

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMITTEE AGENDA REPORT

SUBJECT: 1925 SANTA BARBARA (ARCH-0448-2022); CONSTRUCTION OF A MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE RAILROAD HISTORIC DISTRICT

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APPLICANT: Obispo Investments Inc

REPRESENTATIVE: Barry Williams

RECOMMENDATION

Provide direction to the applicant and staff on design revisions to achieve consistency with the Architectural Guidelines of the Railroad District Plan

1.0 BACKGROUND

The applicant proposes to develop a mixed-use project of three buildings accommodating four residential units and nonresidential space, on property located within the Railroad Historic District (RDP). As provided by the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance (Municipal Code Ch. 14.01), the Cultural Heritage Committee will review and make recommendations to the Community Development Director on this Architectural Review application, which includes new construction within an historic district (MC §14.01.030 (C) (4)).

2.0 DISCUSSION

2.1 Site and Setting

The subject property is a rectangular parcel measuring about 7,250 square feet in area, on the west side of Santa Barbara Avenue, 225 feet south of Upham Street, in a Service Commercial (C-S) Zone, and Historical Preservation Overlay (-H) Zone denoting its location in the Railroad Historic District. It is developed with a small commercial building installed in 1985 to serve as an office for an auto sales lot, and most recently used for personal services (The Brow Shoppe).



Figure 1: 1925 Santa Barbara

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Across the street are the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum and a parking lot serving the Railroad Depot area. Adjacent to the site, to the north, is a group of residential structures: a single-family dwelling, Accessory Dwelling Unit, and rental unit. To the south is another single-family dwelling. These dwellings are now considered legally nonconforming in the C-S Zone and, though they were built more than fifty years ago, neither of these adjacent properties are included in the City’s Inventory of Historic Resources. Also found in the immediate vicinity is the Del Monte Café (a Contributing List Resource), a development comprised of industrial sheds (formerly Flanders Bicycle Shop; 1951 Santa Barbara), and a newer development of three mixed-use buildings, designed in an historical vernacular style with false fronts (1957-1977 Santa Barbara). Behind the subject site are the Chapek House (at 843 Upham) and the Bittick Residence (1902 Chorro), both Master List Historic Resources within the adjacent Old Town Historic District.



Figure 2: Buildings in the vicinity (within Railroad District)

Railroad District Plan. In 1998 the City Council adopted the Railroad District Plan (RDP), an “Area Plan”, intended to implement General Plan policies within the Railroad District. The plan aims to retain and preserve the historic and architectural character of the District with architectural standards to guide new development. The Architectural Guidelines provided in the Plan help to ensure that new development is architecturally compatible with adjacent buildings. These guidelines are applied in reviewing new development in the Railroad District, as discussed in more detail below (§3.3--Railroad District Plan Architectural Review Guidelines).

2.2 Project Description

The proposed project is comprised of three new buildings accommodating four dwellings and a nonresidential suite (see also Project Plans, Attachment A).

Non-Residential Space	485 sq. ft.	1-story
Accessible Living Unit	825 sq. ft.	2-story
Tri-Plex (825 sq. ft. /ea.)	2,475 sq. ft.	2-story over under-building parking area

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The nonresidential space is provided at the Santa Barbara Avenue street frontage, and is intended for the range of uses and activities permitted in a Service-Commercial Zone (Zoning § 17.10.020 (A)). The buildings are designed in a contemporary style, based on rectangular forms, with medium-sloped pitched roofs. The applicant has provided a Project Description (Attachment B) which describes the project design concept:

The design concept is to continue the commercial street frontage while adding more permanent residences. The commercial space continues the pattern of small commercial spaces along this side of the avenue in this block. The residential units have been designed in a residential character with the living area on the ground floor and the bedrooms above, in a loft type configuration. (Applicant Project Description, pg. 3)



Figure 3: Project Rendering, from Santa Barbara Avenue

3.0 EVALUATION

Guidance for construction within historic districts is provided in the City’s Historic Preservation Program Guidelines and the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. In addition, the Railroad District Plan includes architectural guidelines that supplement the City’s existing architectural guidelines, for new development within the Railroad District. Relevant applicable guidelines, standards, and recommendations from these documents are outlined below.

3.1 Historic Preservation Program Guidelines

Alterations to Historic Resources	
§ 3.2.1 (c) Architecturally compatible development within Historic Districts	New structures in historic districts shall be designed to be architecturally compatible with the district’s prevailing historic character as measured by their consistency with the scale, massing, rhythm, signature architectural elements, exterior materials, siting and street yard setbacks of the district’s historic structures. New structures are not required to copy or imitate historic structures, or seek to create the illusion that a new building is historic.

<p>§ 3.2.2 Architectural compatibility</p>	<p>The CHC reviews development in historic districts for architectural compatibility with nearby historic resources, and for consistency with applicable design and preservation policies, standards, and historic district descriptions in Section 5.2. New development should not sharply contrast with, significantly block public views of, or visually detract from, the historic architectural character of historically designated structures located adjacent to the property to be developed, or detract from the prevailing historic architectural character of the historic district.</p>
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The City’s Historical Preservation Program Guidelines include a description of the Railroad Historic District (Attachment C). As described in the Guidelines, development in the Railroad Historic District corresponded to the development of the Southern Pacific Railroad yard. Commercial and residential buildings were constructed to accommodate railway workers, freight and passengers, and employees of Southern Pacific and related businesses. Surviving historic structures date from 1894 to 1945, corresponding with the peak activity of the rail yard and the district’s period of significance, and most were constructed from 1894 to 1920. South of Upham Street the lots are much larger to accommodate the railroad structures. Common characteristic site and architectural features of the District include:

- Commercial buildings located at back of sidewalk with zero street setbacks
- Front building facades oriented parallel to street
- Finish floors at grade
- Recessed front entries oriented toward the street
- Predominantly one- and two-story buildings
- Gable and some hip roof types of low to medium pitch, occasionally with parapets
- Predominantly painted wood siding, with some masonry or smooth plaster wall siding
- Traditional fenestration, such as double-hung, wood sash windows, and fixed divided light windows
- Rectilinear massing, with equal or lesser volume on second floor
- Simple detailing often along the roof line including brackets

Discussion: The proposed new construction is one- and two-stories in height overall, consistent with the scale of existing development in the vicinity. The façade and entry of the street-fronting building is oriented to the street, in keeping with common site characteristics noted for the Railroad Historic District in the City’s Historical Preservation Program Guidelines (Attachment C). The new buildings exhibit simplicity in form and detailing and echo architectural characteristics of some of the buildings in the vicinity. However, the development lacks many of the characteristics described in the Architectural Guidelines for the Railroad Historic District and, as further discussed below (§3.2.3 – Railroad District Plan Architectural Guidelines), and the Committee should discuss if revisions should be made to the project to achieve consistency with the District’s prevailing character and RDP guidelines as discussed in more detail later in this report.

3.2 Secretary of the Interior’s Standards (Rehabilitation)

Standards for Rehabilitation	
9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.	
Setting (District / Neighborhood)	
<i>Recommended</i>	<i>Not Recommended</i>
Identifying, retaining, and preserving building and landscape features that are important in defining the overall historic character of the setting. Such features can include circulation systems (roads and streets); furnishings and fixtures (light posts or benches); vegetation, gardens and yards; adjacent open space (fields, parks, commons, or woodlands); and important views or visual relationships.	Removing or substantially changing those building and landscape features in the setting which are important in defining the historic character so that, as a result, the character is diminished.

Discussion: The Secretary of Interior’s Standards provide guidance on rehabilitation of historic buildings, including approaches to work treatments and techniques that are either consistent (“Recommended”) or inconsistent (“Not Recommended”) with the Standards, specific to various features of historic buildings and sites. New construction will not materially alter historical characteristics of the subject property since, as noted above, the property is not included in the Inventory of Historic Resources.

3.3 Railroad District Plan Architectural Guidelines

The Railroad District Plan includes Architectural Guidelines for new development within the Railroad District, aimed at ensuring that new development reflects the unique architectural character of the Railroad Historic District (Attachment D). Although the proposed project exhibits some aspects of consistency with the guidelines, several of the guidelines are highlighted in the discussion below, to guide discussion about where design refinements may be necessary to achieve overall consistency with the relevant guidelines.

Building Form, Massing and Roof Lines. Simple, rectilinear building forms are encouraged, with horizontal massing at lower building levels and equal or lesser volume above. Medium-sloping roof pitches should be used, typically gable, hip, and shed roof forms, and false-fronts, shed roofs, and parapets may be used. Deep roof overhangs are common, particularly for commercial buildings, at ground floor level, and these are typically supported with exposed, diagonal support braces or decorative brackets. Simple dormers can be used for light or ventilation. (see RDP Guidelines, pg. 76).

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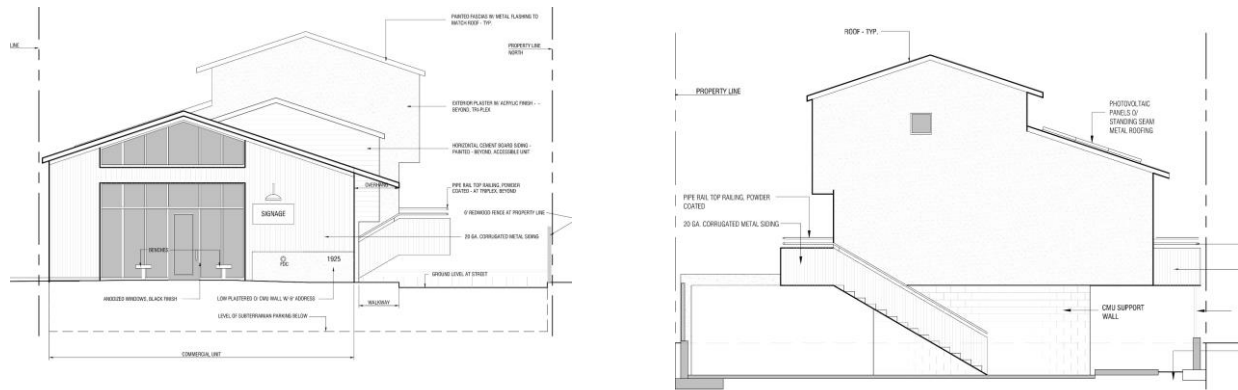


Figure 4: Building forms and massing: Front (E) Elevation, left; Back (W) Elev, right

The buildings are based on simple rectangular forms (see Fig. 4, below), with building volume diminishing with height, covered by medium-slope (4:12) pitched gable roofs. Massing volume is kept at the lower level, except that the rear building is set over an open parking area. The uneven roof heights, and offset alignment of the buildings creates an asymmetric profile that stands in contrast to the simpler, more regular building arrangements and forms elsewhere in the district. At the ground floor, roof overhangs are shallow (except at the north side of the commercial building) and lack exposed support or decorative elements such as braces or brackets. Dormers are not employed, but a monitor style roofline for the residential buildings provides added light and ventilation.

Lower level massing	Unusual cantilever over parking area (triplex building)
Roof overhangs	Shallow overhangs (except north side of commercial building)
Decorative supports	Lack of decorative support elements

Doors and Windows. Doors and windows should emphasize symmetry and be vertically oriented, and should generally have wood or plaster trim. Doors are typically single or multipanel, occasionally with glazing and transom windows above. Windows are typically

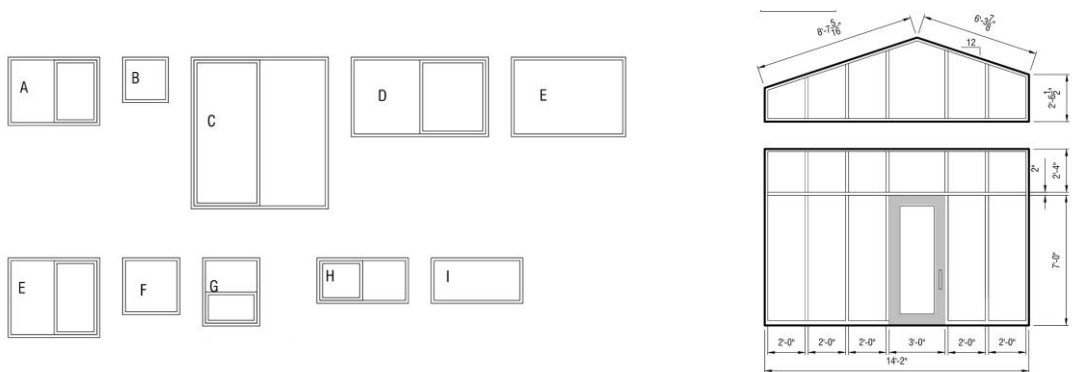


Figure 5: Window types for project, from Window Schedule in plans

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fixed, or double hung, often with divided lites, and are often grouped in multiples of two or three, side by side. Horizontal windows may be used with divided lites and may be grouped. In plaster buildings windows may be arched and recessed, sometimes with wood trim (see RDP Guidelines, pg. 77).

Doors and windows on the commercial suite provide a symmetrical and vertically-oriented appearance to the street view and upper level windows on the residential buildings exhibit a more horizontal shape. Across all the buildings fixed and sliding window types, rather than double-hung, predominate. No window or door trim is depicted in plans for the wood building, nor any noticeable recesses in windows on the plaster triplex building.

Form, Grouping	Windows are predominantly sliding type, where operable Windows are roughly grouped, but not in the formal grouping encouraged by guidelines
Horizontal Windows	Horizontal windows are used in roof monitor, but do not exhibit any divided lite form (slider, single fixed)
Trim or Recess	Few, if any, trim features are exhibited in the design; Windows in the plaster (triplex) building are not noticeably recessed

Surface Treatment and Color. On wood buildings in the Railroad District, shiplap siding or board and batten siding with wood trim are common. Siding may change direction to provide variety in surface pattern and texture, and horizontal trim may be used to separate board patterns or to create a wainscot effect. Foundations are commonly emphasized with brick, stone, or plaster wainscot. Composition shingle, rolled asphalt roofing, built-up roofing, low profile corrugated metal, and barrel tile are all common roof materials. Plaster buildings should have a smooth, hand-finished appearance, are usually white or off-white with pastel or low chroma accent colors, and barrel tile, built-up, and sometimes decorative composition shingle roofing is common. (Railroad District Plan, pg. 78).

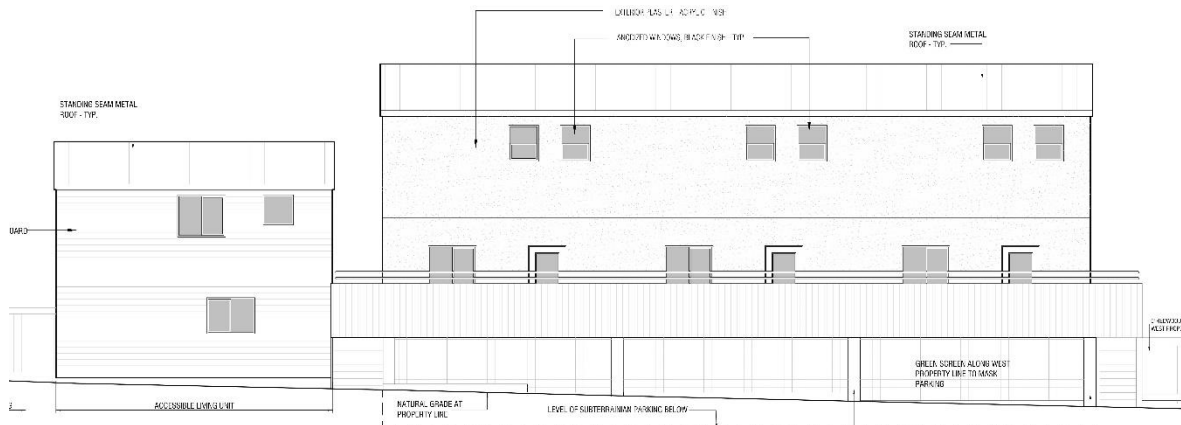


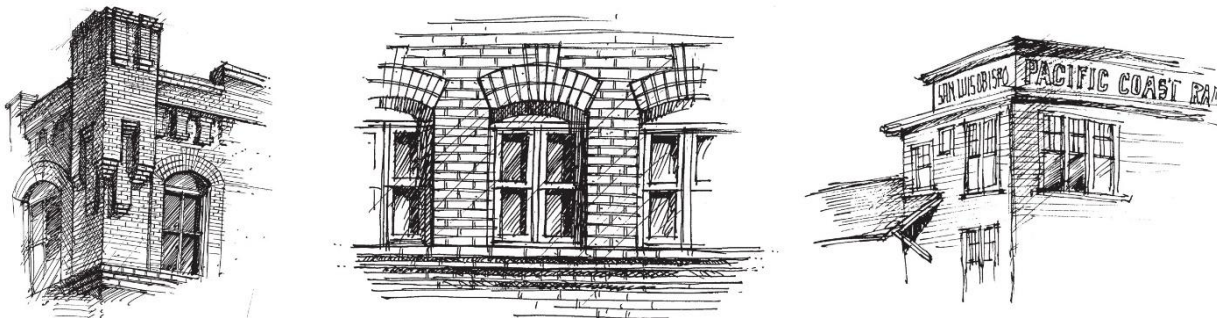
Figure 6: North Elevation

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A variety of surface materials is employed in this project. The front building is sided in vertically-oriented corrugated metal, and the accessible dwelling behind in horizontal fiber cement board (emulating the appearance of wood). The rear triplex building is of acrylic finish plaster, rather than a smooth plaster finish. Each building is topped by a grey standing seam metal roof. The street-fronting commercial building has a darker color treatment, in a gray color, and plan renderings depict a lighter off-white color for the middle building, and darker clay color for the triplex behind. Windows are anodized, in a black color as accent. The proposed project does not include features to emphasize the foundations of the buildings using any wainscot feature (at the rear triplex building the metal and concrete supports over the parking area define the foundation).

Decoration, pattern, texture	No particular decoration or pattern variety (shingles, change in siding direction, etc.) is employed on the buildings
Roof materials	Standing seam metal roof used for all buildings; Guidelines discuss corrugated metal for wood and “auxiliary” buildings, but not plaster buildings
Plaster finishes	Plaster noted as "acrylic feature" which has a texture similar to sand finish, rather than "smooth, hand-troweled"
Wainscot, Foundation	No wainscot, trim, or other differential treatment of lower walls employed No techniques emphasizing the foundation are employed (parking area supports serve as foundation for triplex building)

Architectural Details. Commercial buildings generally have simple detailing with little decoration or ornamentation, with some carved shapes used for rafter tiles, brackets, roof eave bracing, and roof gutters. Masonry buildings commonly have more elaborate ornamentation, including parapet details, towers or decorative cornices or quoins, and sometimes finials and decorative woodwork at roof ridges.



Discussion. The commercial building in this project has simple detailing with little decoration or ornamentation. The residential buildings are also simple, and lack the architectural details described in the Railroad District Plan Guidelines, such as carved and decorative roof elements, masonry ornamentation, or rounded plaster corners.

Decorative Elements	Decorative or ornamental features are not widely employed in the design.
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3.4 Summary

Although of a scale and size consistent with historic structures in the Railroad District, much of the project lacks the specific characteristics and elements described by the Railroad District Plan's Architectural Guidelines. Of particular concern are the elements which appear to be inconsistent with RDP guidelines such as: the asymmetric profile created by the uneven roof heights, and offset alignment of the buildings; the cantilevered massing over the parking area; lack of defined roof overhangs or roof support elements and elaboration; the type, form, and grouping of windows; lack of door and window trim and recesses; the treatment of surface texture and foundation emphasis; and overall lack of architectural detail described in the Plan guidelines. Based on the evaluation above, staff is recommending that the Committee discuss the project's overall consistency with District and Historic Preservation Program guidelines; and if there is concurrence with staff's findings that revisions are required, provide direction to the applicant and staff on needed design revisions and refinements needed for consistency with relevant guidelines.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). It consists of Infill Development consistent with the Services and Manufacturing land use designation and applicable policies described in the City's General Plan, consistent with standards and limitations described in Zoning Regulations for the Service Commercial (C-S) Zone, occurs on a project site of less than five acres substantially surrounded by urban uses with no value as habitat for endangered, rare or threatened species, would not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality, and can be adequately served by all required utilities and public services, as described in CEQA Guidelines § 15332

5.0 ACTION ALTERNATIVES

1. Continue review to another date with direction to staff and applicant regarding design revisions for greater consistency with the Railroad District Plan Architectural Guidelines; (this is the action recommended by staff, based on the evaluation provided above); or
2. Recommend that the Community Development Director find the project consistent with historic preservation guidelines and architectural standards for construction in the Railroad Historic District; or
3. Recommend that the Community Development Director deny the application, based on specific findings describing inconsistency with historical preservation policies, standards, and guidelines.

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6.0 ATTACHMENTS

- A - Project Plans (ARCH-0448-2022)
- B - Project Description (Applicant)
- C - Railroad Historic District (Historic Preservation Program Guidelines)
- D - Architectural Guidelines (Railroad District Plan)