as a historic resource.

The applicant is requesting modifications to the following standards:

- **Height limit in Residential-High Density Zone:** The applicant requests a site modification to exceed the 35-foot maximum building height for a portion of the three-story structure. There is about a ten percent slope in a southwest direction for the subject parcels. The maximum structure height is 37 feet on portions of the south – west building elevations. Although the project could be modified to meet the height standard, the building designer prefers the aesthetics of the proposed steeper roof pitch.
- **On-site laundry.** Code §9.42.140.H.1 requires one common washer and dryer for every five dwelling units for multi-family rentals. The project does not include any on-site common or private laundry appliances. The agent notes commercial, self-serve laundry facilities are less than two blocks away.

The subject property is zoned Residential High Density and provides a transition from the urban downtown core to a mix of detached single family and multi-family residences of relatively similar height and massing. Although the development as proposed exceeds the maximum height by two feet, the massing is compatible with the surrounding properties and the structure’s design is well-suited to the site’s architectural history and surrounding context. The proposal exceeds required standards for landscaping, site coverage and other multifamily development standards.

State accessory dwelling unit law requires the City to ministerially approve up to two detached, accessory dwelling units for proposed multifamily developments. The current proposal attaches the two, state mandated accessory dwelling units with the other primary dwelling units. Community Development Department staff recommends the Planning Commission accept the proposed building configuration to minimize further ground disturbances. The Commission has previously determined that including any allowed accessory units in the initial planning stage is preferable to an applicant staggering applications simply to take advantage of State accessory dwelling unit law adding units after the first build. No on-site parking is required for the state accessory dwelling units. Therefore, the project is within the allowable minimum and maximum parking standard.

Except for the requested site modifications, the proposed project is consistent with applicable design policies and multifamily residential development standards pursuant to Code §9.42.130. The structures generally maintain a moderate-density neighborhood character and abrupt changes in height and bulk of structures have been avoided by breaking the massing along 12th Street into smaller elements. Building elevations have been articulated to avoid long, continuous wall and roof planes. Building design includes traditional elements such as vertical two-over two windows, porches and decks, and steeply pitched rooflines mirror the historic style of the previously existent settlement-era structure onsite. Appropriate lighting and landscaping along 12th and “I” Streets soften the overall appearance of the structure and shield the proposed parking area to the south.

Community Development Department staff recommends the Planning Commission make the findings regarding compatibility and appropriateness of the proposed uses based on the attached Action.

Environmental Review

The project qualifies for a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) §15332, Class 32 - In-Fill Development Projects Exemption as further described in the environmental review findings (Attachment A, Exhibit 1). This CEQA recommendation is based on the proposed application materials and draft findings and conditions of approval submitted to the Planning Commission for the proposed project.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Action, Findings, Conditions, Plans (PDF)